



Together we cleared the chapel

Impressions of the Slovenia Learning Village - August 2012

Joint harvest by
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Foreword

The gathering was called by some Art of Hosting global stewards, but the invitation was not exclusively – or even specifically - to Art of Hosting practitioners. It was aimed at all who felt called to this collective inquiry around learning, community and possibility. In the end most of those who showed up did have some kind of connection with the Art of Hosting world, although for some it was only the curiosity about what it actually was.

It seemed to us both that in this gathering we took some more steps in *re-claiming* some fundamental connections to parts of our lives (like our bodies and emotions) to be fully human, *re-naming* what we really can do together, and *re-framing* the context of our lives.



There can be little doubt that every man, woman and child who attended this gathering learned something. Regarding the *collective* learning, this document represents our perspective on the shared learning journey, through stories, reflections and insights both during and after the village.





If you have a gift, give it now

Imagine an old manor on the outskirts of the sprawling village of Statenberg, in the softly rolling hills and forest of the Slovenian countryside; an enchanted castle in the lineage of Sleeping Beauty, just starting to awaken after 30 years of slumbering neglect. Picture a warm, late August evening, a clear sky with fat clouds frolicking with an almost-full moon to paint pictures for the delight of some 50 star-gazing humans gathered around the open fire on the slope below the terrace, drinking local wine, singing, chatting... celebrating friendship, celebrating Life.

This is one snapshot from one night of a week-long Learning Village - a coming together of almost 100 adults and some 25 associated children and youngsters. The stated purpose of the gathering spoke of collectively inquiring into learning, community and possibility. At the heart of this snapshot, this is exactly what is happening right now, in a most joyful way! Two men are inviting (and challenging) each other into their best creativity and a song emerges:

"If you have a gift, give it now!"

Everybody joins in on the chorus and the youngsters, lying in a hamster heap beside the fire, adopt it and keep it going well into the night. Somehow, the message sticks and the refrain keeps re-emerging during our days together. When it does, it shifts the energy and brings us subtly into a higher alignment.



The purpose of a village is to belong



This gathering probably had as many purposes as the people present, but one particularly inspiring one was that of prototyping an operating system for tomorrow's society.

At breakfast one morning, Chris Corrigan said: "For me, these gatherings have the slingshot effect of aiming for Jupiter in order to propel myself out of the solar system". Despite first appearances, this wasn't a community of professional practice – it was people plugging into a source of inspiration. Whatever the job they do, they would return to it with a different consciousness. As someone else said: "There are already enough coaches and facilitators in the world!"

In a hosting team session during the first days of the gathering, Chris mentioned: "The purpose of a village is to belong." We had never thought of that! Do you have a village you belong to? All of us have families that we belong to by birth, but the feeling of *really* belonging is not always found there.

Again: *the purpose of a village is to belong.*

A village is different than an online community, and it is much, much more than saying hello to your neighbours. Belonging is a deeply primal human need and desire, but it is also a possibility and a potential.

Many participants at this gathering were touched on this deep level of belonging – or triggered into a feeling of *not* belonging. It seems that very many of us have experienced some degree of trauma in our early childhood around the issue of belonging. For many, this worked out





during our time together in emotional release, sometimes quite explosive, sometimes in tears and sadness when leaving the village, and for others in physical pain and sickness during our time together.

On our way back to Belgium, we stopped off again at Schloss Tempelhof (near Nurnberg in Germany) – a small hamlet bought up by a group of people wanting to live in intentional community. While we were there, someone told us that the (eco-)village movement is currently the world's biggest global movement (we haven't cross-checked this information), growing from 100,000 ecovillages 10 years ago, to 1 million today! On the way home, we also visited the place just now being bought by Rainer and Lena, right across the border from Slovenia, in Austria, where another of these projects is being born. It seems that the village is making a comeback, and that healing the ruptures in our belonging is a task for

humanity at this juncture in history.



Reclaiming our relationship with space and place

Place was present in the collective psyche at many levels throughout the gathering. Simply being in such an incredible space as Statenberg Manor, in the beautiful coils of the dragon that curled around us in the form of Makole's hills, brought a heightened awareness of the dimension of place, which so often escapes us as we focus in on ourselves in such 'community gatherings'.

