

# What a pleasure it was, hosting the 5<sup>th</sup> World Appreciative Inquiry Conference!

## The transformational capacity of AI will find its way to the future

*reflections  
from the  
organising  
team*

BY GRIET BOUWEN

Started as a wild and provocative proposition at the World Appreciative Inquiry Conference (WAIC) in Nepal (2009), the 2012 WAIC far exceeded the expectations of *De Werf*, the Belgian organizing team. During the latest Appreciative Inquiry (AI) world conference, they felt a growing sense of a worldwide community, formed by hundreds of people, wanting to devote their work to a sustainable future. The members in *De Werf* share the awareness that our society and economy are balancing on a tipping point. Prof. René Bouwen comments on this: 'It seems to me that at no time before this, the call to take up responsibility for creating a new society, a new economy was so urgent as it is today.' *De Werf* addressed this challenge to the AI community, by setting the theme and building the conference program around this. Asking to their highest hopes a few days before the start of the conference, the organizers spoke with one voice: 'For us, the power of AI lies mainly in the generative perspective. It would be really encouraging if we could understand and experience this strength a bit more than we do today.'

Looking back to all the happenings at the WAIC 2012, the organizing team first of all is grateful. Grateful for the high quality contributions of all keynote speakers, workshop hosts and paper presenters. There was lots of new and highly inspirational content. Combined with a high degree of interactivity, every room became a vibrant space of emerging insights and collective creativity.

Another basis of common gratefulness is explained by Luc Verheijen, one of the core-organizers of the WAIC: 'People came to tell me that the atmosphere at the conference was highly relational and strikingly relaxed at the same time. They noticed how this was a pure reflection of the way we – as organizing team – have been working together towards this conference.' Probably the secret behind it is the fact that everyone who was involved in the preparations, contributed from their personal strengths and hopes, and gave each other full space to do so. Seen from this perspective, organizing this conference already was a fusion of micro practices towards an economy of strengths.

Reflecting on the new content that has risen out of this gathering, the members of *De Werf* are happy with the huge

variety of knowledge and practices, each contributing to a deeper understanding of the real power behind AI.

The aim of making the generative perspective more central to the AI Community was well received by the participants. For so many people, it felt like a relief to be able to admit that AI needs both the positive perspective, and a thoughtful way of building generative relational practices. An important next step could be taken by collecting case studies of really transformational change processes, as Prof. Bushe invited the AI community to. The organizers believe that this can't be too difficult. They refer to all the innovative practices that are presented during the conference.

Questions like those that came up during Prof. Van Egmonds talk, on the importance of including the poor and marginalized people in transformation processes were answered with approval and applause from the audience. In different workshops, this perspective became more explored. Digging for strengths in really difficult situations, and respecting – if not even celebrating – the differences can be the spark of engagement that leads to massive change were most needed.

The conference sparked new ideas, hope and a feeling of connectedness with people all over the world, sharing similar dreams, working towards a world of connected strengths. Seen from this perspective, the WAIC 2012 isn't closed yet. Every participant returned home with new ideas and new

connections to build upon towards realizing their ideas.

How do the members of the organizing team look to their work from now on? Isn't it too silent now for them? Asking them these questions, they share a sense of trust in the power of organic growth. 'What has to emerge, will emerge', they say. 'We have fostered the building of new relationships, through which the transformational capacity of AI can find its way to the future. We are more than curious to discover the future change built upon the WAIC 2012 momentum as we travel to South Africa in 2015.'

For their work in Belgium, De Werf feels highly engaged to continue their AI Learning Networks as a valuable contribution to a strengths based economy. Inspired by the vivid stories of 'Business as an Agent of World Benefit', they want to contribute to the growing awareness of business responsibility for a sustainable future. De Werf also supports the idea to build a generative, strengths based news network together with Axiom News. This is definitely a spin-off of relationships that grew during the preparations of this conference.

What came out of this WAIC 2012 for you? What struck you most? With what ideas and plans did you return home? And how can the AI community contribute to that? Share it at our [facebookpage](#), or send a tweet with # 2012waic.

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From left to right: René Bouwen (KULeuven), Erwin De bruyyn (Stebo), Lut Brenard (Stebo), Wim Croonen (Evenwicht), Arno Vansichen (Evenwicht), Philippe Belien (Belien & Co), Griet Bouwen (Stebo, Evenwicht), Luk Dewulf (Kessels & Smit), Bert Verleysen (Stebo) and Luc Verheijen (Kessels & Smit)

