There were 12 of us who gathered here on the beautiful land of Axladitsa-Avatakia, the home of Maria and Sarah, and all three hosted us well and beautifully. It was a gathering that didn’t seem to have great flow and shared clarity is still trying to reveal itself. But as always is the case at Axladitsa, there was this gathering after the gathering and three of us sat down to make sense of what had happened. Actually, we found out we had done a lot!

The two gatherings in 2010 link back to the Stewards Gathering in June 2008 at The Shire, where Bob Wing, David Stephenson, Chris Corrigan and Ria Baeck stepped forward to host the whole. This was a release of commitment for Toke and Donna, who had stepped forward at the first Stewards Gathering in 2005. These last two years it had mostly been Bob and Ria who held the energetic space and through conversations with Maria and Sarah, three conference calls were held last winter as a sensing organ for what was alive in the Art of Hosting field and what questions were present.

The “one gathering -- two places” was held by the joint hosting teams and one invitation was sent out to a self-selected list of stewards, with the guiding question: “What stewardship is called for now to tend the roots and growth of Art of Hosting?”.

Our days were organised around the Fourfold Practice, so first was Being Present. We started with walking the land, knowing its boundaries, hearing the stories of water and electricity and just enjoying the sheer beauty of it. In the afternoon, we checked in with the simple question: “What brought you here as a steward?”. The second day was about Engaging and we checked in with “What stuck/what popped from yesterday?”. Then, in the afternoon, we had the exercise of seeing each other’s gifts. Planned were 3 minutes per person, but on average, more than 10 minutes were needed to speak the many facets of the gems we all are. Everyone experienced this as very powerful and meaningful, “beyond Appreciative Inquiry”. It reminded me of the gathering in The Shire, when someone said that the Art of Hosting was about “seeing each other’s brilliance”. For me, the most impressive moment was when we collectively bowed to the middle as a gesture of honour of what had happened, as if we were ready to engage with the collective being.

The check-in of the first two days brought a huge pile of many elements, all relating to stewardship and mastery. I had to make sense out of it and I used the morning practice time for sense making. In email conversations between some of the stewards the weeks before this gathering, there had been the question of “what comes first, the world view of living systems or the practice of the Fourfold Way?” and I heard voices from the circle to put the Fourfold practice more into the centre again. I played with it and saw both world view and the Fourfold Practice as yin and yang, both arising out of life itself. (see: “At the heart of the AoH field”) So I took the pattern of the Fourfold Practice to organise all the elements that had come up.

In Being Present it seems crucial that stewards have an awareness and capacity of spanning paradoxes in all situations. These paradoxes are manyfold and in the creation of Kairos and Chronos -- resulting in conscious timing -- had a lot of attention. In the practice of Engaging, many elements were about creating a culture of trust and many times this would be named as essential but also the conscious and unconscious questioning of how deep this trust really is. The practice of Hosting for stewards encompasses the whole domain of purpose, principles and all the people. The Hosting is asking for more depth (deep intention, hold potential of the seed) and more skills in the invisible realm. The practice of Co-creation for stewards holds still many questions, but one clarity was, that stewardship cannot be done by one person alone, but is always collective. (see: "The Fourfold Practice of Stewarding")

For the third day, we headed into Open Space and the invitation was, from the check-in on, to balance more of hands and body, with head and heart. We used paint and sculpture and did some physical maintenance in the entry/welcome space of Axladitsa. From the hands on practice, we noticed what we learned from it regarding the stewardship roles. Welcoming, maintenance of beauty and longterm engagement came up, and again, the right timing or my timing. One Open Space session was a planned conference call around a UK project, which was basically about introducing the stewardship practice into the project. This brought up the realisation of deep desire to learn and co-create, and again, the longterm view. Time creates ease to go deep and stewardship holds time and not just space. Another session was about hosting our cities. It brought a practice of hospitality back into the centre and named Art of Hosting as reclaiming the practice that belongs to all. Regarding stewardship, it named the importance of holding each other and being held. Also, that we don’t possess our spaces/places, but are
there to steward them. A distinction came up -- the difference between an instructor (bringing skills, not caring about the person) and a teacher (coming into an intimate relationship with the student. The last Open Space session was looking deeper into the difference between mastery and stewardship in an effort to find more distinctions in the pile of elements and to come to a common understanding of what stewardship is really about. In this conversation, we went back to the origin of Art of Hosting (being collectively wise with many tools, not just one) to the deepest simplicity (be present, have a good question, have a stone) and to the basic principles of peer-to-peer or being equal and staying close to simple and light structure as a container.