As we learned more about the place, and the wider region, we became aware of many larger dimensions of space *and* time, and the ways in which the micro reflect the macro.

The location of the gathering in Slovenia has a number of mythical significations. Slovenia is, historically, a place which received the confluence of trade flows

from many points – so a fitting place for a meeting of the tribes. Statenberg manor itself is close to Castle Borl – where the Art of Hosting pattern was first born in an earlier incarnation of the Learning Village. The occasion of our gathering was the 10th anniversary of the Borl gatherings, and the story of those days was commemorated around the camp fire on several evenings.

The region around Statenberg/Borl is also home to the Grail legend of Parsifal, and Slovenia's beloved cultural ambassador, virtuoso violinist Miha Pogacnik took us on a magical afternoon tour to share the story of the myth, encompassing a cave and a church next to Parsifal's father's castle. The earth power around both places was



ancient and palpable. These were places of power and they served to deepen our field as we wove them into our shared story. The story of Parsifal itself is emblematic of the Art of Hosting ethos – particularly the transformational power of asking the right question.

The story of the gathering – how it came to take place at Statenberg Manor, which had been an abandoned ruin only six months earlier – added another dimension to our experience of place. Although the manor itself is owned by an ‘absentee landlord’ (an aluminium factory in a neighbouring town), it has been reclaimed by the people of the local village, through their tourism association. Our hosts, Franc and Bostian,



were tirelessly generous and hospitable, sensing and meeting our needs in so many ways, and building relationships with the members of the learning village despite the language divide.

Shortly before we arrived, Franc made a call to the people of the village to adopt a room – to renovate, redecorate, and furnish it in time to host guests to the learning village. The response was immediate and decisive – in the days before people arrived, the place was bustling with men and women in painting overalls, wielding brushes and hammers, clutching bundles of bedding and mops.

When participants started to arrive, the locals melted back into the surrounding village, leaving us to find each other and our way in this new environment. As the week progressed, the people gradually trickled back into the manor, in greater and greater numbers, bringing needed tools and supplies, and peeking in to our community’s activities, until on the final evening the village joined us for dinner and festivities, song and dance together.



Clearing the chapel

On the left side of the inner courtyard was a derelict chapel which had been burned out before the first world war. The roof had been repaired some decades ago, but the floor was still covered with almost one meter of debris. The day after we arrived, as we watched the people working to prepare the space for us, Ria approached Franc, the steward of this place, to suggest that he make use of the 100 pairs of arms and legs that would be here for the coming week, to help with the work of restoring this beautiful, hospitable place. With that kind of people-power, you can work wonders! Franc's instant response was: clearing out the chapel. It was the least we could do to give something tangible back in return for the huge effort he and the people of the village had made for us to be there.

And so, clearing the chapel became a red thread that ran through our time together, uniting and inspiring young and

old alike. Starting in the second day of the gathering, a steady stream of people pushing wheelbarrows - loaded on the outward journey, empty coming back - could be seen (at any time of day or night) leaving and entering the gaping door of the chapel. Friendships were forged across generations and people's passion and creativity was piqued by the challenge and the symbolic power of this task.

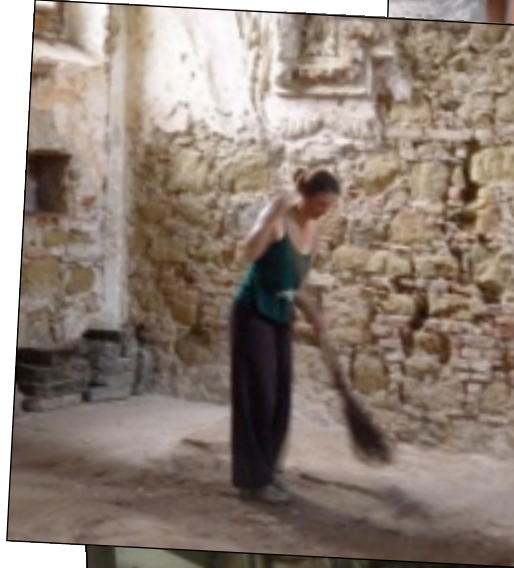
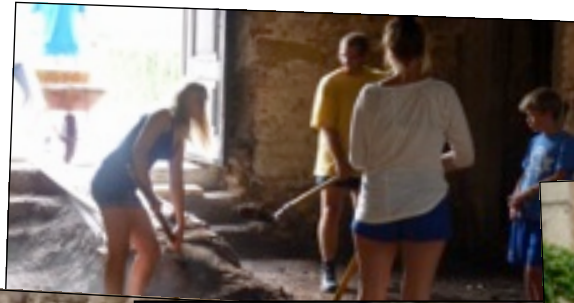


