**Art of Hosting research: academics and practitioners – getting to know each other - July 5, 2010**

On the call:

Juanita Brown – PhD - World Café – California, US

Fred Steier – Prof. at Fielding Institute, US

Jerry Nagel – PhD student /Meadowlark Institute -

Debbie Frieze – consultant/writer – Boston, US

Pawa Haiyupis – practitioner - The National Centre for First Nation Governance – Vancouver, Canada

Ginny Belden-Charles - PhD student/consultant – Minnesota, US

Isabelle Mahy – Prof. at Université of Quebec et Montréal, Canada

Ria Baeck – AoH steward and practitioner - Brussels, Belgium

Diana Smith – consultant Ginger Group Collaborative- Vancouver Island, Canada

Stephan Cantore - PhD student/consultant - UK

Couldn’t make it:

Monica Nissen – consultant/practitioner, Denmark

Erik Mathijs – Prof. KUL Leuven, Belgium

Tim Merry – consultant/practitioner, Nova Scotia, Canada

Jodi Sandfort -

Kathy Jourdain – consultant/practitioner, Nova Scotia, Canada

Vanessa Reid – practitioner, Israel-Canada

Mary-Alice Arthur – consultant/practitioner, New Zealand

Martin Ludvigsen – Prof. in Design – Arhus - Denmark

Ruzsa Agota – consultant/practitioner, Hungary

John Inman – PhD student, Fielding Institute, US

Stephen Duns – Australia, Melbourne

**Framing**

**Isabelle:** I have a question since a long time regarding the foundation – from where are we speaking and acting in the practices? Do we know where is the ground; the undercurrent? There is not a lot of discourse about this – unless they are practitioners already.

In conversations with Ria, we came to a participatory action research: What is this thing? These social technologies of collective intelligence/wisdom? We would like to make it into a collective, collaborative research.

**Checkin:**

**Diana Smith:** I am part of The Ginger Group Collaborative – we have been exploring complex adaptive systems – how do we enable transformation to occur? We are connected to Royal Roads University in Vancouver (?), which focusses on action research. What is it that creates the magic in the middle? How do we hold space? What are the qualities of the hosts that makes that possible? It is more than the competences... looking at act research: what is the brilliance of a host? How to tap into the energy of the field? We have done action research by participants observation + review of theoretical sources; in a beginning phase; without any research dollars. Would like to have some money to have some depth in the research.

**Debbie Frieze:** I don’t know much about my research question, but I’m illuminating the research others are doing. Just ended writing a book with Meg Wheatley on the large change project in Columbus Ohio – big institutions. How do we go from individuals who show up to learn, to big, hierarchy systems that change...?

**Stephan Cantore:** I work as a consultant and host of conversations that matter – with public sector in UK. How do I behave in these large scale organisations? Ended my research at the University of Middelsex, London – multi – conversational consulting – How can I be more helpful in consulting through conversational practice? Also interested in collaborative research with my colleagues.

**Juanita:** Just watching a wild turkey flying over... I am very interested in the whole issue of research into these methodologies. My own PhD – around: what created the magic in the middle – was just to understand that. Conceptual research and pulling from lived experience – came up with some principles. We, World Café Foundation, have a research partnership with Fielding Institute: John Inman and (some one form Brazil) and I come from World Café: What is deeper than any individual doorway that connects them at the deeper co-evolutionary level? That is very interesting to me – I want to support that. Very intrigued, like Debbie: What are the pathways in large scale settings : what are the different pathways to make this into scale? (can stay only one hour)

**Fred:** (Juanita’s research director!) In Florida right now, with strong storms... maybe connection issues... My interest in all of this – first I want to say: a lot of what people have said so far, it connects so closely with what I have been doing – is a lifelong interest in connecting systems approaches... really looking at practice-based ways of knowing. For that we lean very heavily on Participatory Action research in many different forms, and our current project is ways of using The World Café, not so much as a way of meeting, but also as a research methodology within a action research context. … museum of Science... long term action research project: really looking at ways of inviting learning - how the science center itself may learn - to how the international science organisation may learn and at the same time holding open what we value so much. In what we are exploring in the WC project: participatory methodologies, and co-generative methodologies – and look at for whom are these methodologies? Having the assumption and at the same time doubting if this assumption is holding along the way; a recursive quality. A lot of questions around collective wisdom... part of what we have been doing.

