2006 Fuschl Design Conversation : Fuschl Extension Team Report : Igniting a New Form of Design Conversation

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Group innovation and collaboration can be fostered by the application of social systems design and dialogue methods. The Design Conversation is then a journey of mutual inquiry that broadly follows a direction but never the exact same path. Along the way, a common base of shared meanings and social cohesion is developed. If enough energy is present, this momentum may inspire further advancement of the ideas and cohesion. This article describes the journey of a Design Conversation that resulted in the conceptualization of a new evolution of the Design Conversation itself, and includes a proposal to continue a new mini-conversation at the fall ISI (International Systems Institute) Asilomar Conversation.

Key Words: Fuschl Design Conversation, Asilomar Design Conversation, Design Conversation conference, dialogue, social change

Part I: Design Conversation Process and Outcome of the Team

1. Introduction

This report recounts the Design Conversational journey of the Future of Design Conversation team that met as part of the 2006 Fuschl Design Conversation. This team, while engaging in Design Conversation themselves, also explored the future of the Design Conversation conference, both as a concept and as a specific recommendation. The group's journey, as well as its findings, are covered in this article.

The team's Design Conversation journey is recounted in a stylized way, especially in the Part II of this report. This means that the statements and flow are not meant to be literally what happened. Rather, the narrative strives to convey the essential experience of what happened, grounded in the literal occurrences, but thus saving the reader from the frequent awkward, vague, and circular wanderings that dialogue participants go through in attempting to understand each other.

Our team formed to explore the Design Conversation concept and associated methods in order to make specific recommendations regarding the future of Fuschl Design Conversations. We considered whether and how such events should take place. Based partly on our own experience of the week, our answer to the former was an enthusiastic yes, and we proposed a new form of Design Conversation that would extend Fuschl to local communities.

Emerging from our Design Conversation was a range of ideas and insights regarding the nature of Design Conversation-the concept, key characteristics, techniques, and so on. A few samples include:

· Design Conversation involves *opening and holding the space* for ideas and stories to unfold; synergetic concepts emerge in this newly created space.

· *Passion* is more important than method, and interconnection ultimately makes the selection of a certain starting point unnecessary.

· The questions *Who should be involved?* and *Who is served?* both have the same answer.

· While systems science and design may offer much to society, our *joy*-our passion for dialogue-may be the gift with the most potential influence that we can share.

Three key outcomes from our Design Conversation include:

(1) The Horizontal Flip Chart Method. We found that traditional presentation and recording by individuals on flipcharts created an intimidating performance aspect that diminished our creativity and collaboration. Placing flip-

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chart pages horizontally on the table where all of us could add ideas, draw relations, and so on contributed to equality and synergy. In what we came to describe as *interactive systems thinking*, no single angle was correct and multiple angles yielded insights that would otherwise not have emerged.

(2) Fuschl Extension. As we explored the essence of Fuschl -like Design Conversation, we realized that more might be accomplished by inviting Fuschl (i. e., systems scientists who attend the IFSR-sponsored event) to society than by inviting members of society (i. e., community members who might benefit from insights of systems science) to Fuschl. We created a model in which a small group of Fuschl attendees would join with members of a local community in co-inquiry with complementary goals. We completed a first round of development in terms of purposes, participants, criteria, logistics, and so on.

(3) Stories. We recognized the inadequacy of typical reports in capturing the lived experience of Design Conversation. We attempted to do this better by writing our report as a story, especially in the Part II of this Report.

Day 1, Sunday :	General meeting of all the participants of the 2006 Fuschl Design Conversation
Day 2, Monday :	First day of the team dialogue.
Day 3, Tuesday :	Horizontal flip chart developed. Fuschl Extension concept emerged.
Day 4, Wednesday :	Evening : Presentation to the Entire Fuschl Design Conversation community.
Day 5, Thursday :	Closing

Our next step is to pilot test the Fuschl Extension, perhaps in association with Global Open Space 2007 (previously known as the Asilomar Design Conversation of the International Systems Institute) at the Asilomar Conference Ground, Pacific Grove, California.

2. What Is Fuschl Design Conversation?

The Fuschl Design Conversation is a unique kind of conference, often called a "Design Conversation conference." This extraordinary event has been hosted biannually for more than twenty years at Lake Fuschl, Austria by the International Federation of Systems Research (IFSR). Similarly, a sibling event, the Asilomar Design Conversation Conference, has been hosted annually for over 17 years in Pacific Grove California by the International Systems Insti-

tute (ISI).