Two people, in particular (Bertram and Ingrid) stepped up to hold point on this mostly self-organising project. These two, who had shown up to participate in the gathering, were a stunning example of grass-roots leadership, stepping in to provide capable coordination, guidance and encouragement in service to a cause that inspired them.

This work turned out to be a contact point with the local villagers. It was they who brought in the wheel barrows and shovels and, once the work was completed, engaged with us in a beautiful celebration, with the music of the flute and many, many little candles; a blessing by the local priest and heart-stirring local songs.



The clearing of the chapel is also an eloquent metaphor for so much of what we did during our gathering, as well as for much of what we reclaimed back into our lives. One of the biggest learnings for both of us was the power of physical labour and practical work. Whenever we will be part of hosting a big event like this in future, we will always try to include some practical work to be done. Conversation on its own will no longer do the job – it is time to bring in more ‘doing’.



Uncovering sacred intent

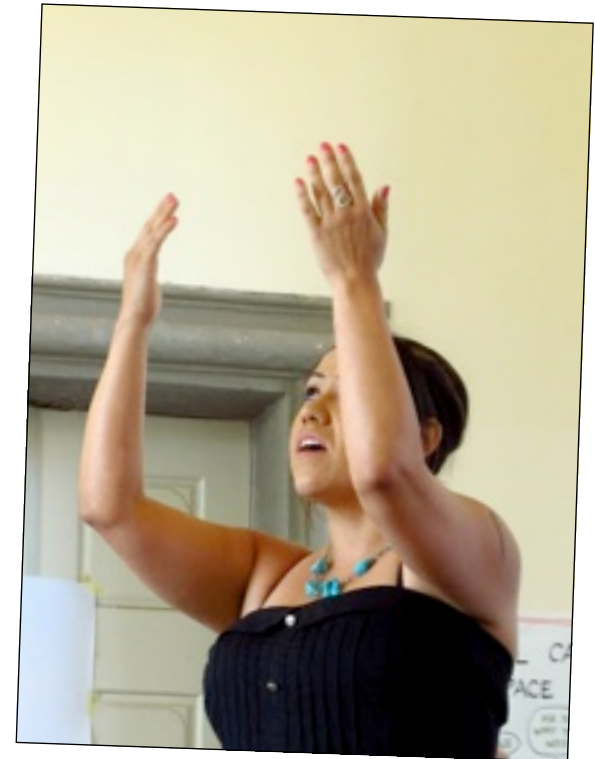
We don't speak it out so much in the Art of Hosting community, but in our circles and the work that we do, we hold the sacred, the mystery of life. In this gathering we asked Pawa, a Canadian with deep roots in the indigenous practices of the ancestors, to open our gathering with the Eagle song. Greeting the four directions, earth, sky and our selves was so in resonance with the artful painting (depicting the four elements) and stucco on the cycling of the Knight's Hall where we held our morning and evening circles. At the closing ceremony at the end of the week, we all joined her in the song and the movement to thank the directions.



The room adjoining the Knights' Hall became the 'sacred room', where a candle burned

throughout the time when the community was 'working' during the day.

The sacred has much to do with the subtle - it is not something you can see or measure. In many hosted gatherings, there are one or two folks on the fringes who are working with the subtle energies of the space and the field of inquiry or community that is in the centre of the



gathering. What they are doing is rarely stated explicitly, and many do not see it at all. At the learning village, this **subtle-energy work moved from the fringes to the centre**. Since then, we have noticed an opening to more subtle sensing in other hosted contexts - including some very unexpected ones!

