

LiFT Case Book

LiFT Leadership
for Transition

Hosting Collaboratories: Insights and learnings from different cases

Editors: Iris Kunze, Elke Fein



6. Collaboratory in the Ecovillage Sieben Linden

By Iris Kunze

*with reflections from Elke Fein, Tim Strasser, Denis Knubel, Karin Lück,
Bettina Geiken, Gertrud Menzel, Karin Persson Haas, Marina Hammer, Toni Bünemann,
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Final editing: Elke Fein

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Hard facts

Date: Thursday, June 2nd till Monday (Pentecost holiday) June 5th, 2017
Place: Ecovillage of Sieben Linden (Germany)
Host: Association Freundeskreis Sieben Linden
Participants: 60, living in 15 different communities, mostly across Germany, invited by the host plus 50 children in the co-program
Topic: Growing up in community: ecovillage children – between community and society
Facilitators: Iris Kunze, Elke Fein, Bettina Geiken, Toni Bünemann, Collin Bootsvelde
Duration: 3,5 days
Language: German

Specific challenges

- A group of mostly very active community people, very well familiar with a wide range of process, and facilitation methods – and with a number of specific habits and traditions in terms of communication and facilitating group concerns, including a strong emphasis on the personal/emotional level, rather than integrating emotional and mental dimensions
- Rather personal topic, inviting to reflect on personal experiences of participants.
- The author of this case study simultaneously holding multiple roles: as the initiator, one of the LiFT facilitators and a member of the hosting community, living there.
- Integrating children into the process, as part of a larger intergenerational camp

Specific resources:

- Comparatively long, intense preparation phase (over 1 year, in good contact with the host)
- Good, often professional experience with running group processes in the hosting network
- Experiential knowledge of the field by the author/LiFT team member, living in the ecovillage.
- Adequate, experienced seminar center as location

Main learnings:

- It is crucial to maximally clarify roles, responsibilities and goals together with the hosting network in advance, i.e. by a formal assignment between facilitation team hosts.
- Adapting the Collaboratory to a specific cultural field is possible (and often necessary) to some extent. Yet, despite or because of an existing strong community culture, clear and (charismatic) leadership can be crucial in order to invite participants to go beyond habitual practices if needed.
- When working in a culturally rather homogeneous context, it appears particularly important to inquire into certain blind spots or resistances (together with the host, possibly also with the participants themselves) which the process can help to explore. The setting should be arranged adequately to challenge these blind spots.

A. The context and preparation of the Collaboratory

Place

[Ecovillage Sieben Linden](#) is a community built and organized by its today 140 residents. It runs an education centre and has become famous for its sustainable way of living and ecological straw bale house building technology. It is located in a remote rural area in the municipality of Beetzendorf, in the state of Sachsen-Anhalt (East Germany). Before the ecovillage settled in Sieben Linden, early members had founded a free school. A number of children have been raised in the community since its foundation more than 20 years ago.

The ecovillage Sieben Linden was founded in the late 1980s as a group of people intending to live more ecologically and communally. After the Berlin wall came down, they first bought a farm, the so called project centre of 'Chüden', in 1993 to experiment with daily living together. In 1997, the property of 'Sieben Linden' in East Germany was bought. The land is owned by a cooperative, and the ecovillage members are shareholders in a second cooperative which supports the members to build eco-houses in groups of about 10 to 20 people. The community designed a completely new ecovillage: No paved roads, no street lights, no cars, eco-houses built with regional materials in the self-developed straw-bale-clay house building style. With 140 inhabitants today, the long-term goal is a reduction of its own ecological footprint in all areas of life. So far, the community has cut it down to one third of the average ecological footprint in Germany. The ecovillage shares its experience and knowledge with the public through a diverse range of educational offerings.

