The zoonomic annual cycle

Manual version 1 - July 2023

The zoonomic* annual cycle is an ongoing, structured learning process that Zoöps* go through. Through this learning process, a Zoöp discovers step by step how to function symbiotically* in the ecosystems it participates in.

Five questions

The annual cycle works with five questions, which a Zoöp answers each year. They are variations of the basic questions any ecologist asks of an ecosystem or habitat. Who lives there? How is their habitat structured? How do they provide for each other's livelihoods? Specific to Zoöp is that these questions are asked not only about the plants, animals, microbes and geological formations, but about all the bodies that make up a Zoöp. The buildings, fences, paths, tiles, lighting, water management, energy supply, suppliers, rules and contracts and so on are also viewed as participants in ecosystems.

By using the same word - bodies*- for all these different kinds of things present, it is easier to see that they are part of the same reality. Although all those bodies may have very different properties, they are related to each other in one big way. Bodies are always themselves composed of other bodies, and all participate in large bodies. In other words, in a Zoöp, all bodies are assumed to be collective bodies*.

The five questions of the annual cycle are:

1. Identify: which bodies make up the Zoöp?
2. Listening & observing: What are the lifeworlds of these bodies?
3. Characterise: Do these bodies form degenerative, regenerative or neutral bodies?
4. Focusing: which of the degenerative* relationships should we focus on, to turn them into regenerative* ones? Which ones are most urgent? Which ones can we work on effectively with our organisation? (alone, or in collaboration with other organisations)
5. Intervene: How and when should we intervene in this degenerative relationship to change it into a regenerative one?

Qualitative map as a starting point

By answering the first three questions, the Zoöp creates a qualitative* map of the ecological relationships in which it participates. The first time this constitutes the baseline measurement of the zoönomic (socio-ecological) integrity of the organisation and its operational sphere. Using this baseline measurement as a starting point, the Zoöp sets concrete goals (> Focusing) for improving its ecological relationships and makes interventions (> Intervening) to achieve these goals. Documentation of the annual cycle is made public.

Question 1 - Identify

What other-than-human life lives in or visits the Zoöp? Trees? Birds? Ground life? Insects? What human artefacts form the structure of the Zoöp? Fences? Buildings? Roads? Underground

infrastructure? Soil layers? What legal entities make up the Zoöp? Contracts and contracting parties? Owners/landlords? Tenants? Laws and municipal regulations? Fire regulations? What organisational bodies play a role? Governance? Production teams? Management? Communications team? What other human social clusters are relevant?

It is important to note that it is impossible to answer this question completely. However, it is quite possible to see where to start - in other words, which bodies are important in the shape of the Zoöp. By following the annual cycle, the knowledge of a Zoöp deepens and refines each year.

Activity: Answer the question of which organisational, legal, technological, human and more-than-human and other bodies together shape the Zoöp. The Zoöp is shaped not only by the bodies that make it up, but also by bodies and forces from outside.

Outcome: An overview of the main actors inside and outside that shape the Zoöp.

Form: At least make a list. For the sake of documentability online and later specification, it is useful to do this in a spreadsheet. In addition, photos are useful and making a drawing can be instructive, as the start of a qualitative map. It is important to always add the date to the information being noted down, this way the development over time can also be followed.

Question 2 Listening and perceiving

How do the bodies that make up the Zoöp perceive their world? What is their living world or Umwelt*? What are their sensory capacities and what are the main signals they respond to and base their choices (if any) on?

Activity: Answer the question of how the life worlds of the bodies that make up the Zoöp function.
Outcome: Of the bodies that form the Zoöp, note what they notice about their external worlds, whether they can perceive each other and how they interact directly or indirectly. The human Zoöp participants learn to see their Zoöp from a whole range of other perspectives.

Form: In any case, add textual information to the list of bodies from question 1. In addition, all kinds of other (artistic and scientific) forms of documentation can play a role here, making the experiences and perspectives of more-than-human bodies (or of other people) palpable. Sound recordings, different kinds of data, photographs, drawings, etc.

Question 3 Characterisation

Do these bodies form degenerative relationships, in which systematically some bodies benefit, and other bodies are harmed? Or do they form regenerative relationships, in which all bodies involved thrive? How do the different bodies act towards each other? Do they support, hinder or ignore each other?

This question involves aspects such as emissions, waste flows, light pollution, noise pollution, retaining or allowing water to flow through. For living bodies, it also involves questions related to housing/habitat, safety, food, the possibility of forming relationships and reproduction, and freedom of choice in this regard.

Answering this question constitutes a first critical diagnosis of the ecological integrity* of the Zoöp. This reveals the pain points in the organisation and its operational sphere, and also the pressure points: the aspects in which can be intervened to alleviate the pain points.

