



**Highlights from
The Ecovercities Gathering:
Re-imagining Higher Education
August 2015
Tamera Portugal**

Co-Hosted by Enlivened Learning, Shikshantar and Tamera Healing Biotope I

- 55 visionary doer-thinkers, representing 35 different 'alternative universities' from more than 20 countries came together to start to co-create the foundations for a trans-local Ecovercities Network. They were from projects that are reclaiming their local knowledge systems and imaginations to nurture learning processes that are meaningful and relevant to the call of our times, that cultivate new stories and possibilities, and that regenerate diverse ecological and cultural ecosystems.

We started our gathering with an opening circle during which co-creators shared an object representing their learning community in the center as they reflected on the deeper call that brought them to the gathering.



We were welcomed to the community of Tamera with an opening ritual at the site of the Tamera sacred stones.



Liora Adler from Gaia University helped to share the context for community care for our week together and invitations to co-create in an UN-CONFERENCE format.



Many of the powerful experiments of Tamera around water, energy, community building, governance and love, were shared with the group throughout the week, infusing us with inspiration and new questions.





Some Tamera Eco-Experiments



Isabel Carlisle from *Year in Transition* (UK) and Etienne Salborn from the *Social Innovation Academy SINA* (Uganda) intensely sharing about their projects during the Mela process (Fair of Projects).



Khadra Ali shares experiences from *Schools Without Borders* (Canada) and her work with Somali women immigrants during the Mela.



During the Mela, Ryan Heavyhead and Adrienne Heavyhead share their experiences in *Red Crow College* (Canada) working to reclaim the Blackfoot knowledge paradigm through a reconnection with the land and traditional language. Ryan's storytelling sessions were also very powerful.



Adrienne McCurdy from *H3Uni* (UK) shares a powerful systems thinking game during the Mela.



We were invited to listen deeply to each other's stories through the *Taghmees Social Kitchen* process hosted by Dina Bataineh from Palestine-Jordan. Several participants shared the diverse contexts of violence which we are working in around the world.



“*Taghmees* refers to dipping, often used to refer to dipping by hand into food, or the act of immersing yourself deeply into anything.”

- Dina Bataineh, *Taghmees Social Kitchen*,
Palestine-Jordan

We engaged in a process of reflecting on a clustered map of our collective questions that was hosted by Ian Kendrick from *H3Uni* (UK).



Some of the questions that emerged from the collective consciousness of the group.



The mind of metaphor: we were invited to share dream images about our deeper purpose for being together. This was hosted by Vanessa Andreotti, *University of British Columbia* (Canada) to help us move into the space of the unknown... beyond our rational, planned agendas.



Edy Garcia from *Unitierra* (Mexico) shares his dream image. Co-creators reflect on the collective images from the mind of metaphor session.