Hosting Organizations, networks and partners involved

One hosting and two collaborating organizations were involved in this Collaboratory. This was due to do the nature of this Collaboratory which was had been conceived as part of a larger event held at the occasion of Sieben Linden's 20th birthday. The idea was to have a festival for adults and children of all ages, with plenty of interaction between them in playful and creative ways (see also section on issue) as a larger contextual frame for the Collaboratory process mostly addressing the adults.

The host: The ecovillage movement and the Seminar centre of Sieben Linden

The event was hosted by the ecovillage of Sieben Linden, more precisely by the "Freundeskreis association" who runs the seminar centre of the Ecovillage Sieben Linden (<https://siebenlinden.org/de/seminare/calendar/>). It was conceived as a conference of six days, with full board and accommodation for all participants. As a professional seminar provider, the community seminar centre has its own service for welcoming guest, introducing the place and giving tours through the ecovillage.

Furthermore, the event was supported by the Global Ecovillage Network ([GEN](#)) and more concretely by two of its branches. First, the association of ecovillages in Germany ([GEN Germany](#)) provided support with advertising the event within the community movement at its annual conference. Second, [Next GEN](#), the network of teenagers and young people inside GEN, also communicated the event. The vision and ideals of the ecovillage movement served as guiding principles for this event. GEN envisions a world of empowered citizens and communities, designing and implementing their own pathways to a sustainable future, and building bridges of hope and international solidarity.

The initiators and core team members

The core team emerged around the main topic, chosen by Simone, a mother from Sieben Linden who, at the same time, is the manager of the seminar center. She then asked other people to join and organize the event together with her. In result, four more people were attracted and joined the core team preparing the event:

1. a young woman of 19 years, who had grown up in 7Linden and was a passionate young networker between communities, as well as a board member of *Next GEN* and an intern at the seminar centre of 7Linden;
2. a learning assistant (teacher) of the village school of the community of *Schloss Tempelhof*, there;
3. a mother of four children, singer and ritual worker from Tempelhof; and
4. a vision quest trainer for teenagers from the community *Hollerhof* who joined the team after the GEN Germany conference.

A nice aspect of having the community movement as a host was that many people came in and helped out at various occasions and were active in making it a success. For instance, a team of three people was hired (financed by the participants) and provided a side-program for smaller children, running in parallel to the Collaboratory, together with the Sieben Linden forest kindergarten. A filmmaker ('filming for change') came in to hold a filming workshop for teenagers between 9 and 13, and ultimately produced a documentary about the whole event with them (<https://vimeo.com/236609517>).

How LiFT met Sieben Linden and this topic

The story of how LiFT and Sieben Linden came together for organizing a Collaboratory has to do with the author of this report holding two roles – first as a LiFT partner (and co-facilitator) and second, as a researcher on ecovillages, who had been living at Sieben Linden herself for some time as well. During the preparation phase of the event, the author had moved to Sieben Linden and become a member of the community. When she and Simone (holding the topic of raising children in communities) came together, the idea of hosting a Collaboratory in Sieben Linden was born.

The author had different possible issues for the Collaboratory in mind before, like governance in communities or an exchange between communities and their regions which she presented and invited support for during the general assembly of Sieben Linden in March 2016. After some exploratory conversations, no community member really caught fire for this though. However, Simone came up with her vision to have a larger gathering amongst community people about the topic of raising children in community. She had felt a need and felt personally moved to do explore and build momentum around this already for many years and did not know what a suitable frame could look like. So we explored the idea of using the Collaboratory as a possible frame and decided to try this out.

Issue at stake, concern and main focus

Why and how is raising children an issue for communities and Sieben Linden?

The topic of raising and educating children has been an important issue in the community networks, including in Sieben Linden, for a long time, and has been debated back and forth for more than 20 years. Therefore, inhabitants were happy to take the opportunity to have an external facilitation team available, supporting them to dive deeper into it.

