

# Reflections on the New Agoras Project: A Fuschl Conversation

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# Outline

- The New Agoras Project
- Method and results of the Fuschl team
- Related research traditions
- A comparison with the Institute of Cultural Affairs
- The synte-gration method
- Other efforts and their websites

# The new agoras project

- Create evolutionary design communities
- Local level – local groups design ideal futures facilitated by a steward
- Steward level – stewards exchange ideas among each other and local agoras
- Linkage level – agora groups exchange ideas in cyberspace

# Description of a local agora

- 7-12 people who can meet regularly
- Intention of creating an image of an ideal future society they would like to inhabit
- Employs a design methodology
- Includes one or more stewards
- Ensures that discussion in the public sphere is facilitated by systemic methodologies

# The method used at Fuschl

- Definition of purpose
- Identification of values
- Definition of functions
- Definition of clients and doers
- Next steps

# Definition of purpose

“Creating a community that collects and promotes the experiences of existing communities or organizations that have been successful in developing participative dialogue for achieving... progress toward a better society... moving toward becoming a steward system that links to the best of systems thinking ideas”

# Identification of values

- Exchange knowledge
- Create knowledge
- Create an open environment for critique
- Respect local and global and cultural wisdom
- Use available knowledge and inquiry
- Adopt an evolutionary consciousness
- Promote cultural exchange and access to cultural resources

# Definition of functions

- Develop an internet supported knowledge base on the agoras' experiences and learnings
- Support the learning process in agoras with useful methods and tools
- Facilitate knowledge sharing and learning by interested communities or institutions

# Defining clients and doers

- The clients for these services would be community activists and organizers; managers, consultants, and technicians; and concerned citizens and researchers
- The doers or the steward community would include the members of this team, a website administrator, communities or organizations wanting to share their knowledge

# Next steps

- Continue to define the functions, with emphasis on creating a website
- Write a research proposal to obtain the necessary funds
- Explore linkages to related social system design activities

# Related research traditions

- Organizational behavior and development
- Open space methods
- Organizational learning, interactive planning, second order cybernetics
- The viable system model and synte-gration
- Design architecture to build a knowledge base resulting from inquiries

# Origins of the Agoras project vs. ICA

- Started in the 1980s or 1990s
- Origin in a school of education, B.H. Banathy at Saybrook
- Intent is to encourage people to take responsibility for cultural evolution
- Started in 1970s based on work in 50s & 60s
- Origin in World Council of Churches, Joe Mathews
- Intent is to live the teachings of The Bible, help the poorest of the poor

# Agoras project vs. ICA

- A goal is to share ideas developed in agora conversations via the internet
- Supporting literature is from education, evolutionary theory, systems science
- Develop methods that people can use to define visions and work to achieve them
- Supporting literature is a mixture of secular and religious writers

# Agoras project vs. ICA

- Emphasis is on envisioning an ideal state and modelling it prior to action
- Assumes that new visions will lead to actions. People have a right to be involved in designing their future
- Emphasis is on designing a course of action to be implemented
- Assumes that a group, working together, can accomplish things that individuals cannot

# Steps in Agoras project vs. ICA

- Transcend the existing system
- Envision an ideal system
- Design the transformation of the present to the ideal
- Display models of the system designed
- Plan implementation of the design
- Define the shared vision
- Identify obstacles to achieving the vision
- Formulate strategies to remove the obstacles
- Identify tactics to implement the strategies
- Define actions – who does what, when, and how to implement the tactics

# Agoras project vs. ICA

- Imagine ideal worlds and think about cultural evolution
- Levels of participation local level, steward level, linkage level
- The stewardship group of facilitators has been meeting at Asilomar
- Create “images of possibility” and learn by doing
- Three groups – people in communities, full time staff, volunteers
- Summer research assemblies review programs, strategies, and methods

# Financing of Agoras project vs. ICA

- Largely self-financed as a part-time activity of academics
- Local agoras are self-funded. Leaders are volunteers
- Initially self-financed with additional support from people, govt, and foundations
- Funding from UNESCO, World Bank, corporations, churches

# Agoras project vs. ICA

- The stewards are the resource people
- The Asilomar Conversations and the Fuschl Conversations have resulted from these efforts
- Primarily an intellectual exercise
- Local people who can provide resources are involved in planning
- Many community groups, day care centers, and business have been created
- Help people learn how to improve their lives

# Agoras project vs. ICA

- Well connected to the academic community, especially the field of education
- Not yet much writing about results. People are encouraged by their conversations
- Widely known about churches, NGOs and development org.s such as the W. Bank
- A great deal of writing about results – project descriptions, stories, anecdotes, evaluations

# The synteegration method

- Facilitates participation and dialog and emergence of social consciousness
- Helps to balance the views of those managing organizational tasks with those focusing on external issues
- Leads to sharing of information and knowledge

# Other efforts and their websites

- National Conference on Dialogue and Deliberation
- Dynamic Facilitation
- Mary Parker Follett Foundation (funding)
- Deliberative Democracy Consortium
- Institute of Cultural Affairs
- Co-Intelligence Institute
- World Future Society and IFSF

# Questions about the new agoras project

- Is there an intent to involve people other than academics?
- Are people more motivated to discuss ideal futures or to improve their organizations and communities?
- Does a deductive approach work better in Europe and an inductive approach work better in the US?