**Jerry:** Minnesota, in the countryside. Thanks to Ria and Isabelle to bring all of us together. I am a PhD student, in the process of writing my dissertation at Tilburg University in cooperation with Taos Institute in New Mexico. My interest is twofold. First: from my research I offered via email slides that offer a perspective that underlines some of the work of my PhD. We all operate from a worldview, and that informs the actions we take in the world; and the bridge are the practices that we use. Art of Hosting is offering a worldview of complex living systems as opposed to a mechanistic worldview. From the worldview we quickly go into practices. My interest is really in: How do we expand the worldview perspective, to move to a larger, deeper understanding of a worldview that includes more than living systems? Talking about local ontologies, process ontologies... What does it mean to have an organisational culture as opposed to an individualistic culture...? Big part of why this interests me strongly, is to shift out of 400 years of our westernised impact on operations, pedagogy and research. Because a different worldview would shift how pedagogy, how research would take place.... the philosofical underpinnings underneath.

As a practitioner, with my colleagues, Ginny and Chris Corrigan, we are going to work this fall and take 8 health related community groups - working with different community groups – and train them over a period of a year in Art of Hosting, residential trainings plus coaching in between. Using the practices in their local community over the next three years. That entire period of 4 years will be followed, evaluated and reported out. We are hopeful of deeper understanding on shifting systems change in the area of health in Minnesota, based on the AoH practice..

**Ginny:** I will follow up... a little background, I am also in the Tilburg PhD project with Jerry. I connect with so many things that have been said here. About 20 years ago, I started a Women’s Leadership community dedicated to understand new practices, trying to understand different practices, and bringing new forms of practices in, and understanding where are the practices that are emerging from a new philosofical base? My dissertation is a deeper look at harvesting what we discoverd as being a CoP for the last 20 years, particularly interested of the intersection of what we have learned on the feminine and relational practices, as well as looking at learning community practices and what it takes for a group actually be engaged in inquiry effectively. Third area is the whole concept of relational leadership, what does it mean as leadership that is residing in between the people, and what are the different practices and forms of collective leadership?

In my work as consultant, over the last 25 years, from doing work in corporations and large organisations to doing work in social change, large projects in Minnesota. Currently working with a group that is trying to organise and deal with an epidemic of sexual transm. diseases in teenagers, summit meeting, state wide... also working with a group on the prevention of sexual violence as well. Thank you for including me, Jerry, and thanking Ria and Isabelle for organising the call.

**Pawa:** I’m in Vancouver right now, working with The National Centre for First Nation Governance. We have a professional developmental director working with different universities on different research projects. That is not my role, I work with young emerging leaders, and I am also a practitioner of AoH – have been working with Chris C. For quite some years. This is my first time working in a organisation where we are able considering exploring long term outcome – engaging with what is the impact of our services over the long term? I have witnessed how these practices really do have an immediate outcome. The magic in the middle, the spirit that comes out of these meetings... It inspires people to be responsible for what they are passionate about. Quite a stark contrast with how we used to organise as our political leaders – meeting in squares etc. Over on our side we use World Café and Open Space, there is definitely something different to this. To formulate the questions so that we can go deeper? Everybody is talking about the large scale social change. In our organisation we do use a lot these practices to really get the collective wisdom from the communities; the answers are there. These practices work really well with our indigenous communities; with young people as well because of the energy... it is exciting! I thank everyone to invite for this conversation to happen.

**Isabelle and Ria sharing their ideas**

**Ria:** I’m sitting here like Whooauw! A lot is already happening! We didn’t really know how this conversation would unfold. I would like to give the ‘floor’ now to Isabelle to speak a little more about what we had in mind. I sense there are probably two lines that are present: to see maybe how the different pieces of research can be connected and how this would connect with what Isabelle and I had in mind. We are very, very open to the direction the conversation wants to take. First hear Isabelle and see where the conversation goes from there.

