

Social Permaculture: The Forum

A description of an important tool for building community and sustainable teams



Project-Report by Martin Stengel

compiled as part of my Fast-Track-Studies at Permakultur Akademie Deutschland

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1 Goals of this project

Playfully analysing the Forum along the principles of David Holmgren aiming at:

- deeper understanding the way, the energetic phenomena and social group building tool Forum works
- getting a broader understanding of the Permacultural principles by seeing them appear in social systems.

2 Introduction to the Forum

Every Project / Organization / Community needs to give time and space to

1. Clearing inter-personal tension and stress, and separate the interpersonal level from the organisational level and from decision making processes;
2. Deep listening and sharing with the aim of building compassion and mutual trust;
3. Strategising and organizing to realise our visions.

Whenever we neglect the first two, the third (organizational meetings) tends to become more difficult.

One method we have found to be very helpful in building trust and maturity within community, while also strengthening inner purpose, is the FORUM:

Basic suppositions:

- Belief in our capacity as humans to build a life-supporting culture
- Belief that what gives us happiness as humans in community is compassion, generosity and co-empowerment
- Belief that a higher individual potential is always hidden behind a socialized and contracted personality
- Everything that an individual is going through and is expressing is part of the shared experience of being a human being
- Life is about constant evolution and trans-personal development
- Life is always more than we think we already 'know': practice of seeing others with fresh eyes again and again.
- Self-responsibility: responsibility not for all that happens, but for how we deal with it, for our feelings, thoughts and deeds
- Belief that diversity is a treasure
- Belief that win-win solutions are ultimately always possible
- Any step an individual takes is ultimately a step of the whole: political relevance.

Goals:

- Building a pool of common values
- Cultivating a shared vision within a shared project
- Creating mutual trust and integrity by practising transparent communication
- Mutual understanding of individual motives of our partner's/colleagues'... behaviour
- Strengthening a heart-to-heart connection and love
- Seeing the whole human being in our partners, colleagues, friends
- Making visible what is happening in the undercurrent/on the backstage

- listening and learning from feelings and processes
- By allowing light to fall on these processes, instead of leaving them in the dark, they often change. Solutions and transformations come about naturally.
- Supporting growth and unfolding of the individual potential.

Basic format:

- Age-old format of people coming together in a circle
- Space in the middle seen as a stage that participants are invited to step onto
- Person 'on stage' (presenter) is supported by two facilitators
- Once the presenter is finished, others can give feedback and express what they witnessed

The Person 'on stage'

- Visible and in the focus of the group – this gives a higher intensity, attracts more attention, and invites us to make a bigger step
- Practice of sharing our reality with the circle – helps us to expand our possibilities to be and act in the world by reducing the identification with what seems to be so personal
- Focus on either spontaneous unfolding of the "individual's universe" or conscious decision to 'work' with a certain theme
- Focus on creating the reality that we wish for

The Facilitator (if possible with Co-facilitator)

- Helps to focus on what is most important and relevant for transparency and personal transformation.
- Invites the person 'on stage' to relax and try out unusual ways of expression.
- Makes sure a non-judgemental atmosphere is maintained.
- Keeps focus on choreography of energy for the whole group.
- Invites collective wisdom into the circle to contribute to the process in the centre.
- High awareness of own personality, of strengths and weaknesses
- Own transparency within group essential

The Circle

- Focusses attention and energy to the centre without interfering.
- Avoids to react personally to what happens in the centre while being connected with feeling awareness.
- Holds non-judgemental attitude of connectedness: open receptivity, compassion, deep listening.
- Offers in advance the needed confidence of the collective in the process between the person 'on stage' and the facilitator(s).
- Gives supportive feedback to the one that made him/herself transparent in the centre:

Feedback

- Aligns self-perception and how others perceive us.
- Offers more possibilities to see and interpret what has been shared by the person 'on stage'.
- Gives appreciation for the courage of the one who shared personally.
- Comes from a supportive place and tries to address the higher potential, but not to criticise the person.
- The feedback we give is meant to lighten people up and to awaken their curiosity. It gives them

information they need to go through the changes they wish for. It deepens their self-awareness.

- Is only given from a place of connectedness, but not as an advice.
- In receiving feedback it is helpful to come from a place of sobriety. Don't judge whether the feedback is right or wrong, rather focus on what it triggers in you. Then you can consciously decide which feedback you wish to work with more.

After every process we applaud to show our appreciation for the courage of individuals to express themselves and make themselves vulnerable. We also applaud to finish off one phase and clear the space for something new. We don't applaud to score what has been shared.

