

Shifting our focus.

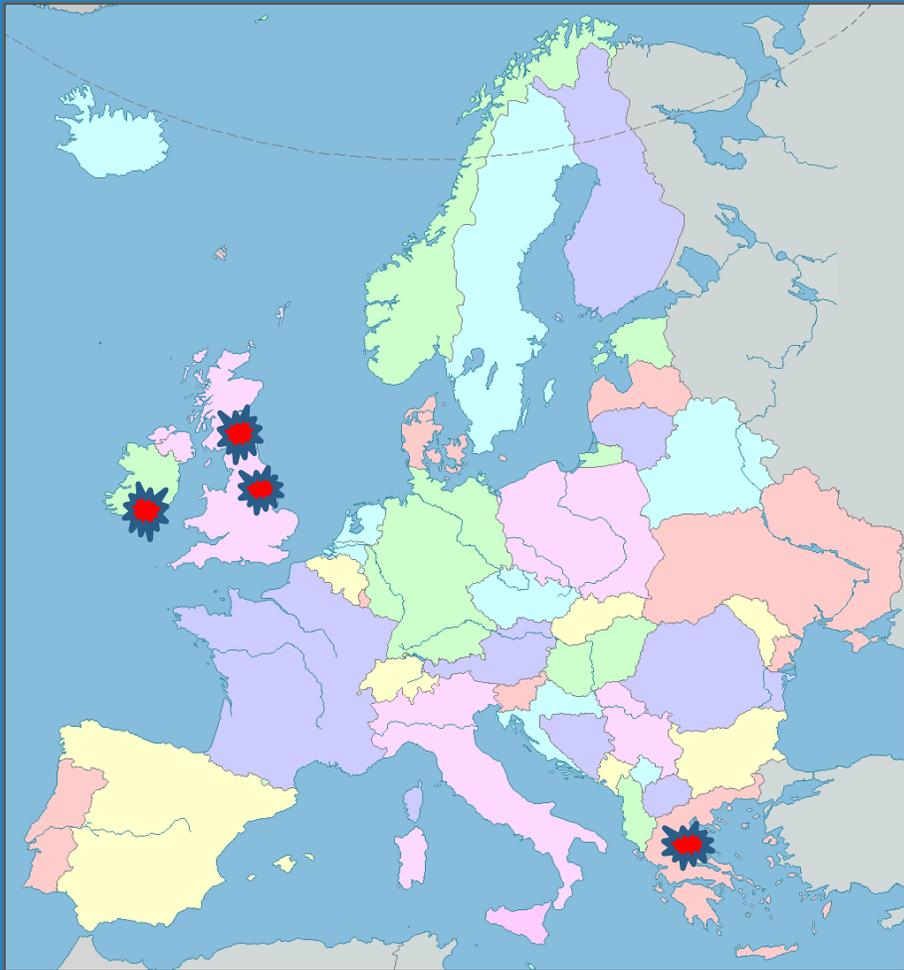
Fostering the potential of occupation and occupational therapy in a complex world

Sarah Kantartzis



Queen Margaret University

EDINBURGH



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International Social Transformation
through Occupation Network





Is contemporary occupational
therapy in the UK enough?

Are we addressing the challenges
to health-promoting occupation
facing the population?



SHIFTING OUR FOCUS

*“occupational therapy is an ethical, moral and social act
as much as it is a technical act” (Borg, 2018)*

Building the argument

WHAT are the contemporary challenges to health, the occupational needs, experienced by people in the UK?

HOW do we currently think about and organise our practice?

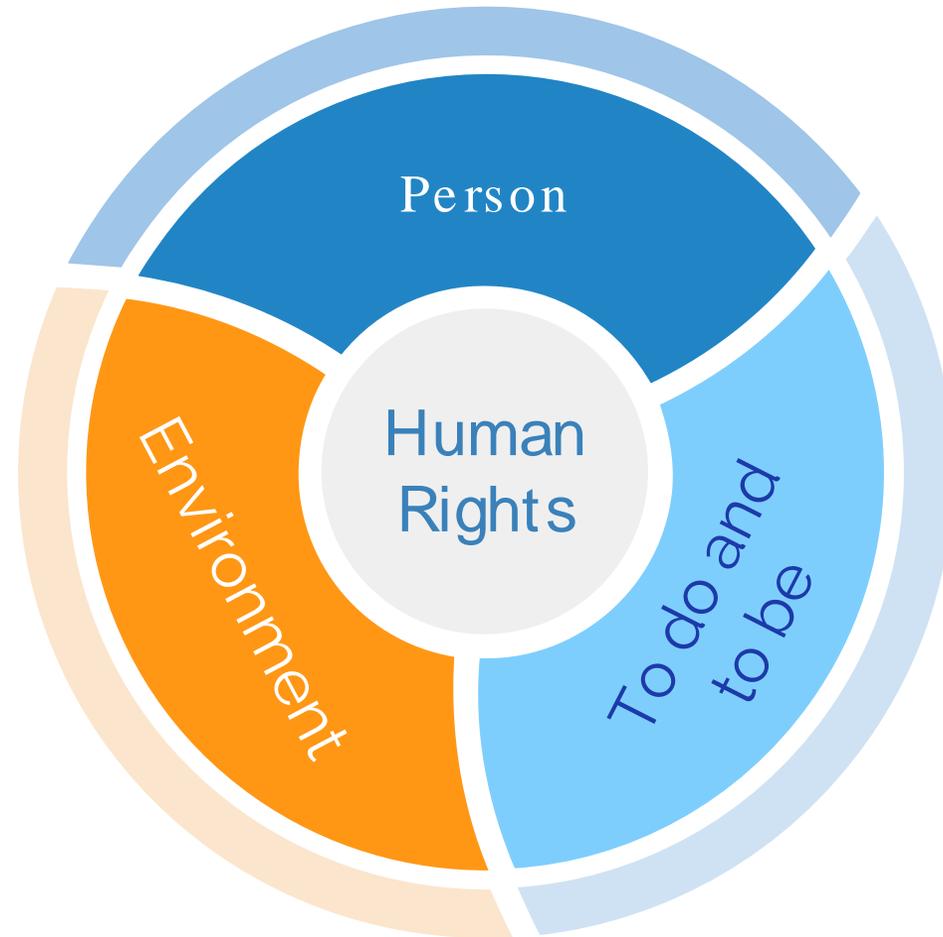
Thinking of complex systems may be an alternative lens

