

## LOCAL ACTION, GLOBAL IMPACT: FROM DOMINATION TO PARTNERSHIP BY DESIGN

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### Abstract

Global changes often begin when people take action locally. Communities around the globe are involved in creative community-based actions that promote mutual respect, social and economic justice, and gender and environmental balance. Insights from ecological thinking, systems thinking, quantum reality, and integral vision perspectives offer new ways to understand the terms 'local' and 'global', and their context. Also, today more than ever, cultural transformation models of domination and partnership coexist and are intertwined in our societal context. To advance partnership, then, requires exercising of conscious intention and choice. Design, with its goal to create, can effectively catalyze the partnership model in global and local contexts. Reviewing global examples (UNESCO Creative Cities Network, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and Project Drawdown) and local examples (the National Loon Center in Crosslake, Minnesota and the Southwest Hmong Community Center in Tracy, Minnesota) will show a way to advance partnership more rapidly: using a design thinking/systems thinking lens, insights from ecology and other fields, conscious intention, and the choice of partnership over domination at every opportunity.

**Keywords:** Local Action; Global Impact; Cultural Transformation; Partnership; Systems Thinking; Design Thinking; Butterfly Effect

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## INTRODUCTION

The theme for this issue of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies* (IJPS) reflects the growing understanding that global changes often begin when people take action locally. Communities around the globe are involved in creative community-based actions that promote mutual respect, social and economic justice, and gender and environmental balance. By sharing insights about this work, we hope to empower others to do the same (Editors, 2018).

Where are we in 2018? Our times are significantly characterized by global dissonance and uncertainty, heightened by environmental disasters and their devastating impact (Newkirk, 2018), the rise of extreme right-wing and controlling regimes, state-ordered violence (Simon, 2018), an accelerating and disorienting pace and scope of technology (Friedman, 2015), and global capitalist economics that excludes most people (Raworth, 2017). In the United States, we are faced with an urban-rural divide (Cramer, 2016); political polarization around liberal and conservative viewpoints; ongoing issues around race, immigration and gender; and societal and state-advanced discrimination and violence against minorities (Schwartz, 2018). Domination and its debilitating effects are, unfortunately, on full display locally and globally.

While domination is on the rise, we simultaneously see partnership also rising as a strong counterforce to domination, ameliorating its impacts. With masses of people supporting each other in times of crisis, rooting for and passionately working towards democracy, speaking up against gender discrimination (Zernike & Steele, 2018), violence and state-induced exclusion (Green, E. L., Benner, K. & Pear, R., 2018), and practicing caring, empathy, and respect in small and large groups both locally and globally. This is particularly a time when there is a great need for partnership models, examples, and practices to be seen and understood, communicated, and celebrated with urgency, as a necessary alternative to domination. This article attempts to understand the local

and the global in light of multiple ways of thinking, considers examples of local and global partnership work, and proposes a possible way to advance and accelerate such work in these turbulent times.

In her work on cultural transformation theory, Riane Eisler (2013) elaborates on the definitions and characteristics of domination and partnership, and notes the simultaneous trends in both models:

Today's religious fundamentalism, however, is not an isolated phenomenon. It is part of a larger worldwide regression to the domination model. It has gone along with the again widening gap between haves and have-nots, a mass media that idealizes "heroic" male violence and marginalizes women and anything stereotypically considered feminine, elections where politicians are for sale to the highest bidder, and escalating violence and environmental destruction worldwide. That is the domination side of the picture. Yet there is also the partnership side: the continuing worldwide movement toward real political democracy, environmental sustainability, and economic, social, racial, gender, and family equity. (Eisler, 2013, 285)

## **MEANINGS OF THE WORDS LOCAL AND GLOBAL, AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR PARTNERSHIP WORK**

Word meanings remind us that 'global' means "involving the entire world" and "relating to, or applying to a whole" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2018). 'Local', on the other hand, is "relating to, or characteristic of a particular place" as well as "applicable to part of a whole." (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2018) Another more recent term, 'glocal', combines the two previous words and suggests something that is "characterized by both local and global considerations" (English Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2018).