Both conferences were started by Bela H. Banathy, who saw them as an anti-conference of sorts. In Banathy's view, most of the key learnings and value of conference were in the relationship building and the dialogue that people had between lectures and over meals. He was also cognizant that adult learning theory has shown how little of a lecture is retained over time. Thus, Banathy's experiment was to focus the conference on the high-value learning elements, and he constructed the "Design Conversation conference" with a format comprising several small research teams of approximately 4 to 15 people that conduct a 5-day dialogic exploration of pre-defined topic.

As occurred at Fuschl 2006, the Design Conversation conference traditionally begins the evening before the intensive dialogue begins with an opening session. During this first session, all the teams meet together and team topics, individuals, logistics, and ground rules are introduced. There are typically several teams present, comprising some 20-40 people, who assemble in the large meeting room.

3. Horizontal Flip Chart Method for Design Conversation

A new method was born during our Team's design conversation. The placing of the flip chart horizontal on the table seemed to open the interactive systems thinking among the group. The group members could then write out their thoughts and draw pictures that others could easily expand upon without getting up and interrupting each other's performances. The emerging set of drawings and notes were intellectually stimulating to look at from various angles. Moreover, the group found that there was no single correct angle to look at a contribution ; rather, there were many equally interesting ways to view a contribution.

Barbara would later say, "Once this happened, I found that the somewhat intimidating performance aspect of the Design Conversation was gone. The vertical flip chart that seemed to be associated with control and hierarchy became a horizontal flip chart more associated with equality and cooperation. Consequently, I was much more comfortable sharing and participating in the group using this arrangement."

The group began to see the Fuschl Design Conversation as more than a 'problem-solving' exercise. It was a way of surfacing assumptions in entrenched positions so that new forms of moving forward together, or co-creating and co -learning, could be found.

Urban then proposed : "It may be better if the conference also has only one main topic, discussed from different perspectives, rather than any topic that is suggested." The group indicated general consensus.

Christian circled back to the process diagram and added annotations, explaining : "And these pre and post discussions can be facilitated with technology—mailing lists, web -based discussion boards, wikis, and that."

In this fashion, there was much discussing of the drawings already on the table, annotating them and clarifying them. Additional notes were written in different colored pens ; lines were drawn across, around, and through objects to connect ideas ; sub drawings were made and inserted.

4. Fuschl Extension—A Weekend, Shorter Design Conversation—Emerges

Once the clean pages were laid out, a stream of seemingly unrelated concepts seemed to unfold, each helped by placement and by being viewed from multiple perspectives. Gradually, the pieces began to fit together as if everyone had been secretly given a different piece of the same puzzle, without knowing it, and then viewed with great surprise as the apparently different pieces began to form a recognizable picture.

Gordon was first. At one end of the blank space, he drew a circle labeled "intention" and a half circle outside it called "framework." To this, Barbara added some elements of framework, such as diverse, special, self-reflection, fluidly bonded, transformative, few distractions, connected to beauty of the "natural" world, generative, joyful.

Doug drew a timeline across the middle of the sheet, showing the three phases of the conference : preparation, conference, and post conference. Yoshi added that the post conference could feed into the preparation of the next conference, thus creating a self-seeding loop and that continuously opened up a new space.

Urban then went to the far end and drew two circles labeled intention and space, which were linked to each other as shown in Figure 1. "In all of it, there is the continuous

Fig. 1 Interaction of Intention and Space

action of intention creating space, which feedback to intention. They have the intention, and we create the space for communities that want to make change."

"But is it reasonable for the community to come here?" asked Gordon. And then he said

"What if we take Fuschl to them?"

The team became highly excited, realizing suddenly a fundamental shift as many of the pieces began to come together. As Urban later explained, "I must admit that it is not easy for me to describe. I can feel the idea very strongly, but making it sound reasonable is a big challenge. Why on earth would anybody want to invite a group of people which doesn't promise results, but just want to learn together with hosts instead? But, the basis for this enterprise is the insight that Design Conversation can help a lot in cases where 'local' actors are trapped in some kind of vicious circle. In this case, an additional group of people —who are not involved in the local problem and are willing to learn from hosts—can bring fresh perspectives and detached view. A shared Design Conversation between Design Conversation lovers (i. e. Fuschl people) and group with Design Conversation focus—*that is Fuschl Extension.*"

5. Detailing the Fuschl Extension Design Conversation Model

Once the concept of Fuschl Extension emerged, there was tremendous excitement among the group and a great sense of coherence. The model was quickly sketched out on brand new flipcharts that transformed the room from a monument to the past into a 360-degree surround experience of fresh ideas. The model began to embody the following concepts :

The intent would not be to 'sell' the Design Conversation methodology. Instead, in an ideal circumstance, after hearing a bit about the Fuschl Design Conversations, potential local participants would approach a Fuschl individual and express an interest in trying out Design Conversation methodology.