OCCUPATIONAL
THERAPY
contributing to
change in systems

Occupation defined

- ▷ “as the ordinary and extraordinary things that people do everyday” (Watson, 2004: 3)
- ▷ is both “the active process and outcome of living” (Whiteford et al., 2000: 64)
- ▷ a means of “personal and community transformation” (Wilcock & Townsend, 2000: 85)

Health defined

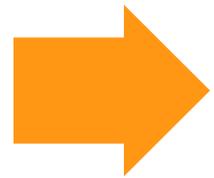


Contemporary challenges

experiences of occupational deprivation;
violent and dangerous occupations in homes and communities;
occupations of substance abuse and addiction;
and occupations linked to environmental challenges

Occupational deprivation

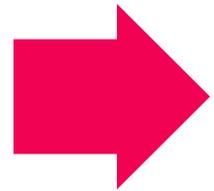
- ▷ Restricted access to occupations
- ▷ Forms of occupations challenging health
 - Unemployment and underemployment
 - Poverty
 - Homelessness
 - Social isolation



23.6%

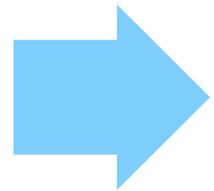
of people with learning disabilities

Employed
(76% nationally)



26.2% - 45.5%

of people with long term mental health conditions

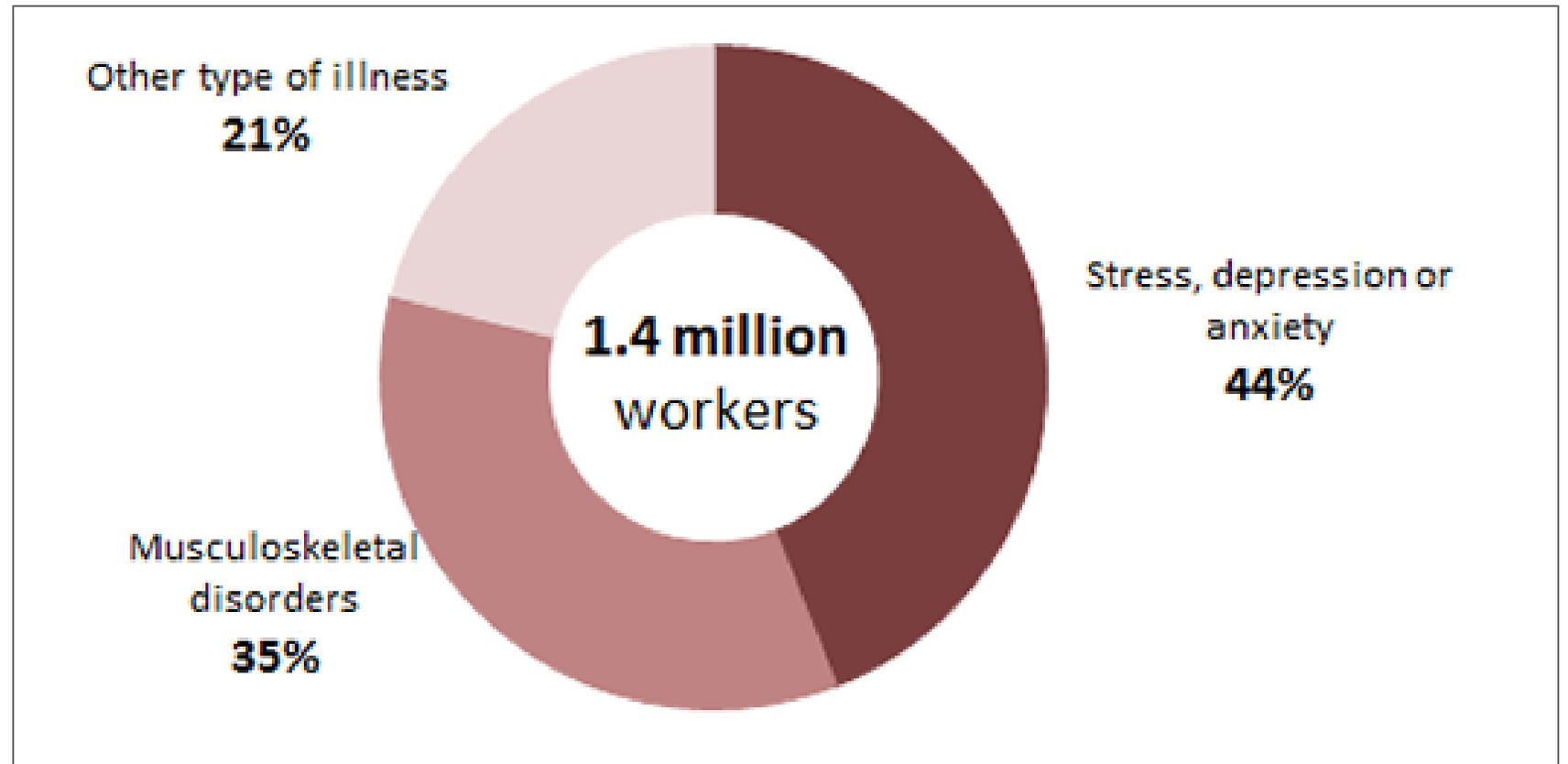


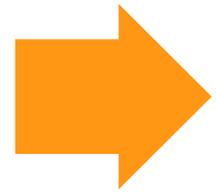
0%

of asylum seekers

Work-related ill health

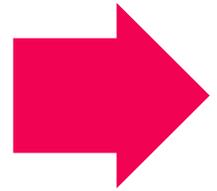
New and long-standing cases
2017/18



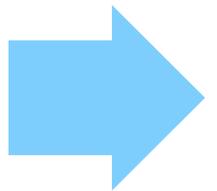


Poverty: 14.3 million

including 4.1 m. children and 1.9 m. pensioners

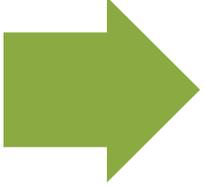


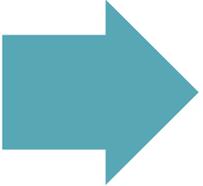
Homeless: 320.000



Lonely: 6%

Violent and dangerous occupations

 **27,000 children are gang members**

 **40,100 knife crime offences**
268 fatalities in 2017/18

Potentially addictive occupations

- ▷ Drinking alcohol
- ▷ Drug use
- ▷ Gambling
- ▷ Eating
- ▷ Gaming
- ▷ Sex
- ▷ Shopping
- ▷ Work
- ▷ Exercise
- ▷ Social networking

Occupations and sustainability



..the environment is the crucible within which meaningful occupational participation can be nurtured...

..it is recognized that climate change threatens the very ecological framework that not only sustains life but makes meaningful occupational participation and health possible.”

World Federation of Occupational Therapists, 2018:13

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



EU: European Pillar of Social Rights (2017)

WHO: Social Determinants of Health (2008)

UN: Sustainable Development Goals (2015)



Reach out .. to help populations, communities and individuals to live well, particularly those who struggle with addictions, chronic disease, developmental challenges, disability, old age, ethnic oppression, poverty and other social challenges that limit their participation, as valued and respected citizens, in necessary and desired occupations”

WFOT Minimum Standards, 2016: 11

The lens we look through
shapes the world we see

The lens we look through shapes the world we see

Traditional scientific thought:

- ▷ External, objective world
- ▷ Universal truths
- ▷ Reductionism
- ▷ Specialisation

(Morin, 2006; Cilliers, 1995)

Limitations:

- ▷ Understanding complex phenomena: language, art, society, life

(Cilliers, 1995)

Proposal for an alternative lens: Systems thinking

F. Paul Cilliers (25 December 1956 – July 31, 2011)

Philosopher, complexity researcher, and
Professor in Complexity and Philosophy at the Stellenbosch University,
South Africa

