

Autumn 2005



In the dialogue business...for real -Aleco Christakis

Invasive Species Co-Laboratories

The Institute is assisting the U.S. Department of Agriculture in its campaign against Invasive Species (imported animal and plant pests such as: fire ants, chestnut blight, and West Nile virus). We are facilitating three 2-day co-laboratories where experts will formulate their 3-year strategic plan. The co-laboratory (CogniScope) methodology, developed by Institute president Alexander Christakis, will enable them to discover the most influential causes of the problems and prioritize recommendations dealing with:

- Prevention
- Early Detection and Rapid Response
- Control and Management
- Restoration
- Research
- Information Management
- Education and Public Awareness.

The Institute will also assist in the plan's implementation.

In addition to the Department of Agriculture, the National Invasive Species Plan involves representatives from the Departments of Interior, Commerce, Defense, Transportation, State, the Customs Service and the Environmental Protection Agency. Two of these workshops are scheduled for later this year; the third will occur next spring.

Co-Laboratories Book

Co-Laboratories of Democracy, a book by Aleco Christakis and Ken Bausch is in press with Information Age Publishers. The book is subtitled: *How People Harness Their Collective Wisdom and Power to Create the Future*. It presents a process, developed by Aleco and others, that makes participative democracy effective for the 21st century.

The book describes Aleco's disillusion with the social systems design of the 1970's, his involvement with the first Club of Rome proposal, and his 30-year quest to develop a process that empowers ordinary people to democratically design their social lives. It presents the techniques, graphic languages, computer software, and the process that develops consensual action plans among diverse sets of people involved in complex situations. It recounts success stories. It also lays out a science of dialogic design and the kind of leadership that effects progressive change.

More news on the Department of Agriculture co-laboratories and the publication of the book will be given in the Winter eBuzz.

Catching Up

by Ken Bausch

The last issue of eBuzz was way back in the spring of 2003. At that time Aleco and I were pulling together the 47th annual conference of the ISSS (the International Society for the Systems Sciences) with the theme "Constructing Agoras of the Global Village."

The conference was a joy. People from all over the world discussed the successes and lessons learned in their efforts to create livable communities. Some of these success stories from Australia, Russia, Germany, Italy, Cyprus, Colombia, Mexico, and the United States are recounted in the January-March 2004 issue of the journal *World Futures* (Bausch, 2004). The September-October 2004 issue of *System Research and Behavioral Science* (Christakis, 2004) describes agora-planning efforts in Latin America, a Syntegrity session on the future of ISSS, and two co-laboratories: one on building agoras around the world; the other on building a worldwide Indigenous movement.

After the Crete conference, Aleco and I were both depleted. I had gambled that the conference would provide new impetus and some sort of funding for Institute operations, but was mistaken. As a result, I needed to devote all my energy into making a living.

In the following months, nothing much happened. Separately, we edited our journal issues. I did little more than keep the website afloat. Aleco worked on the book.

Early this year, Nancy Roberts of Information Age Publishers expressed interest in our book, prompting Aleco and I to work on it in earnest. Also a funding possibility arose and we developed a new version of our funding proposal. Then Aleco won a grant from USDA and decided that the Institute, being non-profit, was the fitting organization to run the project.

In brief, the Institute has come back to life and is ready to go roaring into the future.

A Co-Laboratory on Constructing Agoras

Aleco (Greek/American), Surinder Batra (India), Sabrina Brahms (USA), and Marios Michaelides (Cyprus) were facilitators for the building agoras co-laboratory. Diane Conaway was Co-Laboratory Coordinator. Gianfranco Minati (Italy) and Ken Bausch were Project Leaders. This workshop combined explanation of the CogniScope process with strategic thinking:

- To define what a democratic global discussion might look like (agora as process);
- To describe what a global village achieved by an effective global discussion might look like (agora as product);
- To explore how local discussions as processes and agoras as product might come about;
- To make explicit what thinking globally and acting locally means for individuals and groups within the ISSS;
- To discover how to enhance the practice of boundary-spanning dialogue across disciplines and civilizations (Hayes and Michaelides in Christakis).

The following diagram shows in **red** an influence pattern of the challenges faced in trying to establish global agoras. It shows in **blue** how action options affect the most influential challenges.