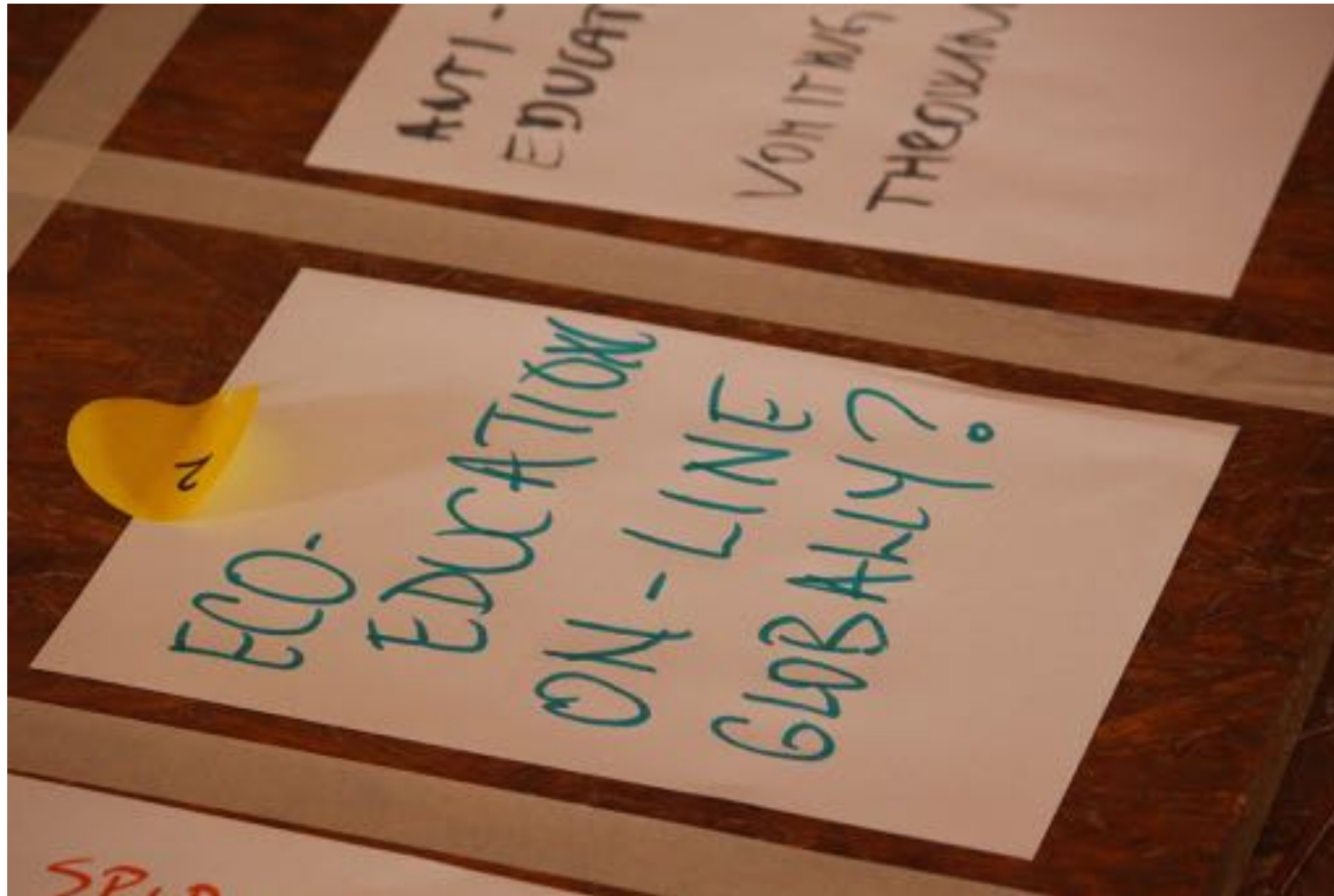
“I especially valued the room - the space we were able to create that included some tension, the inevitable contradictions, and the ability not to resolve them but just to allow them express...”

- Alessandra Pomarico, *Free Home University* (Italy)

Several parallel open sessions were hosted by the participants themselves on various themes. Here is a session hosted by Isabel Carlisle from *Year in Transition* (Transition Town movement, UK) on what are the cosmologies or mythological stories that give life and context to our different projects.



Several provocative topics were explored during the Open Space Sessions.



“There were two strong intellectual gifts that I received at the Ecovercities gathering. One was Vanessa Andreotti’s model on four possible strategies, approaches and positions those working toward systemic change occupy: 1. Everything is Awesome & nothing needs to change, 2. Soft Reform strategies such as personal and institutional transformation are required to deal with inequality 3. Radical Reform as challenging for example hetero-patriarchy, nationalism, colonialism, capitalism, and racism as interrelated power structures. 4. Beyond Reform which sees modernity as irrecoverable and unable to be amended in which case we need to hack it, build alternatives, and hospice it's end of life process.

The second intellectual gift was the concept of the Third Horizon presented by the folks from H3Uni. The First Horizon is Business As Usual. The Second Horizon are the innovations that amend, disrupt or render obsolete the current unsustainable or suicidal practices of business as usual. The Third Horizon is the world beyond our contemporary crises, the world that actually works for all of life, our planet and it's living systems in balance, it is the necessary end goal of our times.

These two frameworks seem to fit together well and are ripe to be synergized. I am currently still thinking about how they do and don't fit together and am finding it a ripe inquiry.”

- Armando Davila, *Generation Waking Up* (USA)

ALREADY TRIED

(for everybody and)
EMPOWERMENT
LEADERSHIP
CONSENSUS
PROGRESS
IDENTITY
DIALOGUE
INNOVATION
AFFLUENCE
COMPETITION
speed
efficiency
idealized self
ego-boosting
MAKING A \neq
PROJECTED HOPE
KEEPING CONTROL
OUTCOMES / SOLUTIONS
separability
involvement

...WHAT ABOUT?