Elements that stood out for me from this conversation:

- “If you don’t have stewards, you soon have owners” -- stewards, by being present and keeping an awareness and “sitting at the door” prevent negative influences coming in
- We use holarchy instead of hierarchy, although there is natural hierarchy in levels of experience and levels of scope. In holarchy and in complex systems, we need a lot of diversity, both in levels and skills.
- The basis of all this is “that we know of life”, all the maps, world views and words are just how we can describe it now.
- What if life was our client and that we are making ourselves, as a field of practice, ready to go anywhere in the world.

One of the threads that wove throughout the days, was about the financial and political situation in Greece, the strike and the violence that attended it. Greece also brings us to the level of the mythic and the many stories it holds. Maybe it is an invitation for us to span across the divide between North and South and to integrate the wild, rustic, more basic elements of ourselves again.

On the evening of the second day there had been a request to pull some tarot cards and Maria always seems happy to do that. We took our collective quest as the topic and this is what was shown:

- We are ready to be in community with each holding our own light, but we are still in “maybe”
- Let go of relationship in the sense of “it feels good”
- Master your thoughts and know the truth
- Become conscious that nothing holds us back
- What wants to be born is a breaking of the contract of the old, go beyond apprentice and go into the new
- The advice is to look at what blocks spirit and earth, and be learners in this
- Know how to manifest & go for what you deeply care about and go for the biggest piece of the pie, but don’t use mind and feelings, but be in the not-knowing and use your intuition

Looking back on the deep and long conversation we had as a hosting team on the third evening, I can see we were exactly there, as the cards had shown us, but we didn’t recognise it enough or fully. There was an opposition going on -- conscious and unconscious -- between the old and new contract; the attempt of being more and longer in the not-knowing to access more intuition, was in conflict with urgency and the need for clarity. Is there a need to be less gentle with each other, less midwife and more warrior?
I guess it was in an effort to “break the old contract” and to go beyond what we already knew that I invited the circle on the fourth day to speak about the need for a generative field of stewardship from own deep experience, meaning not just a sum of stewards, but a group of stewards operating like the best hosting team in deep co-creation. It wasn’t an easy conversation, but as someone said: “We are in deep training together for this kind of stewardship/leadership”. Some of the topics: long term purpose: we are the leaders to produce more leaders... I need fellow leaders because it is scary, I need the field to be courageous... where are our feedback loops... where do the questions in need of collective wisdom go... be real -- name it -- challenge each other... space for sharing and capacity to cope with pain -- not to fix it! ... I need to be as successful as possible and help others to be successful... do we really trust each other’s gifts? ... Co-creation happens in the space between warrior and midwife.

An urgent need came up to share stories of Art of Hosting being out there in the world. Stories from practitioners having to deal with issues of power, needing a lot of their warrior capacities. I could suddenly see that the holding of these projects -- with so many levels, streams, people and complexities -- was difficult and needed exactly the gifts that others who carry the midwife aspect had to offer. For me it was a release to realise that, and probably for the field too. Later on I understood that for these (large scale systemic) projects witnessing the story, listening to the story, mining the deeper meaning and patterns and then reflecting the stories back to the practitioners in the field is exactly what some of us are called to do. Maybe this is more the midwife aspect of the practitioner and the next level of harvesting? By evaluating/harvesting why innovation works and where it didn’t, and by connecting these stories, it will contribute largely to being a system of influence. It seems to relate to stewardship as it includes the long term view of seeing the larger patterns, the care and being of service to the whole.