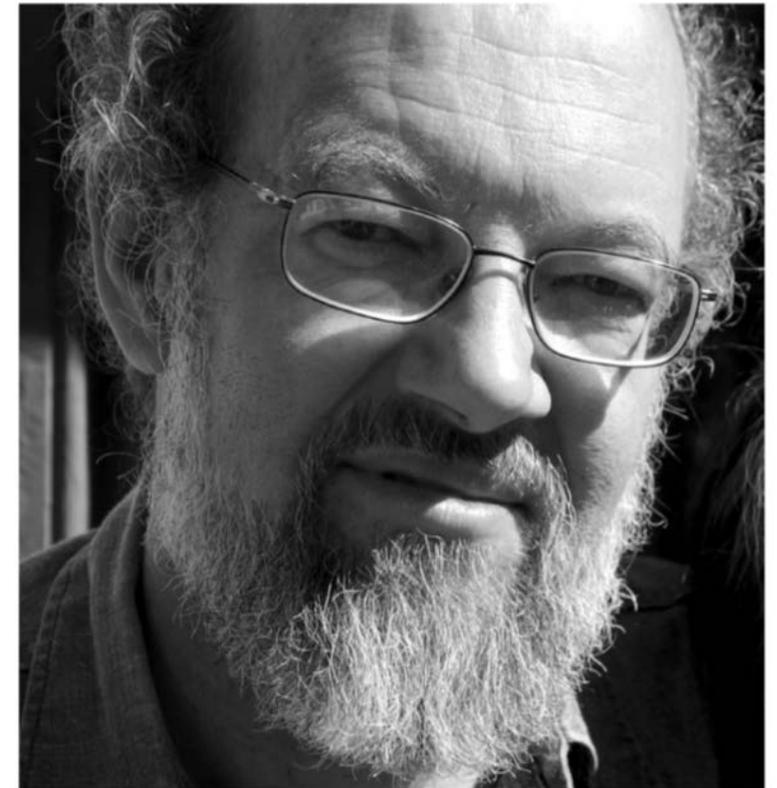
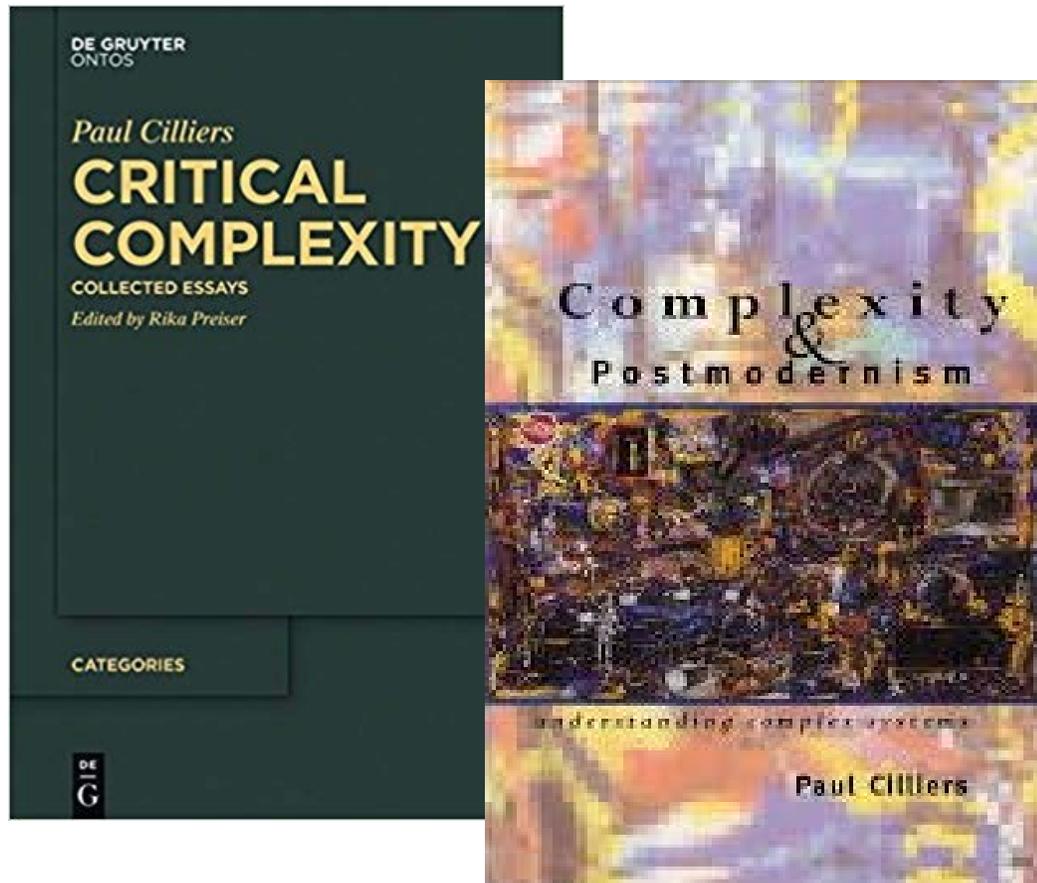