Working with ecological relationships instead of working with common sustainability reports means that participating bodies can thus never be completely reduced to standardised quantitative units. An example: the standard way of thinking about the ecological performance of a diesel car is something like: a 1460-kg diesel car emits so many emissions per travel kilometre, has a lifetime of so many years and costs so many resources. That is important information, even for a Zoöp. But the diesel car is issue does much more, in relation to a large number of other bodies, which may also be important. In a degenerative sense: It occupies public space. Stands still for much of the day. Is a very inefficient way of transporting one human body. Requires paved land, parking space. Legitimises fossil fuel extraction. Isolates passengers from their environment. Emphasises private values versus public values. In regenerative terms: makes the Zoöp accessible to people who cannot use public transport. When travelling together: promotes social relationships.

Working with ecological relationships avoids the tendency to analyse complex phenomena and reduce them to simple particles. Zoöp inherently requires a holistic approach.

Activity: Answer the question of whether and how the bodies that make up Zoöp support each other in their quality of life, or whether they hinder or ignore each other.

Outcome: A diagnosis of the ecological integrity of the Zoöp. Insight into both the healthy functioning aspects, and the degenerative processes and relationships.

Form: here, drawing (and redrawing) is very helpful. In addition, document textually.

An example of a bundle of relationships:

- Blackberries *(bramble berry or blackberry)* in relation to (x) cycle path: blackberries overgrow the cycle path, and the cycle shed. This makes us less accessible by bike, (= degenerative, limits social relations, possibly encourages car use?)
- Blackberry bushes x birds, insects, people: blackberries feed birds, bees and butterflies, which help spread blackberries (= regenerative)
- Insects x birds x blackberries: insects feed birds, birds disperse seeds, seeds make Blackberries, blackberries feed insects (= regenerative)
- Cars x employees: cars use a lot of energy for transporting few people, isolate people sensorially and politically from their environment, underline private values rather than public ones, stand around all day doing nothing, taking up space, some employees drive together, (to be further elaborated) then strengthen relationships (but all together= degenerative)
- Car park x soil life: car park keeps water, light, wind, pollen, seeds away from soil. (=degenerative)
- Car park x cars: car park attracts cars, cars legitimise car park (=regenerative)
- Soil life x plant growth x insects x birds = regenerative

Question 4: Focusing

Which of the (clusters of) degenerative relationships will we work on this year (and possibly longer) to transform them into regenerative relationships? Which ones are most urgent? Which

ones can we deal with within our own organisational capacities? For which relationships do we need to collaborate? With what other parties? This will often involve some research.

Activity: Based on the answers to questions 1 to 3, formulate concrete regenerative goals to improve the ecological integrity of the Zoöp. Reason why these goals are best to set in the given circumstances.

Outcome: A reasoned list of regenerative goals that the Zoöp wants to achieve in the coming year.

Form: Text.

Question 5: Interventions

To achieve the goals, specific interventions are planned in the doings of the Zoöp. Intervention is the process of actually making changes in the Zoöp's spatial planning, management practices or relational fabric. Each year, a Zoöp will make several interventions to transform degenerative relationships into regenerative ones.

By having mapped out which bodies have which types of relationships with each other, the range of possible choices for interventions becomes clear.

The Speaker for the Living helps the Zoöp go through these steps and assists the Zoöp with needed knowledge and expertise. A Zoöp is committed to multiple annual interventions, but is also committed to striving for greater ecological integrity in all its functioning.

Activity: Formulating, planning and implementing specific interventions in the doings of the Zoöp to achieve regenerative goals. The determination of interventions is done by the Zoöp in collaboration with the Speaker, based on the intended regenerative effect, ecological urgencies and in view of organisational capacity of the Zoöp. At least quarterly, the Zoöp publicly discloses what interventions they have made in relation to their regenerative goals, and the effect of these.
Outcome: A series of changes in the processes, properties, agreements, focal points and other aspects of the operational sphere of the Zoöp, which together transform degenerative socio-ecological relationships into regenerative ones.

Form: in addition to the (diverse) forms in which interventions can be made, they are also documented.

Evaluate

The Zoönomic year follows the solar year, and thus parallels the seasons, to work synchronously with the rhythms of more-than-human life. The winter period is dedicated to evaluation. How have our interventions turned out? What has worked? How? What has not worked? Why? What have we achieved with respect to our regenerative goals? What did we learn about the bodies that make up our Zoöp and their relationships? What did we learn about our goals? About our interventions?

This evaluation is documented and made public. Based on this, regenerative goals are adjusted, or new goals are formulated, and new interventions are devised and planned. The new zoönomic annual plan will be published by 31 January.

It also evaluates how coöperation with the Speaker for the Living went, and whether the Speaker should possibly participate in other processes in the organisation. New regenerative goals, or new specific concerns for the Speaker, may mean that the Zoöp Matters (annex in the Zoöp contract) will be adjusted for the coming year.

In light of any new regenerative goals, there may also be a need for a Speaker with a different type of expertise.