

THE EROLES PROJECT:

A SUMMARY OF OUR RESIDENTIAL EXPERIENCE

Index

Our Goal... ..2

Our Principles... ..2

Our Methodologies... ..3

Set up.....4

Learning's and Reflections.....5

Community life: The Collaborative Process

Structure versus Emergency

Inner Work

Workshops and activities: peer to peer learning

Outcomes11



Our Goal

.....

The overall goal of the Eroles Residency is to create a temporary learning community where people from a range of different disciplines have the opportunity to live under the principles of collaboration, creativity and sustainability. Through this lived experience we aim to generate ideas, actions and projects under a systemic framework of thought aligned with a set of values that enact the fair and thriving society we want to live in.

Our Principles

.....

We have developed a number of key principles to ensure our goals stay aligned with our vision. These include:

Interdisciplinary approach

“Everyone in a complex system has a slightly different interpretation. The more interpretations we gather, the easier it becomes to gain a sense of the whole”.

Margaret J. Wheatley

Arts and creativity

“Creativity is not limited to people practising one of the traditional forms of art. Each one of us has a creative potential. Creation involves not merely talent, intuition, powers of imagination and application, but also the ability to shape material that could be expanded to other socially relevant spheres.”

Joseph Beuys

Collaboration

“We know from science that nothing in the universe exists as an isolated or independent entity”

Margaret J. Wheatley

The Work of Reconnection

“As individuals, we must begin to pay attention to our attention (self-awareness); as teams, we must begin to converse about our conversations (dialogue); as enterprises, we must begin to organize our organizing (networks of networks: eco-systems); and as eco-systems, we must begin to coordinate our coordinating (systems of awareness-based collective action, or ABC)”

Otto Scharmer

Holistic Vision of people and context

"As the twenty-first century unfolds, it is becoming more and more evident that the major problems of our time – energy, the environment, climate change, food security, financial security – cannot be understood in isolation. They are systemic problems, which means that they are all interconnected and interdependent. These problems must be seen as just different facets of one single crisis, which is largely a crisis of perception. It derives from the fact that most people in our modern society subscribe to the concepts of an outdated worldview, a perception of reality inadequate for dealing with our overpopulated, globally interconnected world. The new paradigm may be called a holistic world view, seeing the world as an integrated whole rather than a dissociated collection of parts"

Fritjof Capra

Every intention of this project is a seed, an exploration of the change that begins within us.

Maria Llanos del Corral

Our Methodology

.....

The methodology we use at Eroles is based on:

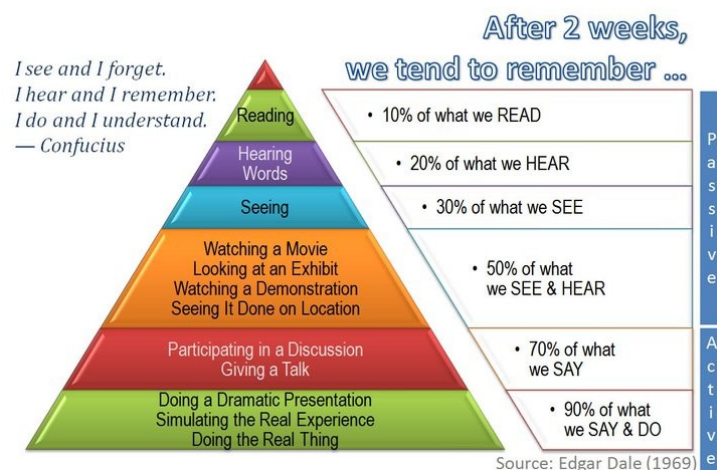
Action Research: whereby we use the field of our own experience as a form of research and learning. We chose this methodology because we believe that change needs to happen within us as well as in society.

Participatory methodologies within Action research also give us the tools to explore collaboration in depth. We need to strengthen the muscles of awareness and collaboration that have become weakened by the culture that predominates today.

Learning between peers (peer to peer learning): With its origins in popular education brings back the ownership of the learning process to the person that learns. It holds an appreciative approach focusing on what we know and can share. Teaching or sharing with others has been proven as one of the most effective ways to learning.

The Cone of Learning

sparkinsight.com



How the Project began.

... ..