Ecological thinking has addressed notions of the local and the global for a very long time. It teaches us that living components plus non-living components equals biosystems. These biosystems are interconnected and nested, moving from genetic systems, cell systems, organ systems, organismic systems, and population systems to ecosystems, all of them together constituting the biosphere (Odum, 1975). Further, the field of systems thinking, with its systems theories, also confirms that all things are connected with each other and related in nested systems. In addition, these systems cannot be reduced to their parts. Their systemic properties are in fact “destroyed when a system is dissected into isolated elements” (Capra, 1996).

Another criterion of systems thinking is the ability to shift one’s attention back and forth between system levels and to recognize that each system has a differing level of complexity (Capra, 1996). Systems are also about networks and relationships, and on close examination of system boundaries, further networks and relationships within are revealed. Eisler’s Human Possibilities Theory, of which the above-mentioned cultural transformation theory is a thread, connects the conceptual framework of the partnership/domination continuum to systems theory:

Human possibilities theory is grounded in a holistic/systems perspective that has been gradually emerging. The new conceptual framework of the partnership/domination continuum offers a dynamic/nonlinear rather than mechanistic/linear model for living systems, focused on self-organization rather than predetermined directions. (Eisler, 2013, p. 286)

The above insights suggest that for partnership work to advance, we need to firmly adopt a systems view of the world, intentionally moving away from the mechanistic, object-based way of viewing the world which is so prevalent and obvious in the domination model and its effects around us. We need to ask what system boundaries we are operating within in the partnership work at hand, and recognize the nested

systems and networks within those boundaries to be able to activate them towards partnership. We also need to understand that while the parts and the whole are related, they cannot be analyzed and understood fully at the scale of the part. Rather, they can only be understood contextually, from an understanding of the larger whole. This suggests that when we consider local action and global impact for partnership work, we move back and forth between system levels, and understand local action based on how it shows up in the next scale, all the way up to the global context and vice versa.

Examples of ecological works with local and global impact include Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Published in 1962, this book was a warning of an impending national crisis due to indiscriminate pesticide use, and became a national impetus for change in policies and the establishment of institutions such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), as well as a global clarion call on the environment (Carson, 2002). Thoreau's *Walden*, first published in 1854, recounted a very localized experience about connectedness to a place that involved nuanced observations and experiences of one's immediate surroundings and of living a simple life (Thoreau, 1908). *Walden* also became a global influence, reverberating through time as a call to personal action. Ecological experts continue to explore the dynamics, involving both locally accumulating effects and threshold crossings, through which local environmental actions scale up into global environmental actions (Rudel, 2011).

The field of quantum physics, the study of matter and energy at its most fundamental level, proposes that energy comes in indivisible packets called quanta that behave very differently to macroscopic matter. Particles can behave like waves, and waves behave as though they are particles (Springer Nature Limited, 2018). Quantum theory also suggests that there are no parts in the whole at all, no local or global, but rather there are only patterns in an inseparable and infinite web of relationships. Unlike in the mechanistic worldview, where there are collections of objects, in the quantum worldview there are only relationships, with the boundaries of the relationships

appearing like objects (Capra, 1996; Levy, 2018). The notion of “quantum interconnectedness” is proposed “possibly in the form of instantaneous nonlocal influences across the universe” (Walleczek & Grossing, 2016, p. 2). “For example, when John Bell was asked what the meaning was of nonlocality, he answered that nonlocality ‘... means that what you do here has immediate consequences in remote places” (Mann & Crease, as cited by Walleczek & Grössing, p. 2). In addition,

Nonlocality describes the apparent ability of objects to instantaneously know about each other’s state, even when separated by large distances (potentially even billions of light years), almost as if the universe at large instantaneously arranges its particles in anticipation of future events. (Mastin, 2018)

While these theories have been around for decades, practically speaking, and from the evidence we see around us of fragmented and siloed work in environmental, economic and political systems, a working and applied knowledge of this way of systems thinking and quantum-based thinking is sorely missing in how we act in the world. Those who are engaged in partnership work can start by asking what web of relationships exists in a context, and what patterns are at play in what is possibly a non-local universe even as we take global or local action.