Once invited, interaction with the local community would involve key stakeholders being joined by Fuschl-trained facilitators who would help establish and maintain the "space" for authentic dialogue.

Other Fuschl-experienced participants could also assist and participate peripherally in a virtual way. The Fuschl -extension to local communities and virtual support could help in making Fuschl not an event, but a process that extends in time and space and globalizes itself. Design
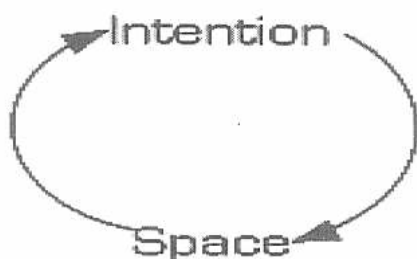
Conversations would become permanent processes that spread and influence each other, as a second-order Design Conversation, a self-referential process in which Design Conversations produce Design Conversations and the Design Conversation process reproduces itself permanently by spreading to other places. Ultimately, there could be great interpenetration between Fuschl, local, and virtual communities. Systems practitioners could go there, to the local setting, while at the same time, local stakeholders could periodically come to Fuschl. At times, some may find they are systems theorists at heart and become actively part

of the ongoing Fuschl Extension. Similarly, past participants, even if they couldn't be onsite somewhere, could participate even during the conference using technology.

6. Presentation of the Fuschl Extension Model to the Entire Fuschl Design Conversation Community

The decision was then made to try to capture the ideas for presentation back to the plenary for feedback, and the Future of Design Conversation team consolidated the flip charts to explain the idea. These summary concepts are

Table 1   General Description (Systems-Environment Lens)

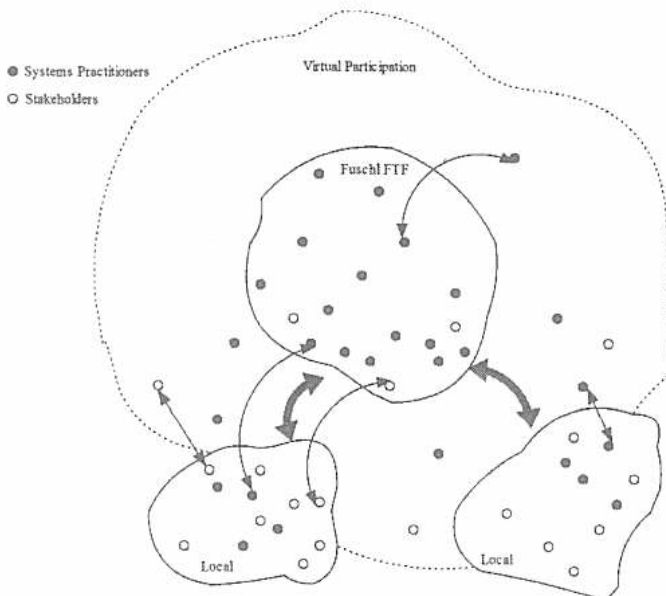| Aspect	Description
Purposes	Inquire into how insights from systems science can be applied to benefit humanity Inquire into how and where systems and Design Conversation might help communities discover what they themselves can do and become Develop new methods, even new epistemology
Who	Fuschl extension team (s) Other IFSR teams Experienced systems/Design Conversation teams Local leaders/stakeholders
What	New methods Local problem area
Where	At Fuschl and alternating with conference held at local communities
Success Indicators	Learning to use- how to improve the next Design Conversation People say it was meaningful Report back in 1 year, whether there was a lasting effect Joy in the process Opening of space - something surprising happens Individual and collective energy is built
Success Factors	Must choose where there are good conditions, likely success Language—there must be enough ability to speak to each other Appropriate parties can be involved—decision makers, key stakeholders Openness to dialogue Appropriate scope and scale of problem—not too big
Outputs	Papers Shifting of deadlocked positions Co-learning
Guiding Principles	To work with and develop the local community's capability as the only moral way, consistent with Banathy's public philosophy Hold a qualitatively different Design Conversation that seeks common ground before trying to create action Use systems thinking
Key Open Questions	How to locate and select local community Who is invited Details of process Logistics Expectations, language, measures of success Funding