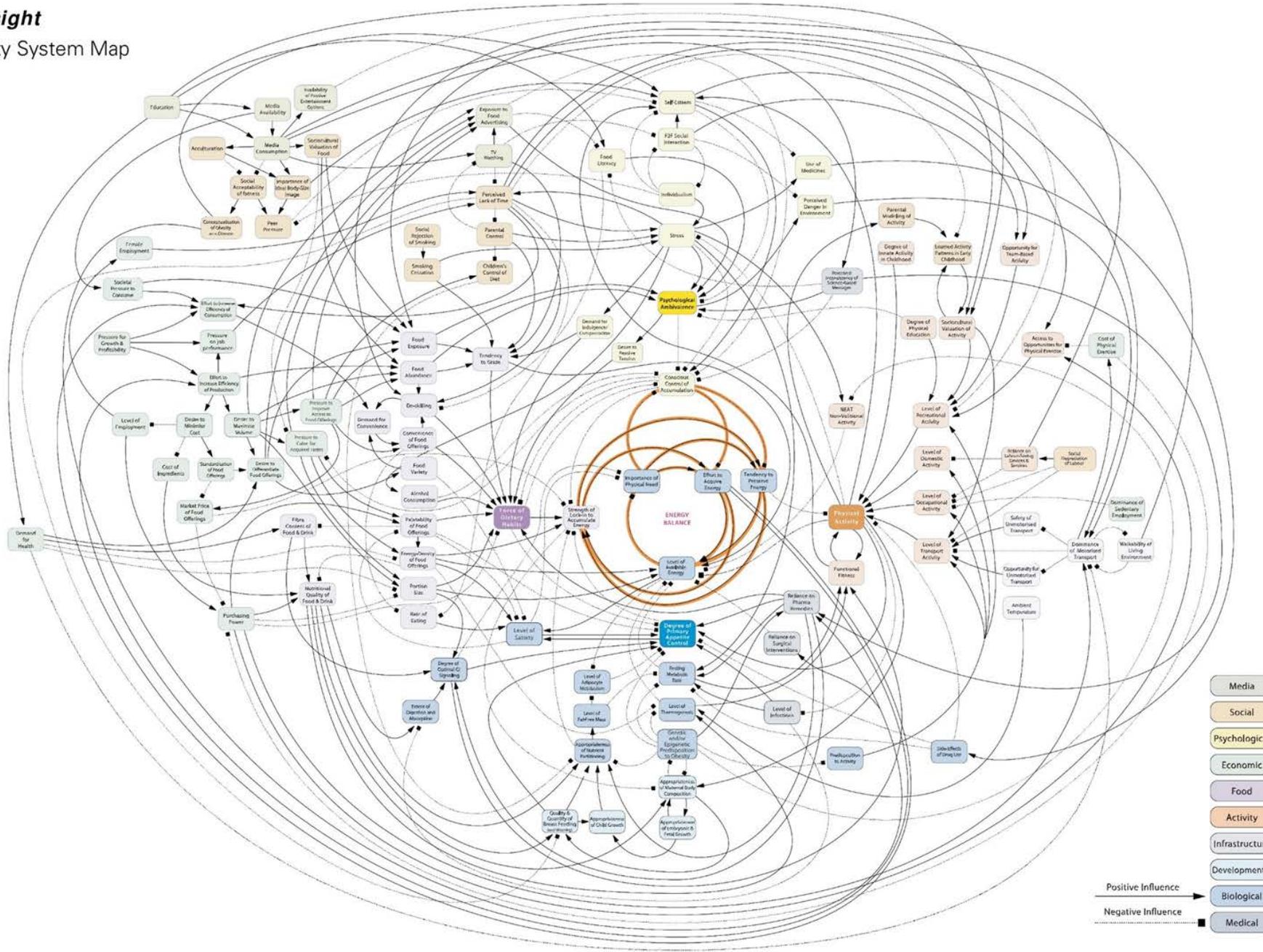