Intentional communities generally aim at high-level holistic values such as living ecologically in their communities on a sustainable basis. In fact, living in community brings a lot of diverse, yet interconnected topics and challenges closely together. This includes the challenge of raising children in alignment with the community's core values, i.e. founding its own, free schools, including intergenerational learning and education. It also includes finding very practical solutions for common meals, a shared economy or ecological ways to build their houses. However, this case study focuses on the question of how to raise children, starting with Sieben Linden's claim to give an example of what holistic education can involve and how community can be an area of personal growth and learning:

"Living together in Sieben Linden means to learn from each other, regardless of age, social background and walks of life. Children here enjoy an environment full of opportunities for development and with many playfellows. They visit the forest kindergarten and the local free and state schools. For teens and other young persons, trainees and alumni of voluntary services, Sieben Linden is an eclectic place of experiences and learning opportunities. People with special needs are cared for in great appreciation of their life experiences." (From the 7Linden website <https://siebenlinden.org/de/oekodorf/soziales/>)

Based on the community's ecological principles, the members want their children to be raised in a community and in a rather natural environment, based on those values. This becomes visible in different areas and implies specific ways of communication and exchange:

1. The community's worldview on education and how to raise children touches right upon their idea of human life and its value. People who build and join communities usually do this in order to be able to live their own values. In many cases, they have struggled with more conventional ways of living, economic organization and education. Even though it is generally like-minded people who come together in a community, there is still a considerable potential for disagreements and differences between the members' specific and individual approaches. This is partly due to the fact that while most communities have been founded based on the idea of ecological living and personal growth, education has often not been an integral part of their common vision.
2. Over the years of living together, some Sieben Linden members have noticed that leaving educational paths and choices up to individual parents is not functional. For living together so closely also implies organising childcare – and thus actually raising the children together. Some find that this requires a common ground about education in order to not confuse the children.
3. The question of how to implement progressive ideals on education in communities also touches the domain of official state education as it is done in kindergarten and school. The ecovillage initiative of Sieben Linden, for instance, had founded a free school in 1993 at their first site, before the current estate was bought in 1997. This free school in a village named Depekolk is now about 40 km away. Also, the ecovillage 7 Linden is growing, and had soon had founded a forest kindergarten which has been operating successfully until today and is also open to children from the surrounding region. Two attempts to found a free school in Sieben Linden failed over the years. The school situation is therefore not satisfying. Due to the remote location of the ecovillage, children have to commute long distances to the free school and to a Steiner school some 50 km away. Some go to the nearby village school where they have problems with mobbing and exclusion because of their ecovillage background.

The leader of the 7Linden seminar center and main host is a long-term member of the ecovillage, having lived there for about 15 years. She also raised all of her four children there together with her husband. She and many other parents have gone through various challenges concerning raising children in Sieben Linden. Although the ecovillage had set up some successful structures, the parents are willing to make improvements regarding some of the remaining problems. They are also motivated to learn and develop the community holistically, including the area of raising children, education, generational relations and peer dynamics amongst children and teenagers in the community. For instance, in the ecovillage of Tempelhof, the third attempt for founding a free school was successful. Sieben Linden and other communities were interested to learn about his.

To sum up, there is a great variety of issues, ambitions and open questions among community members, which was part of the challenge the Collaboratory aimed to address. What's more, the topic of raising and educating children has a very personal dimension to it, touching emotional dimensions, personal ideals and visions concerning the private life of parents, teenagers and children.

Aims of the Collaboratory in relation to the topic

From the perspective of the hosts, the aim of the Collaboratory was to create a space for exchanging and aligning ideas around the overall topic of raising children in community. This also included trying to walk the talk by actually practicing community and intergenerational living together during the very event at the ecovillage Sieben Linden camp site. The hosts have 20 years of experience with this kind of events through their annual summer camps, but they still wanted to improve the situation. Another long-term-aim was to establish a regular group in the community network in Germany to work on the topic of pedagogical approaches, education and innovative schooling in the community context and ideally come up with new insights, ideas and better approaches in this regard. The hosts expected the LiFT team to facilitate their process of exchange and creating new projects together.