Related to the question of impact on the local and the global, the ‘butterfly effect,’ a model emerging from chaos theory, explored in depth in mathematical and now in other fields (Rickles, Hawe, & Shiell, 2007), reveals that small impacts in one part of the system may be amplified exponentially as they travel through the system from the local to the global. “Minute changes in the system’s initial state will lead over time to large-scale consequences” (Capra, 1996, p. 134). At the scale of the system of the human body, we know that specific, local ailments or problems have the potential to affect the entire, or global, body, and the body itself can respond sometimes in very unpredictable ways (Gawande, 2015), accelerating a downward spiral. We are also

familiar with this kind of unpredictability with weather patterns. Even as storm systems unfold and people nervously anticipate landfall locations and magnitude, climate scientists struggle to accurately predict and make visible possible outcomes through real-time data (Schwabish, 2018). Of course, the disaster-laden climatic events in recent times could be seen as the butterfly effect of human actions on the environment.

For partnership work, we can therefore assume from the above examples that while the local and the global are inextricably connected given the complex and dynamic systems that the work takes place in, the overall effects are not always accurately predictable in specifics and magnitude.

Integral thinkers such as Sri Aurobindo, Ken Wilber, and others have also approached the question of the local and the global from a being and consciousness perspective. Wilber's AQAL (All Quadrants, All Levels) map identifies multiple worldviews, waves, levels, or stages, operating in a developmental evolutionary pattern (Phipps, 2012). AQAL "...is shorthand for 'all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, all types'". These five crucial elements represent the fewest possible factors required to create the fullest possible understanding of the universe—from the Big Bang to the evolution of life to the astonishing breadth of human thought and human development" (Wilber, 2014).

Others have made the argument that because of such connectedness and the fact that humans are a significant part of the larger system, they as localized units can affect larger systems they inhabit. They suggest that humans constitute connected parts in the collective global body of humanity of which we are each local, "imaginal" cells (Hubbard, 2017), and therefore actions by these parts at a local level can affect the whole at a global level. The key aspect suggested in many of these models is that the process is evolutionary, moving to greater capacities of being and action, that include relationship and partnership (Phipps, 2012; Wilber, 2014).

An examination of the ideas of the ‘local’ and the ‘global’ in light of the above-mentioned ways of thinking raises questions of underlying assumptions and contexts. While the ecological perspective expands the sense of the local to the global as part of nested systems, systems thinking establishes the interconnectedness of the parts themselves, defying analysis. Furthermore, quantum physics suggests ephemerality and non-reality of boundaries of so-called ‘objects’, and emphasizes relationships and non-locality. Chaos theory suggests unpredictably amplified outcomes of actions. Integral thinking suggests an evolutionary process coexisting and occurring simultaneously in different contexts.

A move towards advancing partnership action will do well to recognize that partnership will mean different things to different people based on their implicit theoretical assumptions. If the practice of partnership went hand in hand with recognizing that we are in complex, dynamic systems, where parts have no fixed boundaries but are in relationships, this may help in some way.

## **CONSCIOUS INTENTION AND DESIGN ACTION IN PARTNERSHIP**

Does conscious intention influence local and global action? *The Intention Experiment* by Lynne McTaggart documents an “array of experiments showing the power of intention to influence the worlds within and around us” (Fauver, 2009). McTaggart’s work shows examples of conscious and targeted intention for healing and other collective actions as well as readings of collective consciousness in moments of global transformation such as during the events of 9/11 (McTaggart, 2007). Other studies in the context of Distant Healing Intentional therapies also show some effectiveness, although not conclusively. The authors do identify that this conclusion may be the effect of the tools used to assess scientific evidence. “...[I]t is inadvisable to use a sledgehammer to study the surface structure of a soap bubble” (Radin, Schlitz, & Baur, 2015, p. 70).



Conscious intention and action may be key in disconnecting from the domination paradigm while advancing a partnership paradigm at every opportunity and at an accelerated speed. The way forward for partnership work and an inclusive and equitable future may be to recognize the role of intention and choice of one paradigm, partnership, over the other, domination. If partnership and domination models are simultaneously present and embedded in our systems, as they seem to be, then making intentional choices towards partnership, individually and collectively, at every opportunity may be the way to accelerate partnership work. This is important because domination systems, and those under the spell of domination, will likely not relinquish control of their own accord. Instead they must be rendered ineffective by the power of accelerating partnership. And as quantum physics suggests, such interconnected movement and local and global action may be possible in ways we do not fully understand.