Photo: Paul Cilliers at STIAS, Stellenbosch, May 2011

Foresight
Obesity System Map



The Obesity Systems Atlas

- Media
- Psychology
- Social
- Economic
- Food
- Activity
- Infrastructure
- Developmental
- Biological
- Medical

Changing our ontological position, our understanding of the world



- ▷ *An attitude of complexity”*
(Priser and Woermann, 2016: 1)

The nature of complex systems

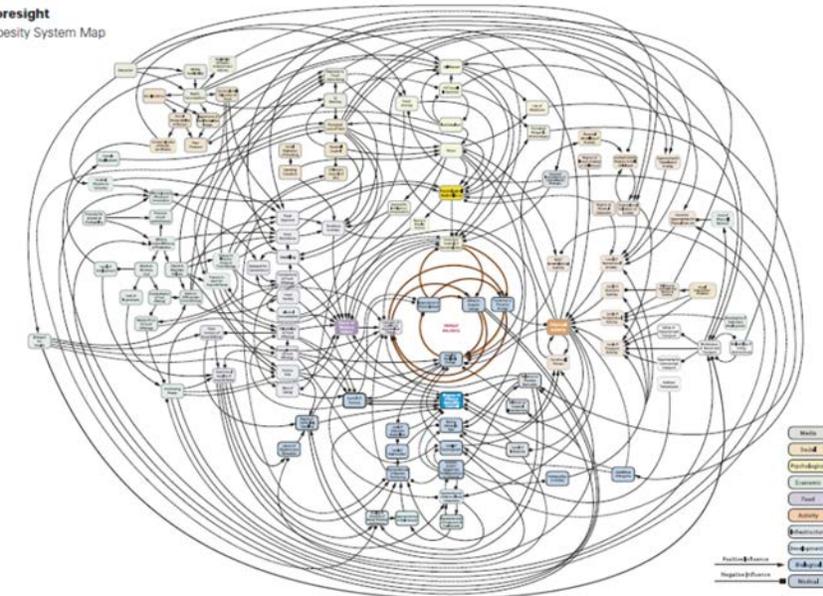
- ▷ Dynamic interaction of numerous elements
- ▷ ‘Emergent properties’; unintended consequences
- ▷ Cannot be understood by analysing one element
- ▷ Are open, interacting with the environment

