

Epistolary Epistemology
or
the Dogma of Letter Writing
in the Public Pedagogy and Sustainability Challenge Network.

Following the idea presented by Katrien van Pock during the Network meeting in Gent in January 2018, we propose a form of communication and elaboration of ideas (*epistolary epistemology*) which makes use of the advantages of the traditional form of letter writing, and of those of electronic communication as well.

Epistolary epistemology is meant to slow down the circulation of ideas so that they are given time to ripen; to keep this circulation public; and to provide for a setting in which new ideas emerge systematically from those discussed and they are given sufficient time to ripen, or crystallize themselves in course of communication. We hope that the proposed way of writing provides ground for – in a way – “autopoietic” self-structuration of the field of public pedagogy and sustainability challenges in course of free, but structured creation and the exchange of ideas.

The basic and a very important rule is that all letters are written to a specific person, as if we were writing on paper and sending our mail in individually addressed envelopes.

How do we do it?

1. Address a single person with a question that you believe the person can answer. Keep the form of the a traditional letter: be polite, explain your questions, say why you are asking them, etc.
2. If you are not sure who could answer your question, you may address your *first* letter “to whom it may concern”, but then you should respond to all persons answering your letter individually, in direct communication.
3. Make all your letters *visible to everybody* in the network (cc). Even though we write as if privately, this is a public conversation – somewhat like in a panel discussion.
4. While receiving a copy of the letter written to somebody else, follow the conversation *without intervening* until the final “thank you” letter arrives that closes the conversation between the two original partners. Then everybody can ask simple questions for clarification of the details of the exchange, addressed to one of the interlocutors. Again, All letters should be visible to everybody (cc).
5. When the initial exchange is finalised, everybody can choose a fragment of that exchange and turn it into a question addressed to another person in the network. Another pair of key discussants is thus set up. Paste the fragment of the previous conversation, explain why it is interesting and specify your question in a letter addressed to a person who you believe can answer it. Send it (cc) to everybody in the group, and we shall all be waiting for whatever follows between the partners, without interfering until the final “thank you” letter arrives. Then everybody may ask one of the interlocutors their questions to clarify certain concepts, etc.
6. Gradually, the number of on-going conversations will increase, and we shall witness a number of parallel topics being crystallized
7. The overall exchange, if successful, may be a tool for “autopoietic structuration” of the field we are working with. The emergent topics of conversation will be used as topics for open seminar discussion during the following network meetings. We may also think of turning the conversations into book chapters.

Tomasz and Maria