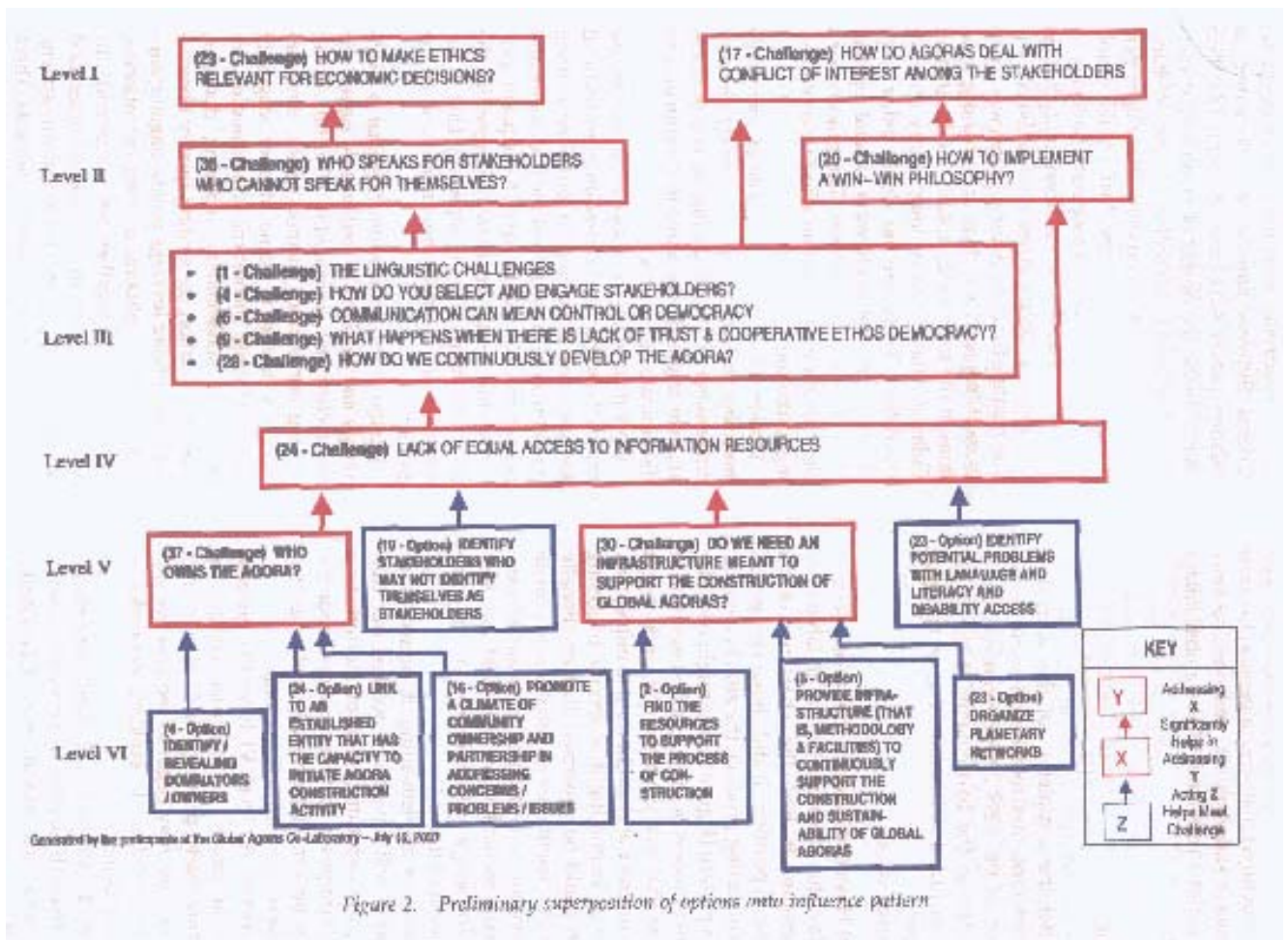


Figure 2. Preliminary superposition of options into influence pattern

My analysis of the deep drivers at Level VI of this superposition diagram made the following points:

These options have the greatest leverage in efforts to construct agoras. By considering each of them individually and collectively, we may begin to see how we can efficiently contribute to building networks of functioning democracies.

Option 4: *Identify/reveal dominators/owners*: This is a research function that operates in small organizations and global ones. Checkland's CATWOE requirements incorporate this need and specify the importance of Weltanschauungen (worldviews) in specifying who the owners might be. Critical Systems stresses the alternative to existing power structures. It seems that ISSS should tackle the project of identifying owners of organizations according to the Weltanschauung that they incorporate. We might generate a taxonomy that would enable common discourse and cooperative activity.

Option 24: *Link to an established entity that has the capacity to initiate Agora construction activity*: The Institute for 21st Century Agoras was set up to meet this

need and there are other organizations in the same field, notably the Institute of Cultural Affairs with its long history of active facilitation. There are no doubt other such organizations that might want to band together in some common endeavors. This practitioner's circle might evolve into an effective coordinating institution.

Option 18: *Provide a climate of community ownership and partnership in addressing concerns/problems/issues:* We all do that in our practices and we might devise ways to coordinate and disseminate our methods.

Option 2: *Find the resources to support the process of construction:* The resources are financial and personal. If we were to formulate a strong program as a consortium of methodologies and practitioners, we would have the requisite personnel and would be a strong magnet for the necessary funds. This is especially true if our programs are practical, measurable, and on the ground.

Option 5: *Provide infrastructure (that is, methodology and facilities) to continuously support the construction and sustainability of global Agoras:* Among our various methodologies, some are especially useful in some area or stages of Agora-building: theoretical understanding, inclusion of stakeholders, initiating dialogue, conflict resolution, generating quality observations, identifying leverage points, ongoing support, building coalitions, training practitioners, etc. by webbing together, we can provide the best of facilitation to our communities and organizations in a lively communal atmosphere.