Design thinking, another unique way of thinking, has the ability to *create, see patterns, move/work across scales* and *make things visible* (Singh, 2015; Weerts, Rasmussen & Singh, 2016) that can help advance intentional partnership. In previous articles I have noted a synergistic relationship between partnership and design, and the benefits of applying the partnership model to the field of design: The design process itself will benefit from applying cultural transformation theory. Most designers intend their designs to benefit the community and the users they are serving. A deeper understanding of this theory and of the partnership/domination continuum would aid designers and users (Singh, 2015, p. 18).

I also suggested that the following questions might be asked as part of any design process: Does the process support a structure in which partnership is possible? Does it genuinely engage participants in an inclusive way? Who is included? Does this design inadvertently accept or reinforce violence and abuse? If so, how can that be changed? How does the design and its process specifically support empathic and mutually

respectful relations? How can the fields of design and design thinking play an intentional role in evolving cultures towards the partnership model? (Singh, 2015). Further ahead in this article, design partnership applications at a local level will be discussed.

## **GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP EXAMPLES**

Next, let's consider some specific partnership examples and reflect on them based on the ideas proposed. The global examples are the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Creative Cities Network (UCCN), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and Project Drawdown. All three are connected to environmental and cultural issues and are simultaneously local and global in some way. The local example is the program Design for Community Resilience in Minnesota.

### **The UNESCO Creative Cities Network**

UCCN is a global network that leverages urban areas “making culture and creativity a driving force for sustainable development and urban regeneration through the stimulation of growth and innovation and the promotion of social cohesion, citizen well-being and inter-cultural dialogue” (UCCN, 2017). Cities now hold more than half the world's population and three quarters of its economic activity, including a large share of the creative economy. UCCN sees the crucial role of cities in promoting sustainable development focused on people and the respect of human rights, and relates its work to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which identifies culture and creativity as one of the essential levers for action and includes among its 17 goals the specific goal to “Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (United Nations, n.d.).

I and a colleague from Minnesota had the opportunity to attend the UCCN Annual Meeting in Östersund, Sweden in September 2016 to present our sustainable development- and design thinking- related work. We experienced first-hand the pre-

conference “Valuing and Evaluating Creativity for Sustainable Regional Development,” organized by Mid Sweden University in Östersund and designed to support research and evaluation needs of the UCCN. The Annual Meeting itself gathered over 250 participants, including 22 mayors, representing nearly 100 of the 116 Creative Cities in 54 countries worldwide (UCCN, 2017).

Attending the Meeting was a transformative experience, and I was able to observe the network and its partnership efforts at close range. Exchanging ideas and projects, sharing knowledge and practices, developing future inter-cities partnerships to make culture and creativity essential drivers of sustainable urban development, and exploring the links between urban and rural areas were some of the themes of the meeting. AnnSofie Andersson, Mayor of Östersund, remarked, “This meeting was a great opportunity to broaden the understanding that urban and rural spaces are mutually connected to each other, and that this linkage is a future issue of sustainable development in all regions worldwide.”

A highlight of the Meeting was the Mayors’ Meeting, gathering 22 local authorities and enabling the sharing of diverse approaches and practical experiences from different regions around the world aimed at harnessing creativity for social, economic, and environmental development and reinforcing support for the Network at the political level (UCCN, 2017). The Meeting in Östersund was associated with a cultural program including regional artists, creators, and entrepreneurs in the fields of creativity and gastronomy.

The pre-conference and Annual Meeting overwhelmingly came across as a partnership effort, strongly reinforcing notions of global unity, starting with recognition of local indigenous people, the Sami, and constructing experiences of local connections with the land, with regional farmers and volunteers, and integrated with authentic experiences of the arts (music, theater, visual art and crafts) and gastronomy. Efforts

like the UCCN bridge the local and the global, and build intercontinental and international networks and communities that serve in partnership and collaboration. As my colleague and I experienced, the profound experience of the UCCN Meeting also served as an opportunity to reflect and understand our own work in Minnesota better in relation to global work. We also got to know about UCCN work happening in other parts of the United States such as Iowa and Austin, Texas.

While there was a strong sense of global network at the event, I noted that the UCCN and their work were not familiar to most of the people in my networks in Minnesota, despite being in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis & St. Paul, a well-known creative hub. Perhaps this lack of awareness provides evidence that the connections between the global and the local are not always uniform and comprehensive.