Change in systems

- ▷ Occurs in interaction between elements
- ▷ Is ongoing and diffuse, feed-back loops (positive – enhancing, and negative- inhibiting)
- ▷ Non-linearity
 - Unpredictable size of change
 - Unpredictable speed of change
- ▷ Unpredictability and inconsistency are characteristic

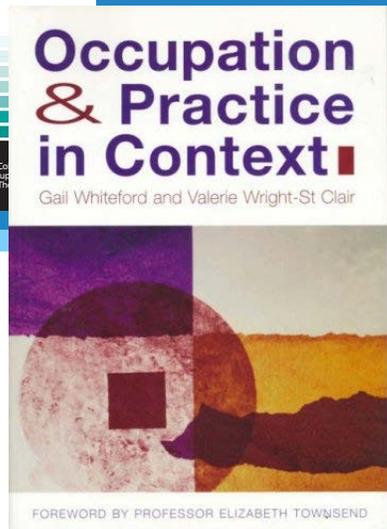
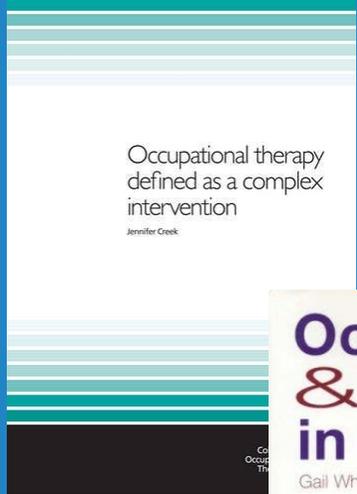
Our place in the system

- ▷ Thinking in a different way about the world and how we can know it
- ▷ We are part of the system, influencing
 - how much we see or understand
 - the nature of the system through our own actions



“From the moment an action enters a given environment, it escapes from the will and intention of that which created it...”
(Morin, 2008: 21)

Developing our practice to contribute to processes of change addressing contemporary occupational needs



Where to begin? some initial thoughts

- ▷ The world is complex
- ▷ Not 'a' problem to be solved but
a problem-situation that may be re-solved
- ▷ Resolutions not clear at the outset
- ▷ **Uncertainty and flexibility as inherent to our work**

1. Attend to the systems of which we are part

- ▷ Outcome driven (Reynolds & Holwell, 2010)
- ▷ Understanding of health
 - Individual life style v social determinants
 - Individualization of health within neo-liberal discourse (Gerlach et al., 2017; Salway & Green, 2017)

Applying a critical lens to current practice in existing systems

- ▷ The location of our practice
- ▷ The boundaries of our practice, partnerships and power
- ▷ Expectations of practice, accurate goals and time scales
- ▷ Our existing theories and tools
- ▷ Limitations to evidence-based interventions

An alternative view:

- ▷ Maintaining a 'modest' attitude; celebration of critical attitude and curiosity; the artistry of practice, experts in the art of occupation

2. Develop strategic partnerships



Developing partnerships

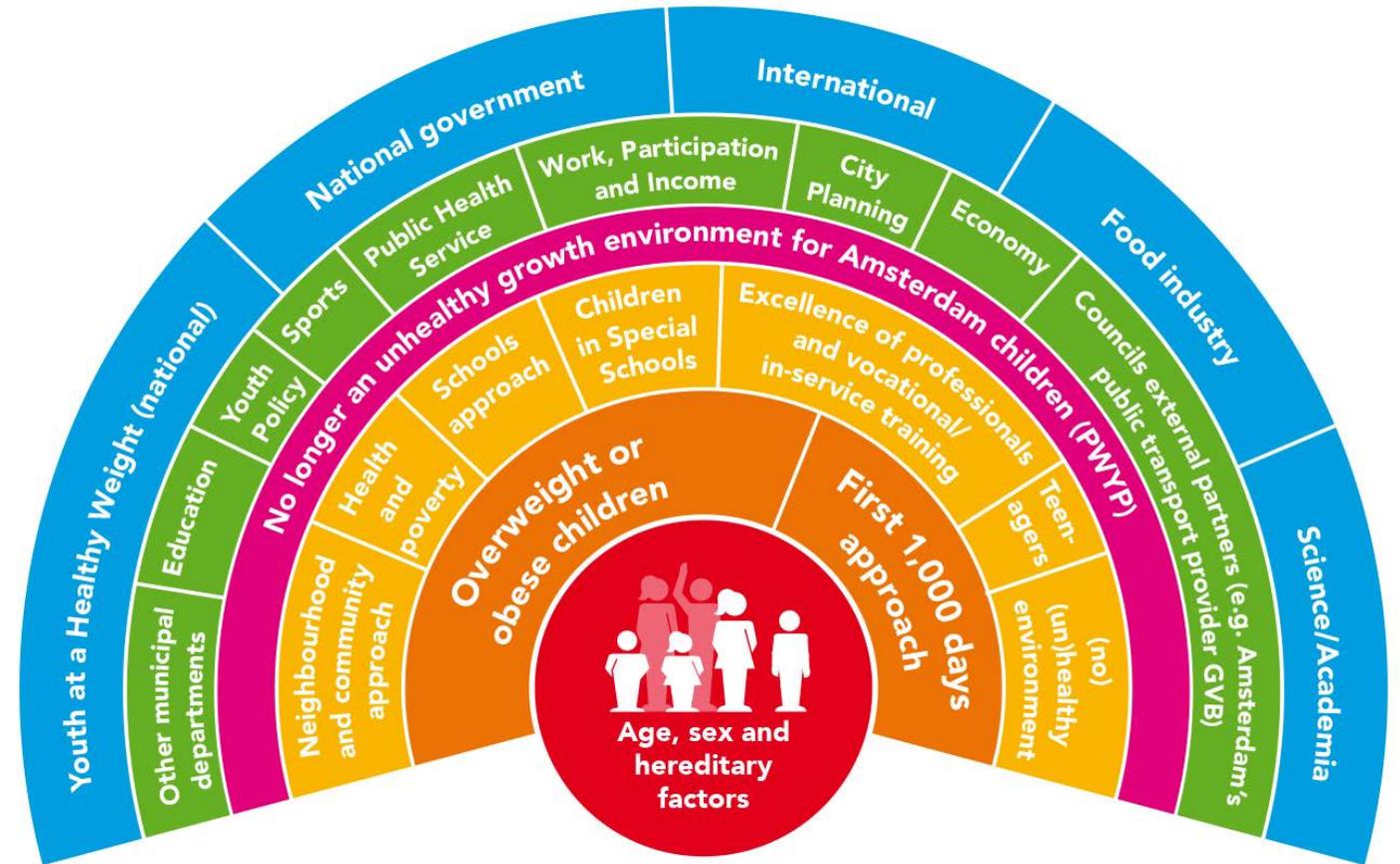
- ▷ Boundary judgements; emancipation, pluralism
- ▷ Open discourse and debate *“to enable ordinary people to determine which problems they wish to address, how the problems should be tackled, and by whom”* (Rihani, 2002: 238)
- ▷ What is good and who decides?