Participants' and their familiarity with process-oriented group methods

The target group invited to this LiFT event consisted of parents and families living in communities, as well as teachers, educators and anyone interested in the topic of different generations living together in a community. It was the wish of the host to only invite people who actually live in a community in order to have enough common ground between participants and similar experiences to build on. This was because their experience with other events is that an open invitation tends to cause a long Q&A session about communal living in general, which would not be attractive for community members. For them to come to the event, it needed a specific space of trust and shared interest with other people from the community network in order to be able to exchange experiences and feel understood. The event attracted a total of 115 participants from 15 different communities, mostly across Germany.¹

Most intentional communities have made use of a wide range of facilitation methods and deeper group processes in order to come into being and creating ongoing exchange and alignment between their own members. Hosting a Collaboratory process in such an "experienced" environment, where most participants were used to group processes in their everyday life, was a rare opportunity. In

¹ From the communities of: Lebenstraum-Gemeinschaft Jahnishausen, Schloss Tonndorf, Lauter Leben, Haslachhof, ÖkoLea, Ökodorf Sieben Linden, Lebensgarten Steyerberg, ZEGG, Schloss Tempelhof, wagnisArt, gASTWERKe, Heckenbeck, Tamera (Portugal), Matavenero (Spain), Findhorn (Scotland).

order to be able to deal with the challenges of creating the necessary functional systems of a community they have developed process-based methods to go beyond rational discussion, providing space to share deep personal sensitivities, emotions and feelings. Over more than 20 years, those communities have managed to realise cooperative ownership and community life and have therefore used and elaborated methods of collaborative inquiry in their daily organizational life. These include the 'ZEGG Forum'², non-violent communication (Rosenberg 2003), Dragon Dreaming³, Community Building (Peck 2005), possibility management⁴, and decision-making methods like systemic consensus or sociocracy.

The community movement in Germany, Switzerland and Austria is generally characterized by a lively exchange and intensive networking activities. Therefore, a large number of people know and have experienced each other in group processes before which also helped to create a deeper level of personal trust in the LiFT event from the beginning.

The Collaboratory method itself is not known yet in the community movement; Scharmers' theory U is only known by some people.

The preparation phase

The following section introduces the process of preparing the Collaboratory in collaboration between the facilitation team and the hosts, including the recruitment of participants and topic holders, building and agreeing on the designs, schedule, content and logistics of the event. Preparation started about a year ahead of the event, with the author, Iris Kunze, attending two ecovillage meetings to present the overall idea and another 1,5 days preparatory meeting between two LiFT team members and four members of the local preparation team, about two months ahead.

Recruitment of active topic holders

Simone's intention to host a large event on growing up in community was motivated by the desire to constantly learn and improve things in the ecovillage, including the situation of children. Through networking in the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), the communities know each other and learn from each other. The host therefore used this network also to generate more interest before the actual planning of the event, and to recruit participants and topic holders, by offering topic-related workshops at two of the half-annual GEN Germany meetings. These were held in the community Jahnishausen in June 2016 and in the community Blumenthal in December 2016, and were attended by members of large communities in Germany. At these occasions, members from other communities could also be recruited. For instance, the initiator of the village school of the community Schloss Tempelhof, a unique, interesting and successful example of alternative schooling and education in community, joined the hosting team.

Preparatory meetings

A preparatory meeting with four members of the hosting team and two members of the LiFT facilitation team was held a month before the event in the community of Schloss Tempelhof for getting to know each other in the event team, generating ideas about design and overall planning, and for dis-

² A facilitation tool for group communication which has been developed in the ZEGG community. The forum is "*a tool to create transparency with our true motivations and wishes, to find out and reveal deeper truth and insights, and process pending conflicts and questions*" <http://www.zegg.de/en/community/zegg-forum.html>. See section B.