### **The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)**

The IPCC is another example of a strong partnership delivering incredibly important work at a global level. The IPCC is the leading international body for the assessment of climate change. Established by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in 1988, and endorsed by the UN General Assembly, the IPCC provides the world with a clear scientific view on the current state of knowledge in climate change and its potential environmental and socio-economic impacts (IPCC, 2018).

Currently 195 countries are members of the UN; membership on the IPCC is open to all member countries of the UN and the WMO. The IPCC does not conduct any research, nor does it monitor climate-related data or parameters, but reviews and assesses the most recent scientific, technical, and socio-economic information produced worldwide relevant to the understanding of climate change. Thousands of scientists from all over the world contribute to the work of the IPCC. The IPCC provides rigorous and balanced scientific information to decision makers; by endorsing the IPCC reports, governments

acknowledge the authority of their scientific content. The work of the organization is considered policy-relevant and yet policy-neutral but not policy-prescriptive (IPCC, 2018).

At the end of 2007, the IPCC was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Over the years, the participation of the scientific community in the work of the IPCC has grown significantly, in terms of the number of authors and contributors involved in writing and reviewing the reports, geographical distribution of authors, and the topics covered by the reports.

For the Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC, a total of 831 experts were originally selected as Coordinating Lead Authors, Lead Authors, and Review Editors from 3,598 nominations across the three Working Groups. Coordinating Lead Authors and Lead Authors have collective responsibility for the contents of a chapter. Balanced assessment of the full range of scientific views, protected from the influence of special interests, is supported through the method of author team selection, multiple rounds of review of each report, and IPCC's Conflict of Interest Policy.

In October 2018, the IPCC released "Global Warming of 1.5°C", a special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty. The sections of the special report included:

- A. Understanding Global Warming of 1.5°C
- B. Projected Climate Change, Potential Impacts and Associated Risks
- C. Emission Pathways and System Transitions Consistent with 1.5°C Global Warming

#### D. Strengthening the Global Response in the Context of Sustainable Development and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty (IPCC, 2018)

A report headline is included below, and some key themes, for some detail to highlight some of the impact of IPCC's work at the global and local level on environmental and industrial systems:

A1. Human activities are estimated to have caused approximately 1.0°C of global warming above pre-industrial levels, with a likely range of 0.8°C to 1.2°C. Global warming is likely to reach 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052 if it continues to increase at the current rate (high confidence). (IPCC Headline Statements, 2018, p.1-3).

Other emerging themes obvious from the headline statements are:

- Projections of robust differences in regional climate characteristics including increases in mean temperature in most land and ocean regions; hot extremes in most inhabited regions; heavy precipitation in several regions, and the probability of drought and precipitation deficits in some regions.
- Pathways limiting global warming requiring rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure (including transport and buildings); industrial systems at an unprecedented in terms of scale and implying deep emissions reductions in all sectors; a wide portfolio of mitigation options and a significant upscaling of investments in those options.
- Need to strengthen the capacities for climate action of national and sub-national authorities, civil society, the private sector, indigenous peoples and local communities to support the implementation of ambitious actions.
- International cooperation to provide an enabling environment for this to be achieved in all countries and for all people, in the context of sustainable development.

As is obvious from the above material, the IPCC is a robust global partnership effort with local involvement and authors as evidenced by its list of authors across many countries and regions. It is to be noted from the excerpts of the sobering special report released in October 2018, that the results continue to identify humans as the cause of climate change - thus reinforcing the idea that a part of the system influences the whole - and predict the foreseeable impacts of climate change on both global and local levels with varying degree of predictability or 'confidence.'

What the IPCC Special Report also reveals is the dire need for a similar massive global partnership effort to address the problems in terms of global action. It is a sobering reminder of the systemic nature of the global problems we are facing, with unpredictable effects needing collective measures and the additional challenges of addressing social inequities while meeting people's needs, including the needs of indigenous communities.

### **Project Drawdown**

Project Drawdown, the third example of a global partnership effort, is a non-governmental decentralized partnership between experts (Drawdown, 2018). Project Drawdown gathers and facilitates a broad coalition of researchers, scientists, graduate students, PhDs, post-docs, policy makers, business leaders, and activists to assemble and present the best available information on climate solutions in order to describe their beneficial financial, social, and environmental impact over the next 30 years (Drawdown, 2018a).