Oxfam.org.uk

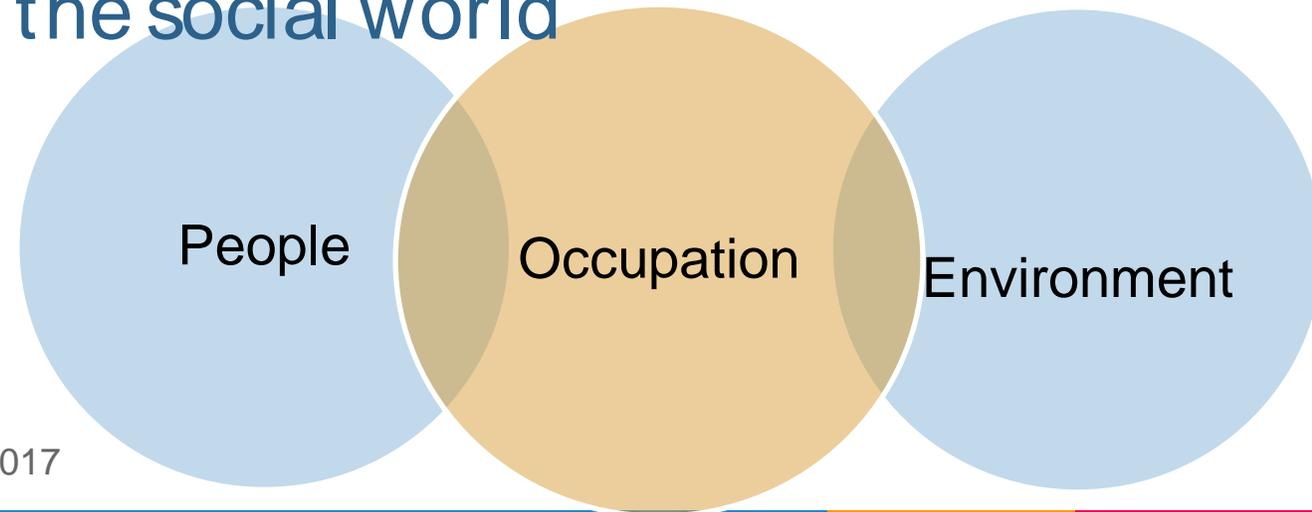
Examples of partnerships

- ▶ Amsterdam Healthy Weight Programme
- ▶ Glasgow City: Violence as a public health issue



3. Develop our contribution as experts in occupation

- ▷ Change occurring as we do together
- ▷ Occupation determined by the social world
- ▷ Occupation to transform the social world



Experts in occupation

- ▷ Occupation and citizenship (Fransen et al., 2015; Pollard et al., 2018)
- ▷ Collective occupation (Ramagundo & Kronenberg, 2013)

“collective occupation can be defined by its unique construction through the numerous people engaged in it and the power that is thereby produced, as well as by its intention or purpose towards the social fabric” (Kantartzis & Molineux, 2017)

- ▷ What is the shape (nature) of occupation in our communities?

The shape of daily occupation

- ▷ Informal daily encounters in common places of public interaction (Francis et al., 2012)
- ▷ Networks of occupation (Kantartzis & Molineux, 2017)
- ▷ Recognition (Frazer & Honneth, 2003)
- ▷ Sense of belonging
- ▷ Who is not there?