³ Dragon dreaming is a holistic team working method developed by John Croft, who is closely connected to the ecovillage movement. <http://www.dragondreaming.org/dragondreaming/what-is-it-exactly/> 2016-02-12

⁴ Developed by Clinton Callahan who lived in Schloss Tempelhof.

tributing tasks and responsibilities between the hosting and facilitation teams. The former was glad to have a facilitation team taking care of the process, also because the hosts wanted to participate in the process themselves. The author experienced this as a great chance to “grow together”, building a joint, complementary structure for organising this Collaboratory. Before and after this meeting, Simone and Karina from the Sieben Linden seminar center shared more details about the organisational context and logistic conditions in several preparatory conversations and meetings in 7Linden with the author of this case study. Based on their experience of dozens of events like the summer camp, they were quite aware of e.g. the needs of parents, realistic time slots for concentrated working, the ways in which a children’s program can release parents, and of the importance of letting small children enter the room at any time.

Spreading the word in the community movement and unite different branches

The event was marketed via personal contacts, via the GEN network meeting and via newlists of community networks and single communities in all German speaking countries (GEN Germany, GEN Suisse and GEN Austria, DACH).

Expectations and motivations of participants before the event:

- Understanding how life with children works in a community and what the contacts to the wider society are (a young mother)
- Seeking inspiration for building a “school community” which would start with a school (a young woman)
- Getting to know others, making or cultivating friendships, learning about how others do things and getting inspiration for their own community.
- Growing up is a fundamental issue for community members and an ongoing learning challenge, connected to balancing individual and community concerns.

Another relevant network for marketing the event was a community network around Sobonfu Somé, an African tribal woman. In the summer of 2016, Sieben Linden hosted a gathering around the ritual education of this community that was attended by 160 people from all over Germany. The majority of them are living in community and showed a strong interest in our planned event. The work of this network is around rituals and transitions between different life phases. Obviously, community and children are central elements in this work. However, this network so far is a community of its own, and we encountered the challenge to meet these peoples’ wishes while not offending other community members who are not open to ritual work.

Karina, the young woman from Sieben Linden who co-hosted the event together with Simone on behalf of the seminar center, is herself an activist in *next GEN*. This helped her to especially invite young people who grew up in communities to our event. In fact, the young people who have been raised in communities proved to be a very valuable source during the event, sharing their experiences and views.

Reflection on the preparatory phase

One of the specific challenges in this Collaboratory was to tune into the given community culture. Therefore, first, it was really a good thing that we took time for a personal preparatory meeting in an ecovillage between the hosts and some of the facilitators. Second, it was important to talk about each other’s responsibilities and clarify the assignment (which should have been done in even more detail though).

A certain tension arose between the Collaboratory facilitation team (holding the responsibility for the collaboratory process, the method, and the strategy to structure individual elements and phases of it) on the one hand and the community hosts (spontaneous, community, emotional process) on the other hand already in the preparatory phase. More specifically, at the preparatory meeting, the tension had crystallized around two different approaches to planning: The hosting side wanted to stay open and “plan” very creatively and spontaneously, working with the group in the very moment, while the incoming member of the facilitation team intended to apply the Collaboratory method and work out the best strategy to structure the process in the given setting. The author, member of the facilitation team, but also living in Sieben Linden, tried to bridge the two and to find a “golden middle way”. It was very good to have this tension explicit and consciously in the room to be able to talk about it, which was stated by both sides and helped to build an appreciative attitude towards each other’s positions and approach. Still, the tension remained present throughout, and the author’s hope that the two approaches would somehow “merge and flow into each other” was disappointed time and again.