● Systems Practitioners
O Stakeholders

Virtual Participation

Fuschl FTF

Local   Local

Fig. 2   Fuschl Extension Functions-Structure Lens

Face-to-Face Conversation
- Academics, systems practitioners and issue stakeholders
- Alternates site between Fuschl and host location

Pre-Conversation
- Exchange of emails
- Build knowledge base using articles and wiki
- Preparatory readings
- Audio conferences

Post Conversation
- Moving forward based on new agreements and perspectives
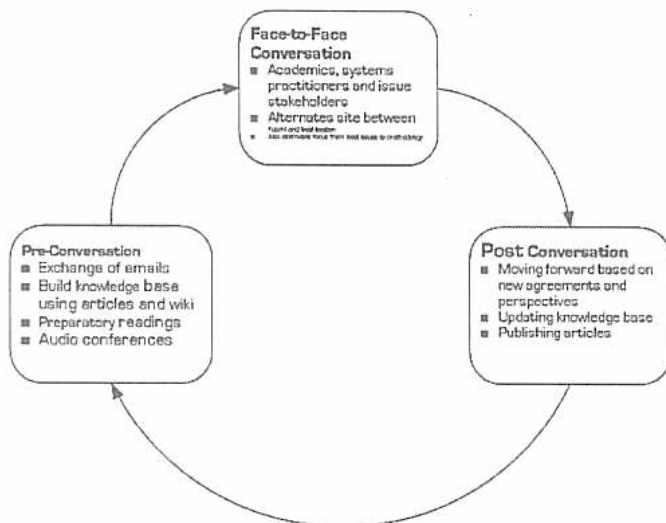- Updating knowledge base
- Publishing articles

Fig. 3   Core Process Flow of a Design Conversation
(Process-Behavior Lens)

recreated below using Banathy's three lenses as a framework (Table 1 and Figures 2 and 3).

7. Concluding Fuschl 2006 : Design Conversation as a Continuing Journey

Meaningful Design Conversation that produces group innovation, cohesion, and collaboration is a journey of interwoven ideas. Ideas emerge and spark others, sometimes combusting, other times dying out, as process and content evolve and mutually affect each other. In a seemingly magical way, the interaction creates a greater idea than would have been possible by one individual.

With the metaphors in mind, the group spirit again began to lift. Next meeting times were plotted. Action steps were defined. Then, it was time to pack up, and each did so

wondering if six people could concentrate enough flame to sustain the fire once they returned to the even large arena of their regular lives.

Part II : Essence of Design Conversation Dialogue in Our Team

Designing a social system like the Fuschl Extension is always a social exercise-there is no objectively valid solution. Rather, the design is the result of shared meaning making by the community of inquirers. Its validity rests on the degree to which the design represents the values and conceptual models of the participants. From this perspective, a model of a social system is a representation of a complex set of agreements among the community of inquirers. Thus, the process by which the design is created is as important as the outcome. If the design does not represent the community interests well, the community will not be committed to pursuing the design, and the idea will lose momentum and fade away.

Social systems design is a methodology that guides the development of such normatively valid, complex agreements about social systems. This approach embodies the practice of dialogue combined with other facilitation methods, such as nominal group technique and Delphi processes. Even when facilitation methods are applied, participative design of this sort is often dynamically divergent and convergent, weaving multiple themes throughout, seemingly moving in chaotic directions until suddenly collapsing on an "Aha!" moment of agreement.

The material in Part II, below, depicts the movement of conversation that both created the Fuschl Extension and a new method for design, called the horizontal flipchart method. To get a sense of this process, as well as a fleeting, somewhat experiential look at the participative design process that would infuse the Fuschl Extension, read the material in this section attention on the process of meaning formation. How did an idea uttered by one person get picked up by another and refined? How were rapport, methodology, and content developed simultaneously? This process resulted in a highly energized, shared agreement on a systems model.

1. Day 1, Sunday : First Encounter

We arrived at Fuschl with unclear and/or mixed expectations. Some of us were aware of a perceived disconnect between the original Fuschl Design Conversation goals and

recent team activities, and the charge of making recommendations. Others joined the team purely to engage the general topic. We soon found common interests and developed triggering questions that would energize our Design Conversation for the week.

This was where several of the Future of Design Conversation team members—Urban, Yoshi, and Doug—had a first chance to meet in 2006. After introducing themselves, the three looked around without recognizing some additional expected faces.

"Where's Gordon?" asked Yoshi. "Isn't he our leader?"

"Don't know. Haven't seen him or Barbara," replied Doug.