**Isabelle:** I will walk you through the ideas we have juggled with these last few days; it really is not linear. We could see that there are many beautiful practices, that generate energy, generate magic. The questions that we had... they are probably of different nature. Some are really practices, others are more theoretical backgrounds (Theory U). **The first question we have is: What are the undercurrents? What is relating all these together?** What are the roots of all this, the invisible? At the beginning we couldn’t name them. We have a certain understanding of this, but not much. We finally named them social technologies – of what? Of collective knowledge, collective intelligence, of wisdom? Scharmer would name it social technologies of freedom?!?

There is a whole body of knowledge and experience, that we feel should need to be developed and explored further and deeper. **The next questions were: What are the next patterns that we see emerging from the different projects,** that are here and there**?** You mentioned some that are very, very inspiring that we never heard of! Is there new knowledge?

**What are these concepts that are supporting these practices?** Are they defined somewhere? what is holding space? What is hosting? Harvesting? They are so powerful in their expressions, that they need to be defined, for people outside the practitioners that are knowledgable about it.

Byond that, we also tried to focus at the roots – more of an intuition – or an assumption on **what feeds and nurtures these practices**: evolution and development, constructionism, humanism, ecology, mindfullness, ancient wisdom, design and art, representative and participatory democracy... These seems to be what flows into ... these values are expressed through the practices. This is not neutral. There is a dream, a wish related with all that!

When we realised that, a question that arose was: **Why is this showing up in the world right now? Why is it so important to carry this with us?** The answer could be stated as: Because we believe the world is in ruins. Getting to a kind of renaissance, a rebirth. We feel that we participate in that. The research has something to do with recognising this, the next level of consciousness.

As summary, we have two questions: What are these social technologies? And why are they showing up now?

Then, besides that, the How – how would we do this actual research? Quite natural, it popped up, hosting and harvesting could be a research process; as some of you mentioned about the World Café. We came to the same conclusion; hosting and harvesting can be a research process, where you can witness, mirror, explore the concepts, see what is already documented etc.

This research, in terms of result, should stretch and contaminate the knowledge in outside circles. When we thought about that, the idea came to us that many of these projects are in English, in ‘our’ culture. Maybe it would be relevant to translate to other languages? Parallel to this consideration - probably more an assumption that needs to be explored - then the third research question emerged: Is there a risk in this? Then what is this?

The idea for us is to see how we are connected. Is there some resonance between what you said, and what I shared – although presented a bit ackwardly; it is more like a drawing? Does it resonate? Could we do something together?

**Ginny:** Thank you for your words, Isabelle, and the questions you are holding. A couple of things that I really resonated with, based on the work that I have been doing. I have experienced many moments of magic in groups, over my life time of work, and I am always in awe when that happens. I have been on a quest most of my life to understand what that magic is and how it is created, so that it is not a random thing that surprises me. But that I could understand more what is going on when groups come together and create and powerful ways. The question that I am also holding: Is this a middle class thing? A fab thing? Versus: What really does work when humans, from any culture, come together? I have seen enough, in a variety of settings, that it is possible in a variety of settings.

In my work with women leaders, we have reached a place where we can create the magic; we understand collectively how to do that. Yet, what is it that it enables a group of people to do that? I have been part of number of methodology groups over the years; and if we get caught up in the trap of the practice itself – or doing it this way or that way - then we miss the capacity to really understand what is going on at the underlying level, and being able to create that in a variety of different ways that is needed locally for this particular gorup that comes together. That is why I have been interested in relational theory. One of the tennets of that is that things are not universal, there is not a single universal truth, there is not a metatheory, but there are historical and local truths that happen. That hasn’t stopped me of the quest for the metatheory. I am curious of how we shift our perspective to be able to have the capacity to create the social change in a wide variety of places. And what can we could learn from each other trying to do that? Excited to be part of an ongoing conversation around these questions. (need to go early)

**Diana:** I want to build on what Ginny has spoken about. It seems to be important to look at what is underlying the practice: What is the collective intelligence, the consciousness – whatever language we put around that - that invites the kind of conversation and generates the impact that we see when we are in those kind of spaces. I am very interested in how we might collaborate to share the knowings that are emerging from each of our research in some way to inform the whole, but also to provide more focus and depth for what each of us is doing individually. So, it is a both and for me.