The project posits that climate solutions and their full range and beneficial impact have not been explained in a way that "bridges the divide between urgency and agency" (Drawdown, 2018a) It quotes Dr. Leon Clark, one of the lead authors of the IPCC Fifth Assessment, who wrote, "We have the technologies, but we really have no sense of what it would take to deploy them at scale" (Drawdown, 2018a). The goal of Drawdown

is to tap the aspirations of people who want to enact meaningful solutions to reverse global warming. Gathering a qualified and diverse group of researchers from around the world to identify, research, and model the 100 most substantive existing solutions to address climate change, Drawdown has uncovered “a path forward that can roll back global greenhouse gas emissions within thirty years” (Drawdown, 2018a). The research done by Drawdown suggests that the means and techniques are currently available, and nothing new needs to be invented. Rather, Drawdown sees humanity’s task as being to “accelerate the knowledge and growth of what is possible as soon as possible” (Drawdown, 2018b).

While the results of Drawdown remain to be seen, clearly the vision has been mobilized and awareness created in the professional community, and the prototyping has begun. The data and metrics are not yet clear on the website but can be explored further. This is clearly a partnership and action effort to be watched and learned from.

## **LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS**

While the three efforts examined so far have been instituted at a global level with some local implementation and implications, the work for which I led the design process has been very much at a local level. The design work was led at the University of Minnesota’s Center for Sustainable Building Research (CSBR) in the College of Design. The Design for Community Resilience program (DCR) serves Minnesota communities who seek design help, often in greater Minnesota, by engaging partners and community members in a design process for a building or landscape or small-scale urban development. The outcome of the design process is usually a clear vision addressing environmental, economic, and social aspects of the project, a design master plan with recommendations and design drawings for the community’s future use in fundraising and implementation.



The DCR projects described here were carried out in close partnership with the University of Minnesota Extension's Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships (RSDP) who offer grants to the communities for sustainable development work that also engages university expertise and resources. RSDP has an established process that partners with community representatives during the seeking funding phase long before the project begins. Once the project launches, each design project starts with welcoming the community partner to the process. The community partner representative is invited to bring additional community members to best represent varied community interests and to participate in the weekly project planning phone calls. Together, the Planning Team comprising community and university team members of which the Design Team is a part, plans the inclusion of the broader community in three larger community design workshops that are held during the duration of the project. The first workshop is intended to create understanding of community needs and aspirations; the second, to share possible design scenarios for community feedback; and the final meeting, to present the near-complete or complete project to the community. This process has consistently worked well, although it has developed differently in each project based on community context, nature of the design project, site, and other factors.

The first project described here is the National Loon Center project in Crosslake, Minnesota and the second project is the Southwest Hmong Community Center, *Tsev Nqeeb* on the Prairie, a project in Tracy, Minnesota. Both projects involved deep and broad partnerships that were core to the design process and outcomes. The first project was driven by the idea of partnership and design with nature and across species (for example, loons and their habitat); the second was driven by the idea of advancing partnership and design with a Hmong community in a rural context within a predominantly white population of European descent in Southwestern Minnesota.

### **National Loon Center in Crosslake, Minnesota**

The National Loon Center (NLC) is a community-driven project led by the National Loon Center Foundation, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt non-profit organization, and its many partners in Crosslake and the Whitefish Chain of Lakes area near Brainerd, Minnesota. The project focuses on loons and their unique relationship with the shared freshwater ecosystem in the area, fish and wildlife management, environmental stewardship, trails, tourism, recreation, education, and long-term sustainability.

The research and participatory design process, conducted from June to December 2017, were facilitated by the DCR program at the CSBR in the College of Design at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. The NLC project has three goals. First, from an environmental perspective, the project seeks to improve on the co-existence of humans and loons in a shared natural habitat. While the Whitefish Chain of Lakes includes some of the state's healthiest lakes, there is evidence that water quality and loon habitat in the area are under threat. The NLC wishes to set a good example of stewardship of loons and of natural resources and waterways through careful development and educational programs, working in partnership with other agencies such as the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR).

Second, from an economic perspective, goal of the NLC is to create a place of year-round attraction that will not only help promote water resource and wildlife protection but also serve as a significant economic driver in the area by being a hotspot for educational tourism in an area that already has significant recreational tourism. It hopes to achieve the economic goal in partnership with entities such as the Brainerd Lakes Chamber of Commerce and the Crosslake Chamber of Commerce. Third, from a social perspective, a goal of the NLC is to become a community hub for local residents and visitors and a place where the intergenerational community gathers, learns, socializes, and celebrates events (Singh & Polacek, 2017).