It was not until an hour later, just as dinner was being served in a small cozy dining room by the lake, that Gordon and Barbara appeared. "Our plane was delayed," explained Gordon. He described a series of travel disruptions emanating from a plane delay. Then, after some exchanging of other stories, he suggested, "Too bad we missed the big meeting—would it be good for perhaps us each to share a little about why we came here and what we are expecting?"

The team agreed and stories were shared. "This, it seems to me, is often a good way to start," said Doug. "Gordon and I have been together on these teams many times and it is amazing how just this simple task builds rapport."

The team seemed to agree. After a while, Urban asked, "So, what is the work here? What is the team to do?"

"What I heard in the plenary," said Doug, "was a request for us to re-imagine Fuschl, to ask, 'How should future Design Conversations be? And even "should we have them?"

"Why now? Haven't they been going on for 20 years?" asked Urban.

"In my email conversations with the organizers, there seems to be a sense of decline," suggested Gordon. "This was the reaction to some difficulties at previous Design Conversations, for example personal agendas conflicting with what others took to be the event's major purposes. Also, there seemed to be less interest, less enthusiasm for it currently."

"So do we ask whether it should even continue at all?" asked Barbara.

"Perhaps."

2. Day 2, Monday: Team Dialogue Begins

The next morning, after breakfast of rolls and jam, the team gathered in a small room lit by dim yellowish lamps.

Vestiges of days gone by lurked in the shadows: hickory seating booths that had survived the room's previous life as the primary dining room; stuffed wildlife adorning the walls as trophies of some long forgotten past conquests; hooks with skis and snowshoes although no snow was to be found. The team sat around a rectangular table on a variety of chairs benches, most none too comfortable. To the side was a blank flip chart on an easel, waiting like a field of pristine snow for someone to cross.

Also, in one chair, there was a new face: Christian. Following the practice of the previous evening, he was asked to give some background about himself, and the other members of the team did likewise, even if the background was repeated for most.

After the introduction of Christian, there were a few moments of awkwardness, and silence, followed by some more general comments and small talk, until Barbara asked: "What is this about? Who has been here before? Since I haven't been here before, what has been your experience? What is this Design Conversation?"

"I was here once before and it was positive," said Christian. "My experience was that I could develop enthusiasm, commitment, and joy for the encounter with new people and the work that we jointly accomplished in small Design Conversation groups. It gives you a feeling of community that you often miss in large-scale conferences. The processes and outcomes are valuable and important for me."

Doug concurred: "For me, it is often a 'magical' experience. It might start out wandering and rough. In fact, often on the second day, a lot of people are feeling like it's a pointless waste of time. But then something—though not always—happens where the group coheres with a sense of purpose and clarity."

Yoshi looked quizzical. Then he said, "I have also been many times. But unlike the Design Conversation teams I participated in the past, we have not exchanged input papers much before coming here this year. It would have been better if we have done so beforehand, I would think. In most of the past Fuschl Design Conversations, our team distributed our input papers before the actual Design Conversation took place."

Gordon added: "I have also been to the Fuschl Design Conversation several times previously, and this no doubt affected how I approached coming here. I haven't been entirely at ease. Early on I had offered to organizers to facilitate a sort of meta-Design Conversation on the topic of Design Conversation and the future of the Fuschl Design

Conversation. But as time passed, it became unclear to me if and how the Design Conversation group would happen in the months prior to the event, so I adopted a wait-and-see attitude. Final notice came at what felt like the last minute that the Design Conversation group was indeed happening and input papers were expected. I could not respond and that made me uncomfortable, particularly since I was bringing Barbara along and felt like I had not guided her well on this."

Everyone nodded understandingly.

"I had a similar confusion," said Doug. "There is so much to do already. Similarly, the historical traditional issue after the Design Conversation has been that we often get together, have a great Design Conversation, agree to action items, and then do nothing. This causes me to wonder : What is it that makes it a Design Conversation? Are we having one now? If we change it, what must stay the same for it to be a Design Conversation in this sense?"

"I think the Design Conversation is about *opening and holding the space* for ideas and stories to unfold," Urban conjectured. "Each person is given respect and an opportunity to speak and be heard, and we witness often the emergence of synergetic concepts in newly created space."

Christian added, "For me I can best describe it by story. Earlier, I spent some time with friends in Salzburg, which turned out to be a very nice afternoon. We went up to the Salzburg fortress from where you have a beautiful view all over the city and its surroundings. We wanted to see the inside of the fortress where you can watch some of the rooms. We entered together with a group of tourists ; to every person an audio guide was handed. People were brought into one room, expected to stay there until all had listened to the messages on the audio guides, and then were brought to the next room. The second room was a former torture chamber ; the whole procedure seemed to us like mental and social torture and a good example for an extremely bad design of a socio-technological system. There was no freedom to decide when to enter and leave a room and to listen to a message or not. Besides that communication between the people wasn't supported, but inhibited by the usage of the audio tools. We decided to leave the setting after the second room and continued to enjoy our afternoon in Salzburg.