Disorientation
De-centering
Pluriversality
[Re]membering
Planarity
Presencing
Wisdom
Give Away
Complementarity
Slowing Time
Redundancy
Insufficiency
Nakedness
Becoming useful under another's tool
Hope Beyond Hope
Surrendering to Guidance
paradoxical experiments
entanglement
hugging the monster in the mirror
the mirror

An amazing cultural evening of sharing songs, poems, stories and inspirations was hosted by Hugo Oliviera, *Schumacher College* (UK) and Xana Piteira from *Quinta do Vale de Lama* (Portugal).



“Redefining the way we learn, the underneath patterns that have been imposed on us through our schooling. Patterns that many times we are not aware, we still have them. The unconference platform allowed these patterns to be visible and come to the surface and be mirrored by diverse collaborative paradigms emergent within the group. To redefine the way we proceed with adult learning and allow the new holistic processes to be recreated, by allowing non cartesian approaches, was for me one of the most important outputs of this encounter...”

- Hugo Oliviera, *Schumacher College* (UK)
and *Global Ecovillage Network*

Lots of rich spontaneous discussions happened during the spacious breakfast times. Here Reva Dandage and Manish Jain from *Swaraj University* (India) are planning some surprises for the day with Udi Mandel of *Enlivened Learning*.



Walking together during the gathering was a time for deep co-learning and friendship.



“A problem was how to connect and communicate through the pedagogy and the pain. We started to create a language that went beyond words. I felt the power of abundant friendship and its ability to confront the violence that attempts to maintain the gap between the intellectual, manual, natural, the immaterial/ spectral and creaturely life. “

- Mike Neary, *Social Science Centre* (UK)

Lots of intense moments of sharing happened with a rich diversity of perspectives. Below are Neil Meckelham from Auroville (India), Manolo Callahan from Unitierra-Califas (USA), and Keri Facer from University of Bristol (UK).



Magical hugs could be found throughout the gathering. We tried to create a space not only to share about our work but also about our personal lives.



“In relation to Wisdom Graduate School and especially Ubiquity University, I would like to see a concerted effort to find ways (and teach them) to heal the deep planetary wounds, especially between victim and victimizer, to elicit the creativity for serious paradigm-shift thinking and actions, and to discover ways to blend the best of both worlds (global south/often colonized peoples and global north/often colonizers).”

- Dianne Brause, Ubiquity University (USA)

There was time for silence and introspection.
Here is Admire from *Kufunda Learning Village* (Zimbabwe).



“My belief in connecting with nature and having nature as a huge gift for healing and learning got re-established after hearing talks and meeting people who brought in stories/practices from indigenous people. Also, we had a sharing circle about how people were communicating with plants and animals. This deepened my faith about communication with plants and it has encouraged me to try new experiments in communicating with the rats on our campus.”

- Reva Dandage, *Swaraj University* (India)

The presence of two small children added a powerful dimension to the gathering. Laura Martinez Galera from the *School of All Relations* (Greece) looking at life from a different perspective.



