

A perfect group

The “From Best to Next Practice” symposium was held for the second time at the Energy Academy the 18th to 20th of September 2013. Forty people participated this year, and it was a perfect group!

BY GITTE LARSEN,
EDITOR, HOUSE OF FUTURES

Malene Lundén from the Energy Academy welcomed everyone by asking us to present ourselves in a different way from what we’re used to in a conference setting. She wanted us to “feel the rythm” and briefly tell about ourselves, not one by one clockwise, but when we felt like it. It was an exercise in changing behaviour and making new structures for a meeting like this. The participants got better and better through the exercise. But it is difficult to change behaviour and most of the symposium was about changing beliefs, as Malene writes in her article “Start with belief”.

The people at the Energy Academy invite their global network to the “Next Practice” symposia regularly, and this year many of the Academy’s national collaborators were present as well as partners from Japan and the US.

The “Next Practice” symposium is a platform for sharing and learning. Experiences and knowledge cross borders and new connections are made. We could compare this platform to a marketplace full of opportunities. You can explore local, democratic processes and contribute to the task of reinventing the commons. Face-to-face meetings are different and indeed nescessary if we truly want to be open to other perspectives and to living the future as it emerges. Face-to-face meetings as joyful as the “Next practice” meetings are rare. Read on p. 100 what people said in the circle while checking out.

Exchanging ideas

The exchange of ideas at the symposium happens in a cross-disciplinary enviroment. You can meet public and private sector organisations, NGOs, practitioners, researchers, scientists and facilitators.

continued on p. 48

Malaika Thomsen, psychologist, Artful Punch, about the atmosphere at the symposium:

Our collective journey was framed with a beginning and an end. Along the way our assembly learnt a lesson about empathetic listening.

First, all the participants were invited to participate in an “energy exercise” by Gitte Larsen. The energy exercise facilitated each participant’s awareness of themselves which led to grounding and room for everyone’s individuality and spirituality. The exercise finished by making a huge collective imaginary energy bubble. This created a trusting atmosphere with room for being foolish, and curious, and open enough to become flexible.

After listening to the first three presenters we were gathered in plenum. Søren Hermansen invited us to explore new possibilities. There was an intense “on-the-move” atmosphere. Many Alice wanted to join the conversation, there wasn’t room enough, and some participants had difficulty listening with their full presence. Mary Alice Arthur read the situation well and understood the need for materializing all the burning questions. She fetched at box of papers and pens. Then she invited everyone to participate in a parallel process while the dialogue continued in a new, airy atmosphere: the burning questions were written and placed in the center of the circle. This created space for empathetic listening and dialogue. This lesson learnt was used in different aspects through the entire symposium.

The closing circle showed that the initial energy exercise and lesson learnt about empathic listening had facilitated individual movement and development whilst also creating many new connecting links that made the collective stronger than the sum of each participant.

atmosphere



The symposium was facilitated by Søren Hermansen, director of the Energy Academy, and Malene Lundén, project manager in the areas of education and communication. Forty people participated, among them a Japanese collaborator, Iida Tetsunari, director of the Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies in Japan. “Tetsu can learn many things from us, and we are interested in how we can help him even more. Not least, he can actually translate and apply the processual, democratic and social software needed to create community power back in Japan. It’s very important that he is here, and perhaps this is even why we are here,” said Søren Hermansen to welcome Tetsunari. Read the executive summary of his and the rest of the speeches on p. 56.

The “Next Practice” symposium is an event to be held regularly. The first was held in the Spring of 2011 (see box on p. 41), and the next (in 2015) will among other issues be about education for sustainable development. Who needs to be educated? By whom? How? And why?

The local place – a common

“A common is not a stable thing”, as Søren Hermansen puts it. Today, lots of our communities are virtual. We do not need to share a local place

in order to take part in them. This is important and challenging when talking about reinventing the commons, which do not only include societal aspects and concrete local areas but also that we have access to clean water and air in specific places. Our starting point, then, is not virtual. How can we all, in our local communities, contribute to a sustainable development by starting where we are and using what we have?