"Fuschl-like Design Conversations are the exact opposite of the situation just described : They enable the intensive communication of people focused on certain topics and aim at communicatively developing joint visions for the future,

they are future-generating processes. The essentials are intensive dialog, co-learning and collaborating."

"So it is a space, but no process or a method?" asked Yoshi. "Completely self-organizing?"

"Too much structure would constrain it," said Barbara.

"Agreed, but I think still there is some process," said Doug. "For example, we were careful to exchange personal stories of introduction. This is something that Gordon and Yoshi and I have learned in our past experiences together is a good way to start."

"What other elements of method are there? Like now, where do we go now?"

"I think there is a logical order of decisions, but that said it probably doesn't matter much where we actually start, " said Doug. "I have often started in the middle of the systems design process. Everything is interconnected and eventually comes out, although it is good to have a concept of the overall flow in the back of one's mind. We should just start where there is some passion around a question and then be aware that there are answers that come before and after it."

"Then why don't we start with something like 'who is served?' " suggested Gordon. "And who should be included?"

"How should we deal with that?" asked Barbara.

"Here is where an element of process might be useful," said Doug. "One of the things Bela Banathy used to do was to have everyone take a flip chart and think independently for a while, writing ideas on the chart, and then eventually reporting back to the group."

The group agreed to try this technique. In about fifteen minutes, they began their report back, as summarized below.

DOUG :

"My perspective comes from several previous Design Conversations like this one, many where Bela Banathy was involved, which we called the Agora Project. In that effort, we tried to create a better civil society or a reinvigorated public sphere, by combining technology with social systems design. The idea was of creating local agoras, or Design Conversation communities of citizens, who would envision a better future. Some of them would be stewards, or versed in design and systems thinking, and the stewards might also have their own community. "Traditionally, though, Fuschl and the Asilomar Design Conversation, have been mainly attended by scholars and academics. So we have to decide if the community that is served is ourselves as scholars, or, if we want to more directly make a difference in the world by enabling people to have dialogue and do social systems

design.

"I can see these possible groups : systems 'experts,' students, and other people who may not be systems-knowledgeable but have a passion to make a difference. So, we have to ask : Is it just to get together and discuss coordinating between scholars? Is it to create more theory or to apply it? We have to choose whether it is for our own benefit, to come and have community and share ideas with other scientists, or is it to go out and improve civil society directly."

CHRISTIAN :

"I think that contributing to a better society and to the empowerment of civil society are important goals of Fuschl -like processes. This idea is particularly important to me because I have myself gathered different experiences in civil society organizations and have for quite some time actively tried and struggled to contribute to the improvement of society and to the solution of societal problems. From a scientific and philosophical perspective I have been especially impressed by the writings of the Frankfurt School that has tried to find ways of sustaining the improvement of society by critical reflection on grievances. Although I was very critical of Jürgen Habermas for a long time, I today think that communicative action is an important principle for solving problems, sharing ideas, co-constructing society, and for achieving a participatory democracy. For me the work of Bela H. Banathy (1996)[1] is conceptually closely linked to Habermas'idea of communicative action because Social Systems Design is all about improving society by the power of communication. Social Systems Design for me means the collective construction of visions and practices of overcoming the alienation and the discomfort that many people feel in the social systems they live in by self-organization processes of affected individuals by and for themselves. Such estrangement might frequently be caused (in Habermas'terms) by the colonization of the life-world by money capital and bureaucratic power (Habermas 1981)[6]."

URBAN :

"I am more struggling with 'What is bringing people here? What is in it for them?' They must come voluntarily and have shared intention. There are concepts and then there are real-world applications. Is it about advancing theories and publishing papers or doing something? I think we must consider whether to leave the scope of the systems community and to connect Fuschl-like Design Conversations to real-world problems and local communities"

YOSHI :

"But, shouldn't we still create knowledge to share with our colleagues? The teams I was on have always published papers. This has been a good outcome of the Design Conversation before. It allows us to share our findings with students and the academic community."

GORDON :

"I go back to what Urban was saying. If we are serving citizens, then they must be included in the process. We cannot design for them. Perhaps what the Design Conversation offers them is easing of conflicts—transforming conflict to co-creation—and our Design Conversations are not only about the future of Design Conversation but how society designs its own future."