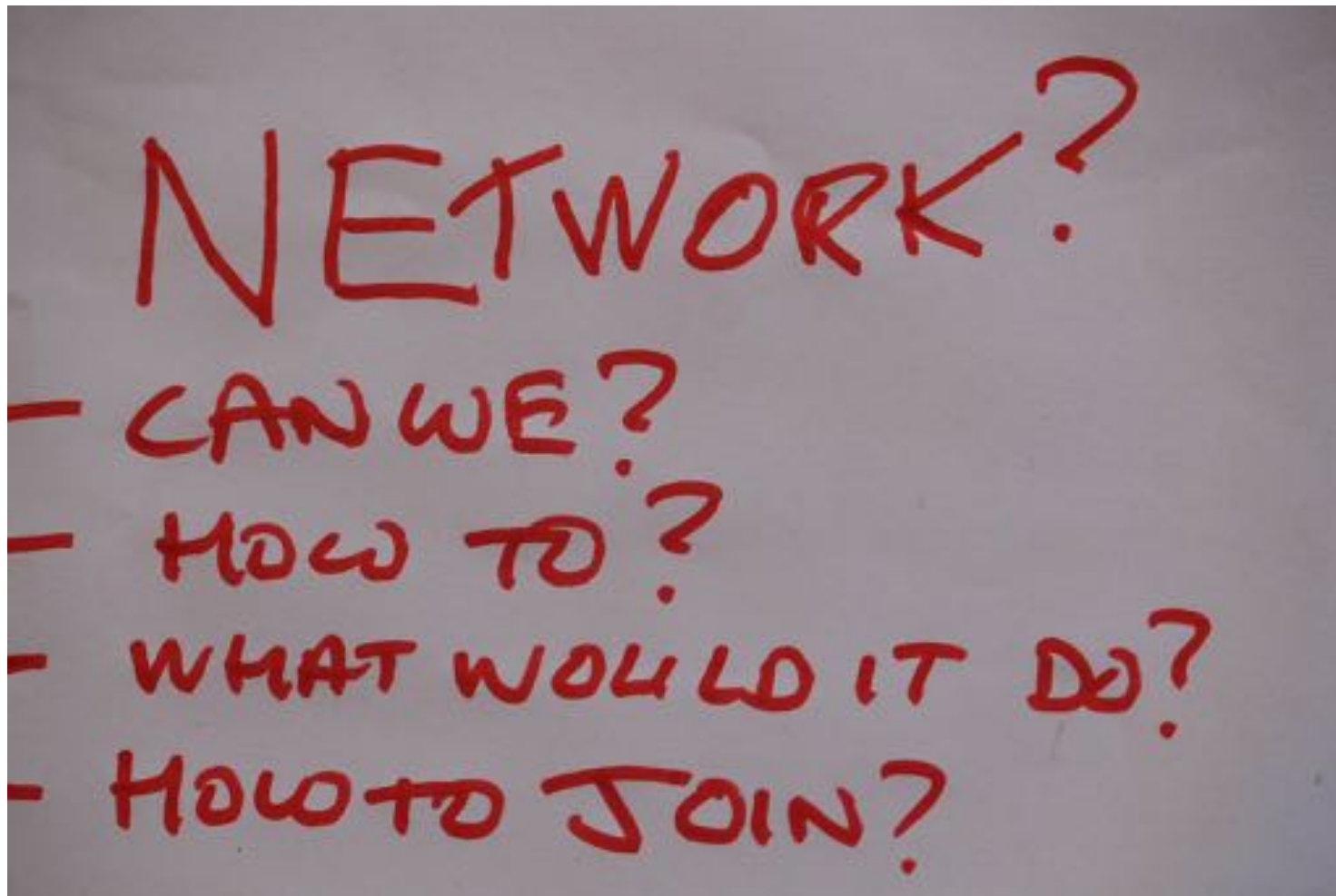
The Love School at Tamera hosted us in an intense evening Women's Circle and Men's Circle to explore the theme of love, community and peace.



Udi Mandel and Kelly Teamey from *Enlivened Learning* opened the day with a reflection about their dream for the gathering and how we might deepen our connections. This was followed by a world café process on the theme of practical solidarity.



We explored what a loose but powerful network might look like. How might it emerge and grow in a more organic way? How might it be shaped by a spirit of deep friendship? What is the deeper story about what we are up to?



“Our entire six days was filled with the pressing question of how we collectively claim our project - are we a community of insurgent learners, a network of de-professionalized intellectuals, and/or an occasional un-conference made up of folks committed to advancing local projects while at the same time trying to imagine how we "hold a space" for our emergence as an effort to be in, against and beyond institutions of higher education.”

-Manolo Callahan, Unitierra-Califas (USA)

Lots of beautiful energy was generated during our time together and we were ready to jump into new adventures together.



"I got many ideas by other participants and also by the ability of Tamera to turn their land into an oasis. We will start a rural biogas project inspired by Tamera. Through inspiration of other Ecoversities, we have started in Uganda to go out into schools for our scholars to give workshops to students to work on their self-esteem. We might also exchange learners from Uganda to Zimbabwe and India. I left the gathering with the wonderful feeling that we are not the only fish swimming against the stream."

- Etienne Salborn, *Social Innovation Academy* (Uganda)

Ku Kahakalau from *Ku-A-Kanaka* (Hawaii) sharing an indigenous prayer song with all of us to help close the gathering..



And as per the standards of great Indian weddings, it took us several hours to say our goodbyes.



“The deepest inspiration I got from the meeting was HOPE, to know that many people around the world struggle daily to build other ways of living. The meeting allowed me to meet some of those people and that, gave me strength to know that we are on the right track but also to know that much remains to be done. Ecovercities gave me that strength and hope that we are not alone and THAT we can change this world.”

- Edy Garcia,
Unitierra (Mexico)



Special thanks to our co-hosts in Tamera, Martin Winiecki and Monica Berghoff.