A number of sessions were called in our Open Space: Helen's invitation to "Aquarian shamans" brought a surprisingly large circle together to share some touching and really diverse stories, and Simone's session on 'de-mystifying subtle sensing' showed us that we can *all* do it – actually we all do it all the time. What remains after the gathering is the awareness that we can become more conscious about the subtle energies, and use them as a stream of knowing, alongside all the other ways of knowing.



Witches of the Tribe

Every morning, before breakfast, a few people would come to the 'sacred room' to sit in silence together. As the days went by, more and more folks joined this circle. In the last day of Open Space, Mary-Alice even dedicated a session to this practice of subtle sensing, which was very well attended.

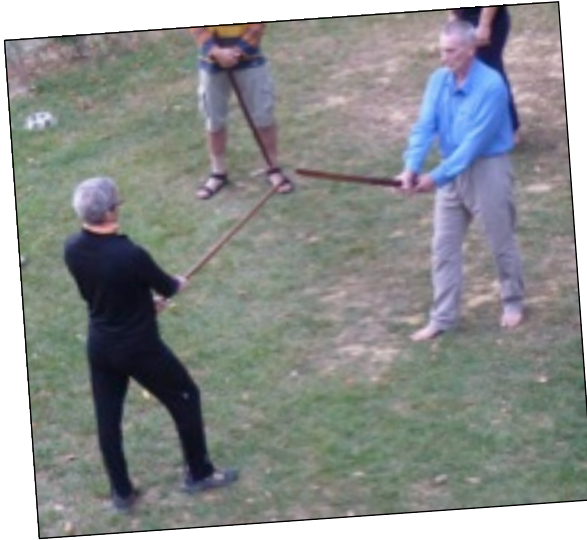
Our intention was to collectively sense into the whole of our gathering, which would help us understand what was actually happening at a deeper level. After a period of silence, people could share what they were sensing, and the shared picture that emerged from our interwoven subtle impressions helped to inform the hosting team of what needed to be taken care of on behalf of the whole – including the place itself.



As we gathered for this work, it felt so good to hear the Kia! of the people practicing clear sword cuts in the Warrior of the Heart practice just beneath our window. There was health and balance in the deep recognition of both practices: supporting the agency in the flow of life, at both the individual and collective levels.

In the collective silence one morning, Ria contemplated a name for this collective practice. What came to her was: Witches of the Tribe. It goes without saying that, just as the Warriors of the Heart were not only men, the Witches were not only women.

Re-claiming the synergy of feminine and masculine in co-creating

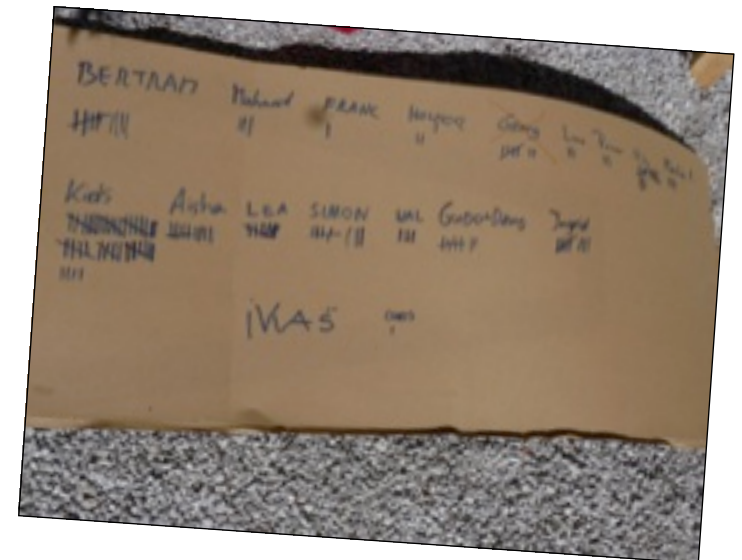


As said before, the subtle sensing that we all do (sometimes very unconsciously) came more to the fore in this gathering. The practice of Warrior of the Heart - a blending of Aikido practice with a wooden sword (bokken) and Art of Hosting - trains the ability to make clear sword cuts, in order to support working and living from the heart. We all need this capacity to create clarity and sharp focus.