BARBARA :

"This has been quite interesting for me. I didn't know what to expect—I thought this was going to be about systems theory—and now there is a long-range thought about society. The terms are even new, like I thought at first 'civil society' was well-behaved society, but now I see we are using it in a special way. This gives quite a challenge if we include those 'outside' the systems community...how do they learn this special language?"

"Thus, do they have to have qualifications?" asked Doug.

"Part of our process could be educating people, building the stewards who learn new concepts and take them back," suggested Gordon.

"So there would always have to be a track for new people?"

"But how would 'everyone' be invited? Isn't there a limit to the size of a team and how many people can be involved, even with technology?" asked Yoshi.

"I think there can only be small teams," said Doug, "although they can intermix in different Design Conversations. Rather than thinking of everyone meeting at once to agree on everything, it is more like an ongoing practice that tends to create greater alignment and shared meaning across the community—a 'magnetic' field by analogy."

"Do they have to come prepared?"

"We should encourage it ; we all agree it makes a better Design Conversation."

"But will people really want to put this much time in?"

"If they don't, then their lives will be designed for them."

"But they should have the freedom to participate, whether they want to or not."

"Well I guess they do in a free society," said Doug. "But on the other hand, don't people have to take responsibility

to be involved? How can democracy work without that?"

There was a pause. Then Yoshi said, "I think maybe this is all a very Western point of view."

"Why so?"

"We are assuming that people will want to speak out. But, in Japan and other Eastern cultures, speaking out may be impolite."

"Will dialogue not work then? Doesn't dialogue require speaking out?"

"I think what it means is that we must set the expectation up front."

Gordon said : "Another issue I see is around consensus. We believe in consensus, yet others may not. For example, my friend, who is a very nice and smart man, believes that the best approach is to debate and critique issues. He believes that produces the best results by exposing the ideas to testing, and he believes that consensus just builds a group think."

"But with all of this, what is the reason to come for the Design Conversation? So what are we offering people through this process? A better way of decision making? A way to remove conflicts?" asked Urban.

"Group polarity research has shown that groups will make better decisions if process and equality are followed," suggested Doug.

Everyone seemed quite puzzled. Then Urban stood.

"I guess I miss something," said Urban. He walked to the flip chart where he had drawn some ovals of intention, concept, and space. After studying it for moment, he wrote JOY in red and drew an arrow into the intention circle, saying :

"It may be those things that you mention, but it is about what each of us is in it for. It's about the passion for dialogue—the joy of the Design Conversation itself. That is something we can share and also serve others with."

3. Day 3, Tuesday, Early Morning : The Flame Ignites in Conversation within the Team

The next day, although aligned around the idea of Design Conversation and joy, the group seemed to briefly struggle, confused and overwhelmed. A lot of questions had been raised, and only a few were satisfactorily answered. Urban then asked, "Would you come back? Perhaps we take each of our personal reasons. Why are you here? What would bring you back?" This question resonated with the group and there was general agreement to pursue that direction.

By the late afternoon, the flame within the team ignites,

once we place the vertical flip chart horizontally.

4. Day 3, Tuesday, Late Morning : New Method of Horizontal Flip Chart Was Born

"Shall we do it the same way of taking turns and one's ideal on a flip chart? Have everybody think independently and then go around and discuss?

"What if we all write our ideas on the same flip chart?

"We could divide it into sections for each?"

"But it would be too small and restrictive."

"What about just free form then?"

"What if we tape several sheets together and lay it flat on the table here? Then we can all gather around it."

Thus, a new method of horizontal flip chart emerges.

5. Day 4, Wednesday : Presentation to the Entire Fuschl Design Conversation Community and Reflections Afterwards

The presentation of Fuschl Extension went exactly as planned. At the end of it, the Future of Design Conversation team asked the plenary : "What do you think? Any questions?"

From the listening larger group, there was mainly silence. A few clarifications were requested. Some heads nodded. Then without any formal statement or acknowledgement of an ending, a decision, or a transition, someone raised a new topic and the plenary vociferously took up discussion on the divergent topic. After a few attempts to redirect the Design Conversation to discussion of the Fuschl Extension idea, the team gave up.

After the meeting, the Design Conversation team retired to sit together and reflect in the dim light of the old dining area. The once fresh ideas on flip charts that covered the walls now threatened to be consumed into the dusty history of short-lived past glory. Each team member was silent, deep in his or her own thought. A light flickered, almost extinguished, then came on again.

"I don't think they really got it," said Urban finally. "It takes a while to absorb."