The shape of daily occupation

Collective events

- ▷ Heightened emotion, belonging, meaning
- ▷ Sense of control, power, ownership, pride



The shape of daily occupation

Organisations, associations, networks

- ▷ Local, national, international
- ▷ Citizenship
- ▷ Activism, policy change



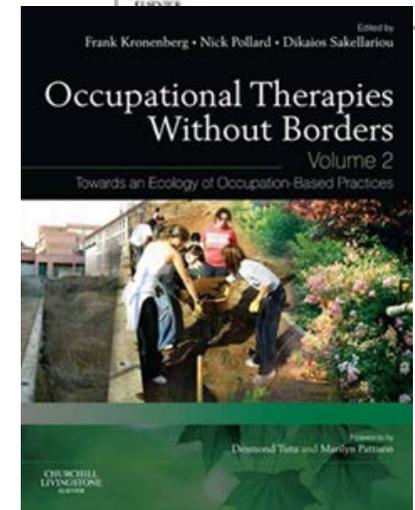
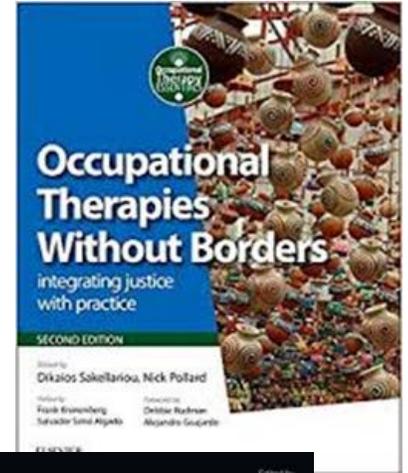
Changing the shape of occupation

- ▷ Participatory processes (O'Neill, 2017)
- ▷ Community-centred practice (Lauchner et al., 2019)
- ▷ Principles of community development (Carra et al., 2018)
- ▷ Occupational reconstructions (Frank & Muriithi, 2015)
- ▷ Multiple points of leverage for change (Foster-Fishman & Behran, 2007)

- ▷ Social transformation through occupation, those
“actions that rearrange and reconstruct the world we live in.”
(Frank, 2013:213)

Exploring occupation for change

- ▷ Occupational therapy without borders (e.g. Sakellariou & Pollard, 2017)
- ▷ Social occupational therapy, Brazil (e.g. Malfitano et al., 2014)
- ▷ Occupational based Community Development Framework (ObCD) (Galvaan & Peters, 2017)
- ▷ International Social Transformation through Occupation Network (Rudman et al., 2019)



Do we work with occupation
as an agent of systems
change?

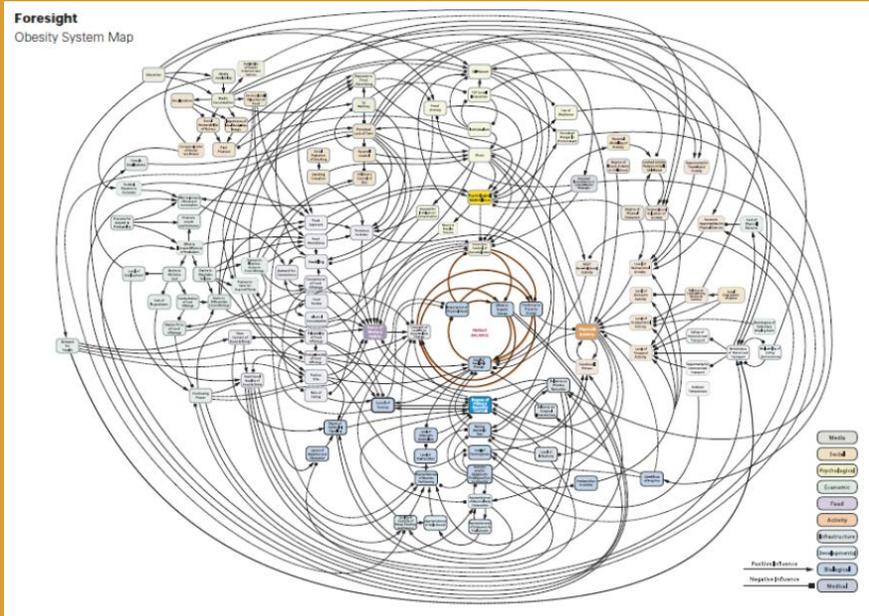
Are we champions of occupation?

Concluding remarks

Systems thinking

Photo: Aaron Escobar, CC BY 2.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=29282045>





“The failure to acknowledge the complexity of a certain situation is not merely a *technical* error, it is also an *ethical* one.”

(Cilliers, 2005: 256)



SHIFT OUR FOCUS

Foster the potential of occupation and occupational therapy in a complex world

Thank you!

With my thanks to my family

And to my colleagues around the world and especially in Greece
and at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh,
for the learning together and the laughter

Email: Skantartzis@qmu.ac.uk

Twitter: [@SKantartzis](https://twitter.com/SKantartzis)

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