Option 12: *Organize planetary networks:* There are hundreds of future-looking networks today. I have over 100 links to them. Many of you no doubt are similarly connected. Some of them, such as Leonard Duhl's Healthy Cities movement, are on the ground in hundreds of locations. We can make ourselves available to those groups to facilitate their efforts and help them to coalesce into a coherent world force (in Hayes and Michaelides)

Bausch, K (ed.). (2004). Constructing Agoras of the Global Village. *World Futures, Volume 60, Numbers 1-2, January-March 2004.*

Christakis, A. (ed.). (2004). Wisdom of the People. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science, Volume 21, Number 5, September-October 2004*

Hayes, P and Michaelides, M. (2004). Constructing Agoras of the Global Village: A Co-Laboratory of Democracy on the Conscious Evolution of Humanity. In Christakis, pp.539-554.

Indigenous Wisdom of the People Forum (WOPF)

Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO) www.aio.org and Advancement of Maori Opportunity (AMO) www.amo.co.nz jointly sponsored a Wisdom of the People Forum

in Crete to share Indigeneity with like-minded systems thinkers and to create a strategic plan for the newly formed international Indigenous organization, the Advancement of Global Indigeneity (AGI). The AGI used the products resulting from the WOPF to guide the first AGI board meeting that was held in conjunction with the ISSS conference.

AIO was founded 35 years ago by Institute Board member, LaDonna Harris to discuss provocative issues and to work on complex problems facing Native Americans. Her daughter AIO president Laura Harris and Kate Cherrington, co-founder of AMO, facilitated this WOPF (co-laboratory). The 30 or so active participants in addition to Native Americans and Maoris included persons from Crete, Germany, Slovenia, and non-Indigenous Americans. They engaged in spirited disciplined dialogue for four evenings during the conference

The triggering question for this WOPF was “*What are the challenges for AGI when reaching out to and relating with other Indigenous groups/nations/peoples who may be in different places and different spaces?*” After identifying seven most important challenges, the participants plotted an influence pattern among them. Then they developed six strategies to address this system of challenges:

- First, AGI will have to develop a funding strategy.
- Next AGI will have to research and study specific countries and groups.
- AGO must develop educational materials and a public relations strategy.
- This strategy will be formalized into a training program for the staff, board of directors, and funders.
- AGI will need to continually work on the development of the transparency of the AGI vision, goals, motives, and its attitude of wanting to learn and share with other Indigenous groups.
- Finally, the group agreed on the importance of not just talking about what AGI wants to achieve and not just researching and studying other groups, but actually getting out into the field to apply and test what the group has described as AGI’s work: in short, to ‘walk the talk’.

Subsequent to this WOPF, AGI has had major interactions with the Indigenous Peoples of Northeast Asia and Southern Africa, and is negotiating interactions in other parts of the world. They are planning to train other Indigenous people to conduct Indigenous WOPFs.

Harris, LD. and Wasilewski, J. Indigeneity an Alternative Worldview – Four R’s (Relationship, Responsibility, Reciprocity, Redistribution) versus to P’s (Power and Profit). Sharing the Journey Towards Conscious Evolution. *Systems*

Research and Behavioral Science, Volume 21, Number 5, September-October 2004. pp. 489-504.

Harris, L. and Wasilewski, J. Indigenous Wisdom of the People Forum: Strategies for Expanding a Web of Transnational Indigenous Interactions. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science, Volume 21, Number 5, September-October 2004. pp. 505-517.*

Agora-Building Proposal

The new Institute proposal envisages several scenarios, each designed to eventually enable groups to conduct co-laboratories on their own. They range from co-laboratories with an initial training session through co-labs with intern assistance, and co-labs run by new facilitation teams with Institute guidance. We support stakeholders as they learn to function independently as leaders of co-laboratories and fund on-the-ground follow through coordinators. The new facilitation teams are paid proportionally to their roles as assistants or as leaders backed by a consultant. The new teams are then given the SDP software (value \$5000) and are free to conduct co-laboratories, hopefully with financial and administrative support from the Institute.

We are actively and creatively seeking ways to fund this proposal. We would really appreciate any ideas you might want to offer.

Darwin in Love

Institute board member David Loye has found buried within the scientific thicket of *The Descent of Man* that Darwin actually wrote 95 times about love! By going to each of these entries, the author in the just published *Darwin in Love* uncovers long ignored, delightful, and often very funny tales of the love, sex, and family life of birds, apes, elephants, deer, earwigs, barnacles, grasshoppers, dogs and cats -- and much else including humans.

David is a leading proponent for the flourishing new reading of Darwin that pays attention to his words that are at odds with the ruthless social Darwinist application of survival of the fittest to human evolution.

Institute for 21st Century Agoras
8213 Hwy 85 #901
Riverdale, GA 30274
www.globalagoras.org
info@globalagoras.org