Next to this is the more feminine practice of deep sensing – into realms below the surface and beyond the tangible – in support of the health of the collective. The practice of the Witches is to hold the sacred centre. We realised in one of our shared silences that **the more strongly the centre is held, the more innovation**

can happen at the fringes. This is absolutely needed in these complex times, where we long for emergence of the new.

We saw a lot of this co-creation between the masculine and the feminine in the work around the chapel. As work progressed, many people were drawn to the chapel just to be there, sense the energy and watch the work being done. This is the more feminine part. Then there were all those who picked up a shovel, filled a wheelbarrow and started moving out the rubble. Interestingly, the girls were very present in taking on this challenge - and it was the young folk who won the competition by shifting the most dirt.





Bertram, who held the space with Ingrid on this practical project, told us how, whenever a part of the floor was cleared so that the tiles became visible, someone would come in and fill it up with something. He saw this as a strong pattern: there are always people who need to clear the centre, creating the open space where the new can be birthed.

Re-claiming that all generations belong together

From early on in the preparation of this gathering, it became clear that children were to be part of it. Many participants came as whole families, with little children or with youngsters.

Also, a few people stepped in to ensure that the children wouldn't be lost while the grown-ups were off doing their thing. They were very clear that this was not baby-sitting as a side programme, but a serious attempt to integrate the children into the gathering.

We think we speak for everyone when we say that the adults learned as much from the children as we did from each other. It is not certain that we really learned our lessons consciously - for some of the adults (especially those without children of their own) it was a real stretch to engage with kids whose language they didn't speak and whose behaviour they sometimes didn't understand.

But the children and young people really shone. They claimed and owned the village space – there was



nowhere they didn't go, no one they didn't engage with. Their authenticity, creativity and generosity were humbling. They stepped up to host check-in one morning and completely shifted the energy for the rest of our time together. The village became more real to us all at that moment, as we lumbered around the Knight's Hall laughing like an elephant.

One evening it was the children who spontaneously hosted a birthday party in the kid's room. They found a way (quite natural in the children's culture) to make sure that everyone who showed up got involved – and even the more timid dancers engaged with each other in liberated expressions of hilarity!

We wholeheartedly support the effort that was made to move away from 'adults only' to a gathering where all generations were welcome.

If it takes a village to raise a child, then it certainly takes children to create a village! And it takes a village to live with all generations together.



The invitation and practice of generosity

During the early days of organising this event, we of the calling team decided not to make the participation fee too high. Even so, we heard from the local team members that for Eastern European family budgets, the cost was already more than high enough! So we decided not to include any fees for the team making this happen, only to cover their accommodation, food and transport.



At some point during the gathering, we realised that some members of the community needed financial help if they were to be able to stay until the end. It didn't take much subtle sensing to feel the undercurrents of money and economy moving in the shadows beneath our collective awareness.

David Reis stood up to host a conversation to cut through the taboos and create clarity on all levels around the economy of the gathering. At

the community news session that evening, David invited in generosity - in the form of a donations basket - and offered transparency, by undertaking to report on the state of the budget as it evolved during the gathering. From then on, each day he reported back to the community on how we were doing with the budget, what was covered or not, how many euros we needed to cover real needs, how many euros would be nice as recognition for work done to make such a large gathering possible.



We soon realised that different cultures have different habits as to how openly they speak on this topic of money. We realised in a deeper sense how important it is to openly express real appreciation and recognition – and that sometimes we have forgotten this, used as we are in the West to close our transactions with an exchange of money, which tends to preclude the opportunity to build the relationship further.

In the end we collected over €2,000 as a gift to the organising team, which seemed like a fantastic miracle. After the gathering, the team decided how to divide that – along with the small profit of a further €2,000 - among themselves in a real and open way.