The Eroles residency and work is underpinned by a range of different disciplines, including holistic science, systems thinking, ecology, popular education, collaborative arts and spirituality. Key influences for this project are the experiential education methods that some of the founders received at Schumacher [Schumacher College](#) and courses/methodology designed by [Ecodharma](#).

In November 2014 a group of people who were interested in co-creating a residency space, came together via a Skype conference to dream, to share, to envision, to create. We came from a variety of different backgrounds and disciplines, and were geographically diverse, but what bound us was a common desire to shape a different world into being, and put into practice the principles and values we believe in.

During May a core team of 'Erolians' gathered on site to start preparing the house. The arrival of the Crowd funders contributions allowed the project to start. The residence received its first participants on June 15. We shared 9 intense weeks with 40 participants from at least 5 different countries.

Learnings, Reflections and Experiences.

.....

In this part of the document we will try to sum up the relevant learning's and reflections that arose during this project. Instead of a chronological description of the project, we have organized the information around the key elements that emerged.

Community life: The collaborative process.

Living in Community is a constant mirror which reflects our habits of behaviour and thought. Living in community means to move from the individual to the collective. Collaboration is based on values such as compassion, empathy and assertiveness. These values are not only values but skills and capabilities that we can train.

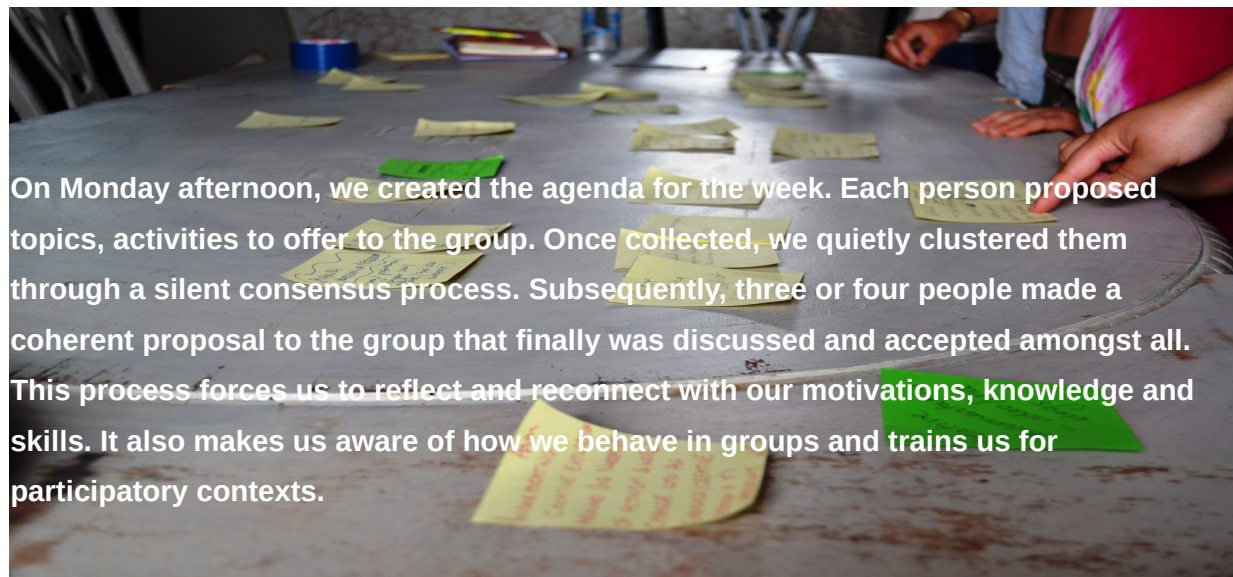
Community life and collaboration requires more frequent decision making. Our personal and cultural patterns and habits come to life in these processes and it is this constant exposure that offers a greater awareness and can help us in the change process. Collaborative decision making can be perceived as a gift or a nightmare depending on the approach. These processes require time to take a good, inclusive and empowering decision. We found the more we understood the processes and values necessary for collective decision making, the more rewarding and fruitful it was.

Some of the tools we explore to facilitate collaborative processes were: CNV, empathic listening, a range of decision making techniques, and power dynamics. We also aimed to create a quality of being based on values, facilitating spaces to build trust and cohesion, for example: morning check-ins, play and introspection, and reflective communal spaces.