**Stephan:** I like to reinforce what you just said. Feels tremendous to be part of this conversation. I’m working in England, I can feel myself part of a larger research community of people who are asking questions that I haven’t thought of and it is great to share these questions because then we develop the inquiry; amongst ourselves on an ongoing basis. I feel now that much of my research is connected into a larger community of inquirers. The work that I do in my little corner of the world is just much wider connected and fed and informed by the work you all are doing and many others are doing. I guess, I just want to share my excitement of being part of a bigger conversation; which is fantastic!

**Debbie:** (need to go soon) The question around how is this work effecting other communities and cultures is interesting to me and leads to this other question I have about this work: Where is this kind of work already been practiced for a long, long, long time? We are using different processes and language on the surface, but it is rooted in practices of collective intelligence in different cultures around How does language and naming gets in the way of us seeing these connections? There are questions around: How to frame this work as new and how to frame it as connected to a stream that is happening for a long time? and why is that white or privileged or mainstream or institutional environments now have access to it? The questions that I have been in with already with people of colour: Why do you think this all is new? Yet, the specific processes really are! How connecting to the roots and lineage, and how do we understand the roots of language?

**Juanita:** I build on Debbie, by asking the question – from being part of the core research team of the MIT dialogue project – What are the assumptions that are being brought to bear as we do this work? For example: Is the assumption that people don’t know how to do ‘it’ – whatever the ‘it’ is? And therfore we have to teach them how to do it? Or: Exist the it in all of us and our work is to create a context for accessing that possibility that is existing in the field? My question in relation to this question of Is this elitist? Is: What are the assumptions that underpin the doorways we are using and the choices we are making in this domain. (need to go) Thank you all; this is a wonderful conversation to be part of.

**Jerry:** Thank everyone again for the all the sharing that is taking place. Building on what was said, I am interested in what relational practice is – I have a tendency to refere to these practice in this way use – many cultures have used these relational practices in some form, for centuries. Many of us are adapting some and cocreating new ones of these relational practices. The operating systems that we have, in our institutions or wherever we do this relational work.

A few questions resonate with me that Isabelle raised. In westernised cultures many of these relational practices... PhD on Appreciative Inquiry ‘82, Harrison Owen ’85 and Juanita’s work in ’99... We are not very far in to the awareness of relational practice, but it has become powerful and resonating; it is time now to go deeper and further in.

The question was raised about research, and is really important: what does research look like when it not subject-object research, but when it is relational research? How do we do that? I call it subject-subject research, how do we do research that doesn’t create ‘the other’? Instead research that looks at how together... How do we teach that doesn’t treat students as objects to be passed knowledge on to? How do we do pedagogy and assigns characteristics in the beginning of the year .... What is a different way of doing pedagogue that is relational?

I think there are long historicals, some going back to some Greeks about relational culture; and some wonderful work done more recently by Bogatsky and Wittgenstein we can build and Whitehead “that we are always in a state of becoming”... are resonating with me more. Working with adults... trying to find ground, to move forward with a worldview that ... individual... relational perspective... culture... (not understood)

Building on Ginny: instead of ‘the’ correct reality that has driven Western thought and research, living in a world where there are local realities and local ontologies and one is not right and one is not wrong. It is in it’s own local, social, historical context. How do we find a way forward as supposed to find the right one?

**Stephan:** Thank for this conversation and thank you Ria for your work on this. (stepping out)

**Fred:** This actually comes from a long time conversation with Juanita, I have been playing around with the relationship between the notion of acknowledgment and knowledge. I am not the first one to do this! It fits with our own process here. It really intrigues me. We are looking at acknowledgment in a number of different ways, we would like to collectively. One is really acknowledging what are the assumptions that are behind what we are doing? What questions comes to us and how they come to matters to us? We have ownership because we are choosing to do this; at the same time not to the exclusion of others. Sometimes we have this desire to be identified as the leader of a particular path – this is our territory that we own - ownership in the sense of commitment rather than ownership in the sense of reclaim this as our own idea.; that aspect of acknowledgment. At the same time it is acknowledging connection with others; acknowledging of ideas and roots and of other conversations that have become an important part of what we are doing. I see that as a tread that is connecting a lot of what we are saying here.