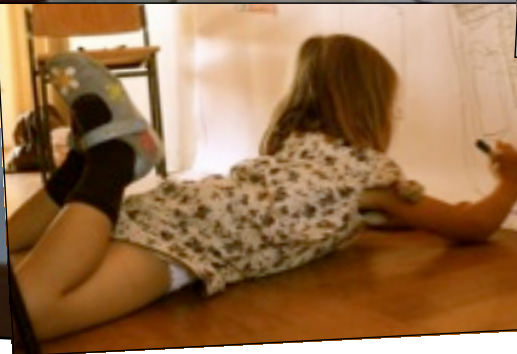
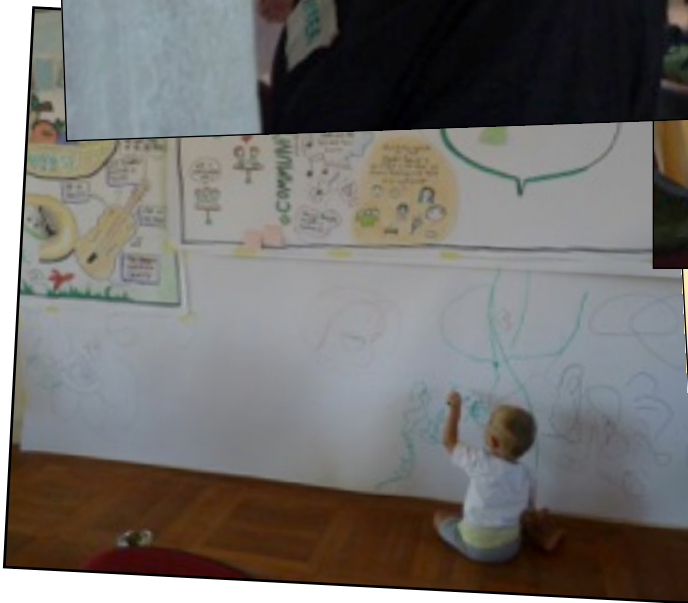
A beautiful harvest is a joy forever



Perhaps thanks to the presence of some strong harvesting capacity in the hosting team, our village was rich with learning about harvesting on many levels.

The gathering was graced by some real graphic recording talent, with Anne and Maja, in particular, stewarding an unforgettable unfolding harvest mural throughout the seven days that invited the involvement of everyone and uncovered unsuspected artistic gifts and passions in many quarters.

There was harvesting of learning and learning to harvest – and whole day set aside to follow the five days in Open Space to make sense together of everything we had experienced and discovered.



Celebrate who we are!

If you have a gift, give it now! The whole gathering was an invitation to live by your soul's calling. The Open Space sessions over the 5 days were an example of the richness that diversity brings into the village: walking, singing, meditating, conversing, looking into the future, football, tight-rope walking... Some of us have the gift of singing and making music, some of us have the gift of taking care of children, others have the gift of always saying hello in a warm way, some sit silent and hold space for others to find their way into the village. The ways of being in the village space are infinite...

On the last evening when we were sitting inside (sheltering from the torrential rain) in a cozy circle, more and more gifts became visible – another tune on the guitar, another song from a different genre, a story invented on the spot, some generative singing together. Real co-creation that happened just by the sheer joy of doing just that! What if life were like that, for all of us, all the time? That is the potential of the Learning Village. Sometimes it takes effort and perseverance, but joy is such a good measure of our aliveness!

On Sunday, after lunch when most of the participants had left, Franc, our local host, put back on his old LP-player and Slovenian and classical music again filled the air in the courtyard. You can just see he loves that music so much! And on the parking lot a moped-club arrived; all over 50. Strange thing to see. They opened the van that accompanied them and started playing local folk music! Soon enough the last participants were engaged in a dance with them, right there on the parking lot! Great entertainment for packing my tent a bit further away.



The Learning Village

Working with emergence, it is important to hold our expectations lightly. For everything that emerges, something equal and opposite doesn't. It is legitimate to rejoice in what we experienced, and just as legitimate to grieve for the potential that didn't manifest.

Many conversations that were planned ahead of the gathering didn't make it onto the agenda wall. We didn't talk much about the future of the Art of Hosting community, although steps were made to take on the revamp of the website, and we reached some new clarity on the Art of Harvesting.

The Learning Village as a form has taken deeper roots; collectively, we are becoming more conscious of how much more of ourselves we bring to the village than just our conversations - even if they matter! It takes us as whole beings, as full humans... may there be many more opportunities for us to practice this social form together!