Samsøe has come a long way, innovating their way through how to do this in an island community of 3700 citizens. Togetherness, leadership and ownership have been vital parts of the process. This takes shared activities and a shared mentality – a vision and a plan of how to become an international example of a renewable energy community. Agreeing about what to do in a local community and how and why to do it – these are the software parts of sustainable development. It’s a matter of making the paths by walking them. Another important aspect of the success behind the island transition is the pragmatic, non-idealistic approach that the Energy Academy together with the population of Samsøe have put forward. “What’s in it for me” has and will be a central aspect when taking the next steps forward.



Else Marie Kaasboel, cand.mag., Lysbrocenteret, about the spiritual dimension of the symposium:

“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” – John 3:8

We met on the island in the middle, in a space inspired by the knowledge and shapes of the past, filled with inspiration from the present and the future. Inspiration for our surroundings, for our conditions and meanings of life, and for human beings in movement - in transformation and creation. We met because we all - each in his or her own way - feel that something is happening, that something is possible and important and fantastic to take part in. Perhaps a vision, a hope or a dream? Or a prayer for help... We met in confidence, openness and expectation about this ‘something’ that can happen. For a few hours we became one, a one made up manifold of people.

We are being carried by the wind or the spirit, and we listen to its sound while the light flows in and around us in the open aspiration, which might or might not be perfect, but which is so wonderfully spiritual. A sensation which was so precisely expressed when Malene ended the symposium with the Leonard Cohen song, “Anthem” (see quote on p. 10).

spirit

Lessons learnt

What did the Energy Academy learn from this second "Next Practice" symposium? "My sensing is that although many of the participants didn't know of our principles before this meeting, they were able to put themselves and their own principles into play and contribute. New connections were made, and I believe that everybody learned something during our days together", says Malene Lundén.

She explains that the Academy's principles are a compass of purposes and intentions. They work as a foundation for the process facilitation and they make it possible to combine all relevant parts, including the unforeseen. When things are moving there are always many unknown factors at play. That goes for the symposium as well as for the local development at Samsøe.

An important parameter when organizing such meeting places as the symposium is that people are invited as individuals. You'll never know how they function as a group and which culture they will create, practically and psychologically. What are their intentions and are they willing to leave their comfort zones. These are questions you as an organizer can't know the answers to in advance. "We are not sure about the group as a common", Malene explains. She continues: "This group was able to do a lot, and many new things were learned that naturally transform into our work life."

"One thing we planned was the checkout." This session (read what people said on p. 100) was aligned to the principles of the meeting place, which are:

- Symmetry through sympathy or empathy
- Beauty
- Mind the Gap, The Inbetween
- Whatever we pay attention to will grow

The campfire

"I think many of us participate in many conferences during a year. How many did you go to in 2013? I've been to five very different ones in Europe and in Denmark this past year,"

Malene says, and she states that at least two factors are relevant when choosing which ones to go to:

- (1) The network and the keynote speakers. Is it relevant for what you're doing right now?
- (2) Do you have personal relations there? Half of the participants here also participated two years ago when we started out while half of them were new.

The symposium headline was "local reduce and the commons". Local reduce was Gunnar Bøje Olesen's contribution because of his years of working with the EU. The EU is an opportunity for the island's future energy reduction projects, and the Academy is already participating in various EU projects. When writing this, new projects and collaborations have already come out of the symposium. The symposium became a common in its own right. A marketplace, and a lightening campfire.



PHOTO: OLE HANSEN

magic

Ole Hansen, human ecologist, Lysbrocenteret, about the magic of the symposium:

The magic came into existence in the force field between the serious transmission of the grave messages about the world around us and the permanent sparkling humour which was constantly bubbling underneath. The magic was also to be found in the energy which made the 'meeting of meanings and opinions' unpredictable, opening and open.

And then - that magical moment in the early morning light when a three-master from a bygone era floating on the dead calm sea turned Ballen into a time warp - a quiet momentum in a runaway world.