"It is difficult to pack four days of Design Conversation into a fifteen minute presentation," said Doug. "But this is the dilemma faced by those who desire to create change. Perhaps we were too optimistic to think the fire would just catch and they would run off with it. We may need to start smaller."

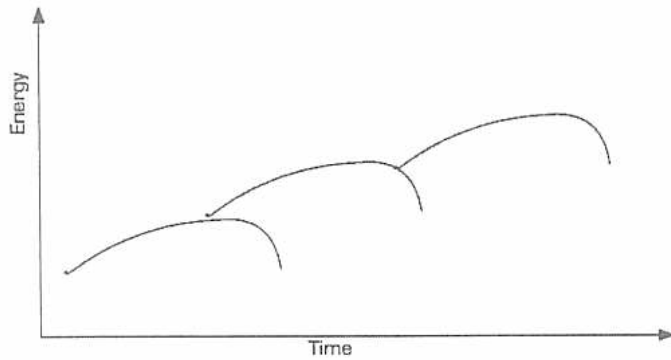"Perhaps we can find a way to pilot it, to show how it will work and to work out the details," suggested Yoshi.

Fig. 4   Flame Metaphor

"I am reminded of Gordon Dyer's metaphor (1996)[3] for increasing energy in a Design Conversation," offered Gordon. He draws a figure of three overlapping curves, shown in Figure 4. "The match lights the paper, which lights the twigs, which light the wood, and so on. The energy of each diminishes but serves to light the next wave, thus producing a higher level of energy in the system, that is, the Design Conversation."

"Even if nothing else," Barbara said, "We come out of this Design Conversation energized and motivated. I am amazed at how the proposed process that has emerged from the group addresses the many differing concerns and perspectives that we all brought to the Design Conversation. For me, what we have developed is clearly better than a process that any one of us could have come up with on our own. It underscores for me the value of Design Conversation methodology. I am surprised about the commitment to the group that I have developed over such a short time ; I am also surprised to discover how our discussions of systems thinking and Design Conversation methodology have tapped into many of my deeply-held values of inclusion, equality, and connection. And also, I have developed a new appreciation of the great importance of promoting systems thinking in educational settings and in the world at large."

Christian offered : "We might compare the Design Conversation process to the communication strategies of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in Mexico who struggle for land, democracy, liberty, justice, and dignity. They have engaged in global communication (supported by the Internet) to invite civil society representatives from all over to world to Design Conversations in the Lacanian jungle in Chiapas, and a tour of all 31 Mexican states for establishing Design Conversations with Mexican citizens. The EZLN for me is an example for what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000, 2005)[7,8] have termed multitudes—decentered, self-organizing, co-operative networks that aim at the establishment of a global democracy.

Similarly, in a Fuschl-like Design Conversation there is no hierarchical centre, it is based on joint deliberation and envisioning and on inclusive communication, it grows from the bottom instead of exerting control from above and forms a polyphonic dialogue. Design Conversation is a method for making a difference by speaking and listening. Speaking and listening to words is how we know who we are, where we come from, and where our steps are going. Also it's how we know about others, their steps, and their world. Speaking and listening to words is like listening to life."

6. Day 5 : Journey Continues Beyond Fuschl 2006

In the lobby of a cozy lakeside pension in Austria, five of us stood with our luggage around an old stone hearth and wondered if the lit twigs would be enough to catch a much larger, older log on fire.

"Do you think it will light?" asked Barbara.

"If the twigs can burn long enough," said Yoshi setting his yellow rain jacket coat atop a huge solid suitcase.

Urban considered this situation and offered, "Well, if nothing else it was a great four days. We have really come up with something."

Christian nodded, watching the small twigs, which seemed to be burning to no effect. "We built great relationships, had very constructive and envisioning Design Conversations, and co-constructed new ideas and projects that have relevance and could make a difference in the world. We learnt from others' experiences and ideas and experienced a great time with some great people."

"Yes," said Yoshi, "although what I missed very much was opportunities to discuss our ideas with the whole Fuschl community in a Design Conversation-like manner."

"Perhaps in time," suggested Doug.

Outside, taxis and small buses were beginning to load. With brusque shaking of hands, patting of shoulders and quick hugs, we were off to parts all over the world.

"See you in Tokyo next year!"

"I'll be there!"

"Bye!"

(This report is based on, "Topic 1 : Fuschl Extension : Igniting a New Form of Conversation," in, Gary Metcalf and Gerhard Chroust, eds., *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Fuschl Conversation*[4], and the 2006 Fuschl Conversation Team 1 Report in the *IFSR 2006 Newsletter*[5].)

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