Collaborative support networks as generative of new futures: using world café and other dialogic methods to further inclusion, awareness and sustainability (submission 25)

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Collaborative support networks are increasingly used to support the inclusion of otherwise marginal, marginalized or less visible groups in structures such as schools, institutions of higher education, and political entities (see, e.g. Camarinha-Mator & Afsarmanesh, 2005). Their form and scale can vary from communities of practice (Wenger, 2000) to global action networks (Waddell, 2010). Playing a part in such networks can also increase our awareness for the potential of interpersonal, interdisciplinary, and interorganizational collaboration in a number of differing contexts. One of the inherent features of such networks is that they bring together individuals with various types of experience, whereby the value of that experience for the network is not only based on their formal qualifications such as academic merit or time spent in a job, but also on the quality of their reflection on that experience and its potential to enrich the whole. As catalysts for inclusion and as awareness raisers for the power of network thinking, collaborative support networks may become an essential element of future societal structures. This in turn may help societies to adapt and sustain themselves gracefully in the face of major issues, like climate change, which seems to us one of the most challenging anticipated environmental changes coming at us in our history on earth. The form and shape of collaborative support networks can vary tremendously, and can include non-traditional characteristics like humor and playfulness. Such characteristics may be helpful in the adaptations collaborative support networks may help make in societal structures. We hope to highlight some of these non-traditional qualities in our session and hope they afford our participants the possibility to liberally use them to adapt the session's structure to co-create a unique outcome with us. We plan to provide some examples from our own praxis-based and scholarly-based work.

In this session, we will use the concept of generative metaphors from Don Schön (1979). We will give a few examples of generative metaphors as a starting point to the session. However, the focus will be on getting the group to create their own metaphors, and reflect on how those metaphors can enrich the outcomes of collaborative support networks and catalyze new futures.

As they combine qualities that pertain to both the realm of the poetic and the realm of logic (as suggested in Bateson & Bateson (1987)), metaphors may have an emancipatory and empowerment-building quality that can further dialogue in unanticipated and creative ways. We will also reflect on Mary Catherine Bateson (1991)'s idea of generating "our own metaphor" and discuss the meaning of the collective "we/our" when building metaphors. The importance of flexibility is central to generating new metaphors and reflecting on them.

We will use our own disciplines and areas of practice, respectively social informatics (Laurence Habib), conversational leadership and whole systems design (Flavio Mesquita da Silva), disruptive innovation and transformational change (Sergej van Middendorp), and collaborative design for learning and play (Frederick Steier) in order to inform the conversation. A key feature that brings our ideas together is a commitment to designing a process for design in these different domains, attending to communication process at multiple levels. The recursive aspect of designing a process for design will also be central to our session. When helpful, we may choose to support our joint process by introducing some of the tools and methods that we have developed in our research and practice, such as work=play, and the meta4language toolkit.

We will use the concept of the World Café as the basic structure of the session. The World Café is a meeting process that brings together groups in small, intimate conversations. It is a living system that relies on design principles like asking questions that matter, creating a hospitable space, and setting the context (Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community (2005)). Such a structure is to a large extent self-organizing and provides learning opportunities both for individual participants and for the group as a whole.

The overall aim of the session is to allow for cross-pollination and becoming wiser together. We will strive to keep the range of possible topics as wide as possible, to allow for reflections on the state of the affairs of humanity as well as discussions of narrower or apparently mundane topics. In doing so,

we aim to connect with one another and, and with one of humanity's most ancient traditions— to talk about what really matters and find the wisdom that can only be accessed through dialogue and exchange. This dialogue and exchange, in addition to offering an arena for 'messy' encounters, will also bridge the playful and the academic.

We aim to leverage the World Café's potential as a learning system that provides participants with opportunities of acquiring new information and knowledge as well as finding new ways of seeing their lifeworlds (Rehorick & Bentz, 2009; van Manen, 1990). We hope that one of the takeaways from the session will be that participants will experience new perspectives and emotions as they collaboratively create new meaning on themes that are important to them. In keeping with the World Café philosophy, the session will be a session of "futuring" i.e. co-creating a process in which participants project their thinking towards future scenarios (in line with the concept of "futuring" as outlined in e.g. Cornish, 2004).

Knowing that a successful World Café session requires at least 12 participants, we will also have a plan for an alternative format if less than 12 persons attend the session, in which case the session will be more of an open-space discussion. The space will be set-up to afford co-design and can be used as a generative metaphor while working on creating, discussing and reflecting on new generative metaphors for collaborative work. By setting up each table to have a metaphor to play with in the café rounds, we invite participants to anticipate their future context through that table's metaphorical entailments. Also we will offer 'open' tables where participants can collaboratively generate their own metaphors to play with. We will spend the last few minutes of the session reflecting on our own process, in particular the verbal and non-verbal communication, as well as the extent to which the group has chosen or did not chose to liberate itself from the structure of the session.

An important element of collaborative support network is the variety of the backgrounds, experiences and perspectives of the participants. This variety often leads to serendipity in the encounters between participants. To ensure variety in future scenarios, we will consider developing methods to widen the net for identifying participants and inviting them to the session (widening for example age range, professions, levels of disabilities, etc.).

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Note: the authors will also have a dialogue session on the same theme. The dialogue session is titled: "Generating new futures through collaborative support networks: reflecting on inclusion, awareness and sustainability" and has been given the number 30 in Easy Chair.