From a research point: How is it that you recognise the collaborative nature of bringing about transformation, at the same time collaboration bringing about understanding? These two, seem very often,... in a very strong way you change what you are trying to investigate, at the same time of investigating... How do you actually acknowledge that aspect? For those of us doing action research, in a way a very intriguing paradoxical aspect of doing action research.

**Pawa:** I am interested to be part of this conversation as it develops. In what Jerry talked about earlier... we are doing a similar project and almost airy how much paralels... to set up training sessions over a period - we will do it over a period of 1,5 year – as well do workshops on governance and leadership... chaordic stepping stones... projects that are important for them, that they are working on. We are in the setting up of this: How are we going to evaluate it? This other component – how do we evaluate the connection, the tapping in to what is inherently known? Talking about these processes of conversation and dialogue, I think they work so well in our indigenous community because it is so natural; not something that... What? No agenda? No, we are talking about what needs to be talked about, as it emerges.. how they are natural to how we want to have conversations...

I am really excited, is there any way to continu to make connections and develop the inquiry? My interest is in these deep questions, so that we can evaluate the long term. And engage other people to come in, so they can host inquiries in their own local areas.

**Ginny:** I have to say goodbye; grateful to have met and hope that more will happen.

**Debbie:** Grateful to be on this call and hearing the questions you all bring. I will be watching this conversation.

**Teatime**

**Ria:** If we would sit in a real circle, I would say have a cup of tea or coffee. It seems we have a little bit of a break.(checking who is still here) I have a practice of taking notes while the conversation has been going on, and it is so rich and so much is going on. I try to sense what is the direction this group/conversation wants to go. It seems that we all share a longing to challenge the deep assumptions, to find the deeper ground; and also to hear and to learn from each other. That’s what I hear so far. I would love to be in deeper conversations about all of the research you are all involved in. It feels to me that we just heard what is on top, on the surface, of your thinking and your experience.

I invite everyone to speak about what you sense is the way forward; what seems most natural to do next... Also inviting even more of the questions and stories...

(Fred disappeared as his connection was lost)

**Way forward**

**Diana:** I sense and do share the deep longing to be in the **inquiry about what are the deep assumptions that underly the practice.** I appreciate the focus, that Fred made around really acknowledging and owning what these assumptions are. A way forward for me, would be to continue the dialogue to share what assumptions we do hold and integrating the treads. For me there is value in conversations with each other and practically there might be value in creating a virtual repository of these conversations. That would be a good way to acknowledging what we are discovering. (have to leave)

**Pawa:** I also think to continuing to have this dialogue - as some people couldn’t make this conversation. As we continue to go this journey together, the linkages and connections will emerge. It is such a rich conversation. Keeping the conversation going would be a realy good next step.

**Isabelle:** I was thinking everyone is already doing, locally, or research or practice, is a process that is already very rich. If we would share that more, maybe we could find the common ground, the linkage, some of the assumptions that are there and see more of the undercurrents that makes the flow of content and of energy. The suggestion would be to invite to tell the stories of the projects – research or practice - to get an overview of them; that maybe a way of going further.

Then, ... talking about what now? And how? Finding this common ground... maybe we could try to summarise the questions that everybody already gave to the group and share them to everyone. It could, eventually, trigger more ideas. Do a little harvest of what has emerged today...

**Ria:** I had in my mind’s eye an idea of little harvest teams that visit these bigger projects that run over a longer period of time. The core teams of these projects, together with this harvesting team, dive in to the story and look for the deeper harvest and look for the new insights and patterns. These harvest teams could host these core teams... that is still a picture that is in my mind. What I am now thinking is... what if we would with the same focus and perspective, can we look as a group with the research mind, - with the witnessing and the mirrorring - to the research projects that are already going on. Maybe there isn’t a big difference between the ‘hosting’ projects that are going on and the ‘research’ projects... because at a certain point there is the question of how do we evaluate and there is an implicit or explicit focus on what are we learning, and what are we learning next? I do have a sense that there is already so much spread around the globe and how do we connect that in a good way, in a nurturing way? That is the question that I am holding now...