How did we create the conditions for collaborative decision-making in Eroles?

On Monday morning, the first community organised activity was to create a container for safety and trust, to prepare the ground for people to talk about personal and group needs and agreements. Space for us to know each other in more depth, to tell our stories, our worldview, challenges, hopes... Every week we invite these reflections in a different form: through intimate conversations between two, using body language and painting, inciting a more transcendental conversation.

We took the time to talk about the things we needed to live and participate safely in the community. Some of the things that were expressed were: inclusive language, punctuality, non judgement, time for silence, respectful speech... Thus we generated a culture of open communication.



On Monday afternoon, we created the agenda for the week. Each person proposed topics, activities to offer to the group. Once collected, we quietly clustered them through a silent consensus process. Subsequently, three or four people made a coherent proposal to the group that finally was discussed and accepted amongst all. This process forces us to reflect and reconnect with our motivations, knowledge and skills. It also makes us aware of how we behave in groups and trains us for participatory contexts.

Some of the questions that emerged

To what extent and in which context, consensus is relevant in comparison with other forms of decision-making?

To what extent collaborative context and leadership contradict or complement? What type of leadership is needed for collaborative context?

Structure versus Emergence.

During one of the weeks we wanted to explore a more emergent way of decision making. The reasons why:

- ✓ Due to the numbers and variety of people we wanted to open the space for more diversity.
- ✓ Power imbalance was growing around the coordination team. So we wanted to allow space for more personal self-organise leadership.
- ✓ We believe that a space that is working without a pre programmed plan, nor a designated leader offers a rich experience in terms of the formation of group dynamics and culture and provides an opportunity for the emergence of personal leadership and empowerment. This space is a blank canvas from which we learn about our own patterns, expectations, motivations and group processes and the relation between group and personal dimensions.

The sixth week of the project, offered this space. The first day programme was changed. We used the whole day to talk about who we are, what we want and how we want it but in an open self led form. This slight change gave form to a different type of conversation more focus on

essence and motivations. Also the process of decision making about the week became much more participatory. Conversations about processes continued being a topic of conversations through out the week. Although we had a programme it became much more open and the uncertainty of each day transformed into everyday enquiry. A wider range of activities and conversations happened due to the tone of emergence that stood with us from the first day, from which the process of being together was a strong part of it. An awareness of process was very present.

This way of being and working had attached very different opinions and reactions. For some people it generated much uncertainty, unrest and a sense of failure. Others felt it as a space for deeper discussion about our intentions, more spontaneous and creative¹.

The reflections and lessons we have learned are:

1. In a non structure space one needs to have clarity about ones motivations and interests to be able to participate and influence in the group.
2. It provides a space for personal leadership, it makes us question what we want and why we want it and from this reflection, we become aware of our purpose.
3. Assumptions, expectations and group culture create and establish very quickly and almost unconsciously. It is important to understand how culture is created within our organizations and find ways to challenge assumptions and expectations that may not be encouraging and that make us rigid towards change.
4. Expectations although a necessary defence mechanism often prevent us from responding to the changing reality that we are in. Although it is important to have a vision, an expectation for the future, it is essential not cling to them in order to be reactive and responsive to the present context.
5. This week influenced the culture for following weeks. From here, the structure took more open and organic forms.

Some of the Questions still present

What kind of learning we can achieve if we are not aware of the process in which we are in?

Was our behaviour ethical?

When is emergence a useful tool in group work? Or is it a inner state from where we enter participation?

¹ For a better understanding of this process please read <http://www.eroleproject.org/#!/HOW-WE-EAT-IS-AS-IMPORTANT-AS-WHAT-WE-EAT/c1zje/55ca501e0cf2c049b5f3cbe0>

Inner work

The structure of the residence has offered numerous spaces for inner work such as Check-ins, meditation, yoga, and some of the participant specific proposals: work of reconnection, rituals, rites of passage, internal dualism workshops, storytelling, free writing, fasting...

Inner work was though transversal to the whole experience. Is a key element of our theory of change, the learning has to happen through you, change has to be modelled within you. That requires a real attention to inner work.



Some of the Questions

What kind of inner work is useful for a space like Eroles?

What is the most constructive environment we could provide for a rich inner process?

Workshops and activities: peer education.