*Based on a Handout, written by Kosha Anja Joubert, co-written by Martin Stengel -
With gratitude to our friends from the ZEGG and Tamera Communities who developed the Forum over more than two decades.*

3 Analysing the Forum along the PC Principles

3.1 Observation as the general attitude



Observe
&
interact

The most important attitude and action during every Forum is observation. We want to look on any person being part of the circle as some "thing" new, somebody to get to know with a fresh observation, somebody to get to know deeper. As natural systems and beings are never static, but always change, this observation needs to take into account that every moment can unfold in the most unexpected way.



Apply self-regulation
&
accept feedback

Other than in permaculture design we do not intend to create solutions for 'problems' with using the Forum; our major intention is to shed light on everything that is, observe with a maximum of attention and awareness, learn from this (see patterns), and increase our consciousness as part of evolution. Instead of moving things to a certain way of functioning we allow nature to self-regulate with its intrinsic and everybody's innate evolutionary wisdom. The reality of the moment unfolds in the interaction between the performing person and the circle, and between the performing person and the reality of the moment, including the individual imprints of the past, that might become active. Interaction only happens as inspiration for the performer to react on,

but never as something that is enforced.

3.2 Using renewable resources



Use & value
renewable resources
and services



Catch
&
store energy

Human potential is connected to a nearly endlessly renewable energy (within the lifespan). Healing blockages to access this intrinsic source of energy increases its availability and flow, and in many cases even might decrease the use of non-

renewable energies and services, that have been used by the individual or the group to substitute missing human power, joy, passion, engagement. Unused potential is a waste in itself, and in needing to be substituted it rather produces additional waste.



Obtain a yield



Produce no waste

The Forum invites us to use the intrinsic (energetic) potential of the individual and the group. It does this in the opposite way as the principle tells us: Liberating stored, but (often unhealthy) unused energies, and catching these by making them available to the system. The liberated energy contributes to a higher level of connection within the group, a higher potential for opportunities to unfold, and more creativity as a consequence. Investing energy in liberating, inspiring and energising social beings and social systems can

result in an increased energy available to the whole system, both immediately and at long date – the total output becomes more than the sum invested.

3.3 Fostering self-regulation and resilience



Apply self-regulation
&
accept feedback

“Self-maintaining and regulating systems might be said to be the 'Holy Grail' of permaculture” states David Holmgren when explaining this principle. The Forum wants to empower the individual by becoming more conscious about oneself, getting to know the functional fit of one's individual system, learning to self-regulate oneself. We can force people to do something, but we can never (!) change anybody permanently. The beauty of (assisted and inspired) self-discovery lies in the self-empowerment, the increasing power of one with oneself, the unfolding ability to deal with everything that occurs or comes up in

a way that the individual life is sustained and thrives. With integration and diversity (principles 8 and 10) the whole social system composed by self-empowered individuals grows in flexibility and resilience.

3.4 Understanding human patterns



Design
from patterns
to details

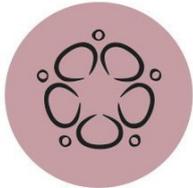
Patterns are one of our major focusses when using the Forum: What can we learn from what becomes visible in the centre about human patterns of living and reacting to life? What can we translate from the individual reality in the centre to the shared reality of human experience?

By being interested in compassionately understanding the individual perception of the moment we are partly taking away the individual identification with what is being experienced. We are increasing the awareness about this individual experience being a shared (typical) experience of human beings, and by this

allowing the individual to take it less serious and to experience the unity with the human species/the circle.

Learning more about these human patterns we become able to gain more space in playing with the endless diversity of human experience beyond what feels so individual and separating. We additionally learn to support others overcoming identification with their individual experience. We learn to design and live our social environment according to human patterns, in which every individual experience in any moment can find its expression.

3.5 Fostering diversity



Integrate rather than segregate



Use & value diversity

Resilience and sustainability of communities and working teams are fostered by diversity of skills, of ways of thinking and perception, of possibilities to co-create life and react on challenges, of potential to further develop in any direction. Communities are living organisms composed of organisms that are composed themselves of trillions of cells with very complex systems of intelligence, self-regulation and interaction. As Bruce Lipton states, that the main drivers for forming physical

living beings out of individual cells seem to emerge from the contact between the surfaces, the membranes of different cells, so does a community form itself informed by what happens when the different members are interacting. Thich Nath Hahn talks of the “Inter-Being” that creating reality, that what exists as a field of information in between to beings. The Forum encourages the individuals to open up to interaction with the group by fully becoming present and unfolding their highest potential. And it encourages the community to welcome and embrace diversity in every form and open up to an ever increasing process of co-creation.



3.6 Maintenance



Creatively use & respond to change

Finally: The Forum never is fixed as a tool or procedure itself. The main concept and rules as stated above are meant to describe a framework, that every participating person should be aware of and respect. Still, the more advanced both facilitators as well as audience and performers are, the more creatively it can be used according to the challenges and potential of the moment. All participants and especially the facilitation team are invited to adapt, further develop, and play with the Forum as a setting for community building, where they can bring in their individual expertise.