The large-scale potential impact of this project is that it has the opportunity to model sustainable and regenerative design on the Whitefish Chain of Lakes and beyond. About 200,000 visitors (local, regional, and some national) come to the Pine River Dam recreational area and campground on which the building will be located. Loons migrate all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico, and this geographical connection has been heightened by the oil spill a few years ago that negatively affected the loon habitat in the Gulf. In the case of the National Loon Center project, the partnership was initially developed between the Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, the National Loon Center Foundation, and the CSBR as members of the Planning Team. The rest developed from there. The process genuinely engaged participants in multiple ways. Community engagement on this project happened with two groups: local partnering organizations and members of the broader community. The long list of partners involved in the project, including the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the Brainerd Lakes Chamber of Commerce, continued to expand during the project. Community members were invited by an open call and by getting the word out in multiple ways.

An important decision along the way was choosing one of the two possible sites; the site chosen was in downtown Crosslake on the Pine River Dam site, with a campground that already served around 200,000 visitors annually, rather than a pristine site that would need additional road development and other infrastructure and was located further away from downtown.

On DCR design projects, determining that partnership is foundational to the structure of the project in the first step. Using the design process in service of the community's aspirations and goals is another way of supporting empathic and mutually reinforcing relations. On the NLC project, because there were so many partnerships, there were also many mindsets and ways of operating, sometimes leading to misunderstandings. For us as the design team facilitating the project, there were distinct opportunities to

support and develop partnerships. On multiple occasions, when there were some disconnects or tensions between parties, the design team played a facilitator role to invite feedback and input from all parties, thus advancing the potential for partnership. These attempts had favorable outcomes. At other times the project revealed areas for further work. One aspect that I noted and brought up during the discussions and included as part of the recommendations was that the project needs to acknowledge and represent the Native history of the region and the presence of Native American communities in that location historically, as a temporary presence on Crosslake and a settlement on Gull Lake on the Whitefish Chain of Lakes, of which Crosslake is one.

### **Southwest Hmong Community Center: *Tsev Nqeeb* on the Prairie**

*Tsev Nqeeb* translates as a traditional Hmong house or hut. *Tsev* means house, and *nqeeb* refers to the grass materials used to roof a traditional Hmong house. The name *Tsev Nqeeb* on the Prairie was selected to convey the essence of what it means to have a community center for the Hmong community in Southwest Minnesota.

The Southwest Hmong Community Center (SWHCC) is a community-driven project led by Project Uniting Southwest Hmong (PUSH), intended to serve the cities of Tracy and Walnut Grove, and surrounding areas of Southwest Minnesota. The design project focused on a site with existing buildings in the city of Tracy, and developed a master plan that meets community needs, including a community gathering space, a cultural museum, a renovated greenhouse, a new cold climate winter greenhouse, a farmer's market, a daycare center, a cafe, and areas for food growing and community gardens (Singh & Chang, 2018).

The goals of the SWHCC project addressed social and cultural sustainability, environmental sustainability, and economic sustainability for the Hmong community and, wherever possible, for larger communities of Tracy and Walnut Grove.

The research and participatory design process were conducted from February to June 2018, and were facilitated by the Design for Community Resilience program at the Center for Sustainable Building Research, College of Design, University of Minnesota Twin Cities. It was funded by the Southwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships (SWRSDP), Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA), and PUSH. The site considered for the master plan was located on Highway 14 in the city of Tracy. With annual average daily traffic counts from the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) an estimated 2550 per day, the site had high visibility. The site also had existing buildings that require renovation and expansion, and land for food growing needs of community members from the Tracy and Walnut Grove areas. Areas of focus were:

- Provide the Hmong community of the region spaces to preserve, celebrate and practice traditions.
- Design a place that the Hmong community can use for education, entertainment, exercise, and farming.
- Create a place that introduces Hmong culture and art to the public and promotes youth awareness of Hmong culture, tradition, and history.
- Create a place that invites cross-cultural interaction and use by the larger Tracy community.