**Jerry:** One thought that occurs to me, at least in the nearer term as we explore what is emerging here... maybe for a little while we keep an online dialogue going, around the issues of research and deepening of exploration in the philosophical foundations; into the roots of what we are doing. The larger AoH listserve I find rich and rewarding - it is the only listserve that I really pay attention to . In the last weeks this group emerged within that larger group and maybe we keep this subgroup alive as a listserve conversation. Let us explore ideas, openings with each other and see what structures emerge out of that. We will find a way wether it is just a touch back to the larger AoH group or whether... we can invite others if they are interested.

**Pawa:** Ria, when you were talking about what you saw about research team and core teams that are hosting the projects, I kind of saw a visual of that. Maybe, even if we kind of use the chaordic stepping stones, start that process: how this group emerged out of the AoH list... There is definitely something common that we all have; and explore what can we all contribute? I do see the research component and then there are the projects that are going on for a longer time... there are already these common threads that are happening... everything happens for a reason, right...

... I’m interested in this project going forward... the principles of these conversational methods ...(not understood) How to hold this larger container? That is really a global conversation and look at what is working and share it? I think that is the magical, that those connections are made... everyone is indigenous... connection back to the deeper roots, to the land, mystical, magical and unexplainable... There is so much wisdom there around cycles and conversational processes. I welcome the idea of, at least, looking of how we can work together; and maybe create a global movement where information is shared on a larger scale.

**Checkout:**

**Isabelle:** Personally I would need to take a moment to let my mind float a little... there are many ideas, questions, and suggestions... I cannot sense the whole, but I feel that there is open inspiration to contribute. At the same time it is not very precise. Maybe we should reflect a bit on all the good suggestions and questions that give some rich texture on what we, Ria and I already had scetched out. This would be the most natural next step. Also keeping these calls on and having the virtual support to harvest somewhere.

**Ria:** As I said, this is indeed a lot of information and questions, and intentions, and hopes, and longing... and my main question – How do we keep the connection going so that the learning between us can happen? Can amplify? From the few minutes that I have heard everyone speaking... there is such deep thinking and experience! My passion is about how to connect that; so that each becomes better at it or is inspired and we can learn together.

Maybe that is the start of the checkout; maybe you started that already Isabelle. I’m also thinking of; OK, this is my passion but is this is project that will provide me with some money? Do we need to have a formal partnership between some research institutions or not...? How doe we learn and how do we ampligy the learning, that are the questions that I leave this conversation with. With that, I invite everyone to check out.

**Jerry:** Thanks again for bringing us all together. I want to express my deep wilingness and commitment to continue the dialogue where I can... online; in person perhaps some day. I know I have to reflect before stepping into action. The conversation will work within me for a few days now, it is terrific. I am committed to contribute as we go forward. Thanks again.

**Pawa:** I am commited to continue to talk about the research component, as well as the different connections that will be emerging. In terms of partnership agreement I have to bring this back to our research director. We do need to explore and researching the large term outcome. Our institution works with AoH and sharing that is important. I look forward to work together for the future; formal or informal... It is close to my heart and definitely count me in!

**Isabelle:** If, whenever we come back, to share all this... The intent is to post the audio version, a summary on paper could be useful. So many things have been proposed that I need to step back a little bit... see what can be done, in a way of approaches, research strategies. Reflecting back on small teams, going on visits with projects core teams... this needs to be a little organised... Maybe we can see what can be done? How? Also with official academic partnerships, it can be valuable. This I will investigate.

It was a pure joy and enriching to share this all with you. The way it resonates is on a very personal basis a source of joy, because the way our initial questions emerged, and the way we started the conversation with you Ria already meant something for people – it has meaning for people out there. I believe that the way we had stated it, the expressions of all that it seems to be relevant and seem to resonate. That is great to see.