What the stories told us about the next level of need/service in the world:
- Connecting the dots -- across divides, finding common ground, creating the conversational field to see things anew/meet & share
- Strategic conversation containers for re-imagining, re-engineering of focus, structure and relationship
- Challenging the concept and practice of leadership
- Moving into strategic relationship -- away from dominance to self organising, from rigid structure/status quo to the new

Our gathering came to an end and we wanted to go on, as no shared clarity was reached. We extended our end time... We read the original documents from 2005 and noticed that a lot of it was still quite relevant. What needs attention is finding a simple structure of leadership that is in response to and resonant with what is needed now; a structure that befriends our practice and world view, where form follows function. The concept of a Learning Council was introduced, could this be an Art of Hosting governance form? Could this be part of using the 5th paradigm for ourselves?

We named that the root system of Art of Hosting is really strong, but it asks to become more participatory -- adapting to local contexts, new forms of training and learning are arising. And back to basics; share (large scale systemic) stories around the campfire, so basic in our humanity and nurturing a long term view. It will illuminate more of our path and where we are on the map and it will give us more confidence in walking...

How are we hosting “the enemy”?

There is so much more we can do with power!

And a finally a lovely dinner at the seaside...

Ria Baeck/10 May 2010
**The Fourfold Practice of Stewarding**

**What is stewardship?** Stewarding means attention to something larger than your own work or mastery, a service to the whole in some form. Art of Hosting Stewards are in service of wholeness and protecting and stewarding the Art of Hosting pattern & practice. A steward is a protector of the simplicity of the pattern. The root of stewardship is caring. The world is calling for us to steward in service to life.

**Principles:** You are a steward when you know it yourself and other stewards recognise you. You offer something of your gifts to the whole. You have the capacity to know and hold the whole, to work with complexity and hold the simplicity at the same time.

**For good stewardship...** These are expressed in each of the Four Fold practices. In Being Present we are reminded about the steward’s capacity to span paradoxes. In Engaging we see how important the culture of trust and generosity is to being able to be at the edge with each other and go deeper, and we’re reminded of the basis of Art of Hosting “ask for what you need, give what you can”. In Hosting we go wider, deeper and more intangible than the practice of methodologies. In Co-Creating we clearly see that this can only be a collective journey and practice.

**CO-CREATING:**
- Stewardship is collective, an energetic work, a form of collective shamanism or invisible alchemy
- A relationship between the self and the centre
- About hosting the next level of wholeness, the tipping point, continuing to regenerate diversity
- A practice of continuing to relate our skills & capacities to what is needed in the world

**BEING PRESENT:**
- Capacity to know and contain oneself (relaxing for others)
- Being fully present to whatever is present
- Honouring both the tangible and the intangible practice
- The awareness and practice of spanning paradox in all situations
  - holding/intervening
  - detachment/perseverance
  - Kairos (conscious intuitive timing, patience -- when is it ripe?)/Chronos (clock time)/not going into panic or urgency
  - holding it lightly/holding it fiercely
  - breadth/depth
  - ancient - present - future

**ENGAGING:**
- Being aware of everything that is in the field and engaging with what is important and present in the immediate work
- Nurturing and deepening the culture of trust and generosity, so it is possible to choose, to intervene, to challenge and to work with edginess
- Challenging and witnessing each other to invite more brilliance and greater integrity

**HOSTING:**
- Continuing to demonstrate & embody a commitment to how you do it, not to outcome, to the dance between harmony & complexity
- We are hosting/holding space for purpose, people, the pattern, for deep intention and our evolutionary potential, the transition point where the invisible becomes manifest
- Hosting the field for the manifestation of the highest potential

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What if Art of Hosting is really a way to help people uncover their power to hold their ground and not be afraid of change?
What if the methodologies are an excuse for teaching people they can change in intelligent ways?
At the Heart of the AoH Field

Art of Hosting means being attuned to life. Mastery in any of the domains of the Fourfold practice is earned through experience and is a way of being in the world. Mastery doesn’t mean perfection, but a commitment to continual learning and practice. It is an effortless embodiment of a wholeness perspective on life.