The project involved community stakeholders from the Tracy and Walnut Grove communities, as well as some city, county, and other partners in the planning and feedback process. It marked an important shift in DCR and RSDP's work. While most projects are connected for majority populations in Minnesota communities, this project was an opportunity to meet the needs of the Hmong Community in Southwest Minnesota and give voice to their ideas and aspirations through design. While the Hmong community has been present in southwest Minnesota over the last 25 years, with 200 families in the Tracy and Walnut Grove area, this was likely the first opportunity to

envision a community center, and there was much community excitement about the project.

While community engagement in previous DCR projects was marked by large attendance in community workshops, this project had smaller representation, due to cultural factors including the Hmong community not being familiar with a community input process. The timing of the workshops was shifted to weekends to address the fact that work schedules provided a logistical challenge for people to attend.

In the SHWCC project, the initial partnership was developed between the Southwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, the CSBR, and PUSH as the planning team. The rest developed from that point. PUSH had already done work on getting substantive input from community members about what a potential community center might include, before the design team was involved, which helped advance the project design process.

Reflecting on both of the projects, it can be said that they genuinely engaged participants in an inclusive way, including broad participation of more than 200 people over the course of the NLC project. While a much smaller number of community members participated in the SWHCC project, the more personal interactions were very effective, as we heard in the debriefing sessions after the project.

In terms of design inadvertently accepting or reinforcing violence and abuse, the main thought that comes to mind is the heavy-handed impact of buildings on the environment. This continues to bring up the need to practice sustainable and regenerative design, which was accomplished in both projects.

When design and its process are practiced in a participatory way, as was done in both the NLC and SWHCC projects, it specifically supports empathic and mutually respectful

relations. It has the opportunity to build collaborative relationships between entities including the community and the university but can also play a role in catalyzing a vision for the future, evolved iteratively with input from different stakeholders. Because design and design thinking can in this way play an intentional role in evolving cultures towards the partnership model, it is a critical method for furthering a partnership future.

Reflecting on the global and the local, in the NLC project maximum partnerships were active at the local level, with interested partners at the state level and possible federal level funding sources/partners; these partnerships have continued to grow after this phase of the project was completed. The NLC project operated at a system level, and implicitly recognized that the systems were nested, moving from local to regional, state and federal levels. In the SWHCC project, maximum partnerships were active at the local level, with interested partners at the state level and possible federal level funding sources/partners. The SWHCC project was very much a local project in the sense of the region, and was not as connected to the state level or national level.

Speaking of 'quantum' and invisible and unexpected connections, I personally experienced contacts from individuals unconnected with the NLC project offering to donate funds to the project in ways that I had not experienced on other projects. This was attributed to the 'magic' of loons, birds that are dear to many people and inspire imagination with their unique appearance, calls, and behaviors. On the SWHCC project, synergies were experienced during the project as well as barriers - the community workshop had to be rescheduled twice because of snowstorms.

Conscious intention was very much part of the projects, with the RSDP, the NLC, and DCR team actively engaging in the partnership in many ways and reinforcing a commitment to partnership at every turn, which helps sustain the project when things are not going as planned or differences of viewpoint arise.

As mentioned above, design played a critical role in the process of creativity and shaping ideas, using design expertise and integrating ideas/aspirations/desires of community partners to explore divergent ways of thinking as well as converging ideas. On both projects, the design engagement was really valued in advancing the work; in the SWHCC project it was a new experience for the community, offering an opportunity to learn about design even as the process advanced community goals.

### **ACTION STEPS FOR ADVANCING PARTNERSHIP**

Finally, here are possible action steps for advancing local and global partnership action for our future:

- Recognize the interconnectedness of the global and the local using systems thinking and a quantum reality lens. This will need a deeper understanding and study of systems thinking and quantum physics and recognition of the pitfalls of a mechanistic worldview embedded in domination models.
- Set conscious individual and collective intentions to empower partnership models while taking immediate actions both at a local and a global level and in the nested systems in which the work is based. This is important particularly when systems of domination are the default and seem more attractive than partnership.
- Use design thinking wherever and whenever possible as the creative force underlying actions.
- Recognize the sense of urgency and action in the partnership model exemplars both at the global and the local level, and use effective measures to advance them. More focus on connecting the global to the local and vice versa may be helpful.
- Apply the new approach, test, and repeat; share results and learnings broadly; and continue the journey.



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