In this type of education we are all teachers and apprentices, we learn and share our knowledge.

The current education system tends to be passive and hierarchical. There is someone who learns and someone who teaches which can end up being disempowering for those who learn. Education should be an empowering tool that skill people up to then act in the world.

During the residency around 100 different workshops were offered. Each week was developed around a cross-cutting theme (some of the themes were: ritual and ancestral knowledge,

Frackanpada², voice, systemic approach to social change, creative thinking for social change, care, inner work) and focused on an action related to the environmental justice, 2015 saw rising global momentum around the UN talks on climate change (COP21) in Paris. It was collectively decided that the residency will focus on actions to re-imagine activism for the COP21.

Some of the main themes we explore in the workshops were:

1) **Personal Development work:** With workshops on dualism, sexuality, rites of passage, storytelling (tell personal stories), the four shields, the hero/heroine journey, among others.

2) **Reconnecting with nature:** We did this in many ways through practical hands-on work in the garden, as well as workshops offered by participants which focussed on deepening this connection and transcendence. Rituals in relation to land, natural dyes, excursions, tales about water, quests.

3) **Creativity:** Games of improvisation. Theatre and project design, Theatre of the oppressed, forum Theatre, Presencing Theatre, generator of ideas, corporal expression, art making, authentic movement, collaborative sculpture making, social sculpture.

4) **Organizational processes:** Decision-making, power and group dynamics. Activism and sustainability, conflict resolution, leadership and horizontality, political frameworks to understand the COP21.

All the weeks concluded on a workshop focus on gathering and collecting ideas for actions in the COP21.

Some of our learning's around the workshops design process are:

- The learning methodology, peer to peer, has very positive results in terms of commitment, motivation and empowerment.
- The interdisciplinary provides immense richness in the landscape of learning possibilities.
 - Even though there were themes for each week it was not explicit enough to be able to have depth on the topics of each week. The week was very much shaped by the participant's profiles and sharing's.

² We participated in the anti fracking camp in Vitoria, where we became responsible for the art space and gave some workshops such as creativity and social action and sustainability and activism.



Some of the Questions

What is an interesting balance between participation and direction to build a deeper learning process? Between peer to peer and learning based on experts?

OUTCOMES

.....

- Participants empowerment for action:

Out of the 40 participants more than half are involved in activities that the Eroles Collective is organised during the talks of the UN Climate Conversations. More than half of those have never participated actively in an environmental justice project.

Some of the elements that we believe have influenced this empowerment for social action are:

- 1) The collaborative quality of the residency: the participation and co-creation of the weekly program and the peer to peer process influence the will to participate. At the same time the discussions have brought awareness to climate issues which opened the possibility to engage.
- 2) The interdisciplinary element: opened a space to discover other realities and fields of action.
- 3) The sense of belonging: the creation of a community served as a container for people to take risks and leaving their comfort zones.
- 4) The community continued to work as an online collective for COP21 and beyond! This has allowed us to keep people united under what is sometimes spontaneously called the Eroles Collective. This network has facilitated people joining in the activities and a network to support actions.

- An international collective of people with a common interest has been created.

Eroles has become a network of diverse people with a common interest and a share experience. We see great value in these connexions; hence our intention is to maintain this network that will be nourished with the people who joined us in both our actions in Paris and next editions of the Eroles Project.

- A greater awareness of the importance of inner work. The holistic and reflective approach of the residence opened spaces for introspection and awareness of the importance of inner work for social change. The deconstruction of mental and cultural patterns that build from the paradigm of thought and system of values in which we are born is a fundamental step for social transformation.

- A program of activities for the COP21.

The Eroles Collective brought several activities to the complex map of actions which took place in Paris during the months of November and December despite the state of fear, grievance and emergency that the country was immersed in.

- A Future for the Eroles Project

Thanks to the generosity and support of Ecodharma, and the potential gain by the project we have the possibility to continue in the village of Eroles for the next 6 years. This time scale offers us a new perspective and an opportunity to bring a long-term vision for the residency programme.

We are currently working on a strategic proposal and would love to hear your ideas for the future:

1. What has called your attention about the project?
2. In your opinion what has had a greater impact?
3. What are you less convinced about?
4. What do you see as the most important changes that need to be made in our society?
5. How do you think Eroles can contribute to this?