Chapter VII
Exploring Serres' Atlas, Hodges' Knowledge Domains and the Fusion of Informatics and Cultural Horizons

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the extent to which selected writings of French philosopher Michel Serres and a health care model created by Brian Hodges in the UK can augment and inform the development of social informatics. The volume of Serres' output contrasts markedly with work devoted to Hodges' Health Career - Care Domains - Model. Since the concept of health is universal culturally, and informatics disciplines are emerging fields of practice characterised by indistinct boundaries in terms of theory, policy, and practice, various ethnographic and cultural associations will be made. Placing Hodges' model and Serres' work together is not intended to suggest direct equivalence, other than the common themes this author intends to bring to the attention of the social informatics community. Central to this is the notion of holistic bandwidth, utilising Hodges' model as a tool to develop and disseminate socio-technical perspectives.

INTRODUCTION

In 1986, whilst studying community mental health nursing, the author discovered a conceptual framework known as Hodges' Health Career-Care Domains-Model (hereafter referred to as h2cm). Clinical experience, work in health informatics, and awareness of contemporary social informatics issues including access; community economic development; social cohesion; development and learning (Clement, Gurstein, Longford, et al., 2004) convinces the author of the value and po-

tential utility of h2cm to the extended informatics community. This potential arises by virtue of the model's structure and four knowledge domains. As for any generic framework, Hodges' model can be used to address several issues; policy development, health promotion and education, intercultural matters, communication, research, public involvement, service development and evidence-based care, plus community informatics and e-government. This list is pragmatic, incomplete, and not meant to impress. While successful application of any tool ultimately depends on its users, the model's scope and the problems of the 21st century make the potential h2cm user base and beneficiaries immense.

Demographics are the dynamic that shapes health and social policy as well as population pyramids. Globalization, migration, ongoing humanitarian crises highlighted by Rieff (2002), superbugs, terrorism, and environmental degradation bring home the lesson of just how interconnected, interdependent, and vulnerable humanity has become. Commentators report on the digital divide, the increase in social and political exclusion, and the policy imperative to engage citizens in the political process. Citizens in turn are deluged with wave after wave of messages. While the majority are contentedly fully immersed and cannot be distracted, others play the part of King Canute and try to stop the tide. Where is the wisdom in the exponential growth in the volume of information produced, to sell it as knowledge, as intelligence, transactions completed in nanoseconds? Amid frequent calls for new tools, what might a framework like h2cm provide?

As social informatics emerges as a distinct discipline, it needs to define its boundaries and differentiate its content from other informatics disciplines to produce the social informatics curriculum. Social informatics is not unique in this regard, sharing this issue with other informatics practitioners. The author (Jones, 2004a) coined the term *holistic bandwidth;* an as yet loosely defined concept, this may nonetheless assist informatics curricula developers. Holistic bandwidth refers to the conceptual scope of a discipline. So in use, h2cm can help identify those issues and concerns that are truly unique, and those which overlap informatics fields.

Reading Serres' translated texts, this author was immediately struck, firstly, by the similarity of Serres' concerns to current informatics issues; secondly, the problems that led to h2cm's creation (which will be explained shortly); and finally, how well Hodges' model could represent both. This expressive power arises from h2cm's structure; a conceptual space created by diagrammatic representation of four pivotal concepts: *individual*, *group*, *humanistic,* and *mechanistic*. This construct leads to a conceptual framework with generic, and specific, broad and detailed capacities.

This chapter begins with brief introductions to the range and nature of Serres' ideas and Hodges' model. The main text then comprises a fusion of the two linked to informatics, culminating in a discussion of why this chapter matters. Common themes are epistemology, the relationship of the sciences to the humanities, space and time, noise, information, and interdisciplinarity. Researcher's attention to Serres and Hodges can be justified on several levels including integration of knowledge; the need to equip the civic population with tools to facilitate engagement and critique; to blend and balance analysis-synthesis, the quantitative and qualitative.

Despite the philosophical and metaphorical emphasis in this chapter, it is of significance to the social informatics practitioners on several levels:

- Health is a key determinant in quality of life outcomes.
- Demographic trends continue to highlight the health burden on communities, locally and globally (Lopez, Mathers, Ezzati, Jamison, Murray, 2006).