We inquired into which comes first -- the Fourfold Practice or a Living Systems view of life. As we understand it now, both of these come out of life itself and complement each other. We suspect that each of the domains of the Fourfold Practice are mirrored in a generative worldview of Living Systems. We imagine could expand this diagram further by adding mental models and practices to each of these domains (like basics of application, methodologies, design tools). People can enter this field through many doorways, but along the way you integrate more and more of the whole. A master needs to span both the practice and the understanding of the worldview.
The Path to Stewardship

How do each of the stages of mastery fit together? The beginning of the path lies in apprenticeship or being a student, then moves to Journeyman/Practitioner, then on to Teacher/Mentor, and finally into Steward/sensei. Within each of these roles, the stances of midwife and warrior both need to become fully developed, so that they are in balance. And each of these stances has co-creation as a given element and a foundational practice. Fear cannot be present if these stances are to fully manifest.

The stances of stewardship: Each of us approaches stewardship from our unique perspective. Some of us are Journeyman/Practitioner Stewards, some of us might be Teacher/Mentor Stewards, etc. Each of these stances are valuable and needed. While some of them are more visible -- the Warrior Practitioner is the spearhead in our current practice field and in the mainstream culture -- we need to continue to nurture and balance all stances.

Areas for exploration/development:
1. We have many Apprentice Stewards, we long for Master Stewards to show up, and they may or may not. Perhaps some of the turbulence we are experiencing in the Stewarding field is lack of clear recognition of each person’s gifts, acceptance of their chosen role and application of those skills in service of the field. While Practitioners are concerned with the piece of work at hand, Stewards should be concerned about including a full diversity of skills, practices and stances -- stewarding whole. Neither of these approaches is better, but being clear about role or blending of roles is important. [Master Steward: having let go of personal goals/a stake in the direction; fully in service to the field without regard to reward, always giving away]
2. We practice Steward Midwifing, we need to practice the Steward warrior (protecting & guiding the field).
3. It seems as though the Practitioner & Teacher are the only roles valued in the mainstream economy, while the roles of Apprentice & Steward reside in the gift economy. How well does this serve the Art of Hosting?

As each role moves around the wheel, it handles a more subtle level of practice (no hierarchy intended). We have been noticing that each person has their own way of working these roles and their own preference for practice.

Mary Alice Arthur, Ria Baek, Toke Paludan Moeller, Bob Wing/9 May 2010
Stewardship is a river....

A river is a confluence of flows...

You may think when you are looking at a river that a river is a simple thing. A river is meant to flow and every river is flowing to the sea, in whatever manner it can. A river flows through a landscape.

But every river has a number of streams joining it and within it. They are of different speeds and sizes, each with its own pattern. Some streams hug the shore, or eddy back on themselves, some gurgle over stones, and one or more may be the dominant stream. If you didn’t know better, you would name the nature of the river by the most dominant of its flows.

But they are all the river. If you take away one of the streams, the river is diminished. Its nature is changed and its impact is changed. A river needs all the subtlety and variation of its streams to produce a healthy and diverse ecology to surround it. Since everything is connected in nature, the health of the river depends on the health of the ecology that surrounds it and vice versa.

Every river also depends on its banks for shape. This shape helps to guide the direction and the strength of the flow. Sometimes a river is thin and swift, becoming whitewater. Sometimes a river is wide and deep, appearing to be slow on the surface.

And every river has its destination.

We think Stewardship is a river. Here are some of the questions we’re asking:

How aware are we of the streams within our river? How diverse are we? How are the various streams honoured & nurtured? How are they assisted to support the whole? How do we challenge each other?

Is our ecology healthy enough and generative enough to sustain life -- for living wholeness to manifest?

What/who holds the banks of the river? What shape is this giving us?

What is the next evolution of the river and its ecology? How do we know? What will we choose to do?