Iris’ perspective

During the preparatory phase, I felt the need to communicate ‘the community culture’ of our hosts’ context to the LiFT Collaboratory team. While this was easy concerning specific customs (e.g. to use handwritten posters rather than powerpoint slides, to not wear shoes in the house etc.), it was more difficult to explain the community culture of interaction and communication. The latter, in my perception, is a very personal, often intimately close, direct one, mostly happening on the heart level. At the same time, this culture tends to reject extensive explanations as “academic” and “intellectual”, in other words as creating a distance between people. For a brief insight, check out the following! youtube video from a similar setting of a community meeting ([Gemeinschaft X.0](#)).

Even though I described some exemplary situations, I assumed that this community culture would be difficult for “outsiders” to fully immerse and tune into – at least that this needed more time and space, which were missing in our case. It is not just a matter of knowing some customs and language patterns. It is much more about the individual habitus, how we connect, perceive the world and others etc. So I was worried, that this could cause some clashes – and it did. Nevertheless, the LiFT Collaboratory for me was an interesting setting to combine the two worlds, of community culture and the more “academic”, distant approach of the Collaboratory at least as we realised it.

I had the perception that we were not able to meet them with their expectations of emotional tuning in and that the Collaboratory concept we use normally was too intellectual for them, plus they had their emotional issues anyway.

Finally, it was decided that the hosts would open and close the event, while the Collaboratory would be introduced as an entity of its own, embedded in the middle of it. The author did not really feel comfortable with this, because it felt like a separation to her, and because she felt that it might need more playful and emotional elements woven into the process for this kind of participant group, than would usually be provided in a Collaboratory. This worry was increased by the fact that the theater person from 7Linden could not participate on short notice. The boxes below give some more insight into the different perspectives and perceptions that various team members held at this point. The first box explains in more detail how the author, seeing herself as the person between two ‘cultures’, tried to bridge the tensions. The other boxes add other, partly differing facilitators’ perspectives.

Bettina's perspective

This is exactly it. From my point of view and experience, the tension came from one's assumptions and beliefs, rather than from what we found in the actual setting. There were a lot of projections in the room, about the communities and what they need and want and about the LiFT team, what they would not be able to do and connect to. Without all those fears, worries and projections, we might have had a chance to get into a better flow. Yet, as has been seen also in the Sibenik case, the Collaboratory has a structure that can challenge emotion-/person-/relation-centered people, while facilitation may be falling short of providing an attractive enough transpersonal space from which going beyond the emotional domain and including the mental one could happen more naturally.

Elke's perspective

I too felt the tension mentioned by Iris, both during the preparatory meeting with the hosting team and at various occasions during the event.

It was extremely interesting to see and experience how the hosting context at Sieben Linden differed from previous ones we had encountered. My first (positive) surprise was how eager the hosting team was to be involved in and contribute to the design of the event. In fact, we hardly ever had a hosting team that was similarly engaged. More precisely, when we had our first preparatory meeting in the LiFT + host constellation, the hosting side almost had their own concept and design for the event readily prepared and was enthusiastic about going further. So my own perception at this point was that it was a rather sensitive and challenging task to communicate what LiFT's perspective, and all the more its "agenda" and aspiration in view of the event was about, going beyond just having a nice get-together of likeminded people. I saw LiFT's intention namely in testing and trying out how the Collaboratory method and format might be suitable for supporting the given group and context in making progress on their topic. In other words, my aspiration was to experiment with and possibly once again stretch the limits of the Collaboratory as we had gotten to know it so far to match yet another stakeholder setting and challenge.

One discussion we had with the hosting team in this context – and one challenge of this specific co-operation – was about the role of the Collaboratory in relation to the larger event. The most straightforward options were either to have the Collaboratory as a compact, separate "thing in and of itself" situated in the middle of (embraced by) a larger event (which the hosting side seemed to prefer or at least to expect) – or to design the Collaboratory such that it would serve as a meta-frame to embrace most of the local event. This, I suggested, would be quite an interesting new challenge to the format and could be done by integrating a number of separate activities and group sessions that the hosts had already conceived and planned, into the logic of an overarching U process. From my perspective, this was a possibility to take LiFT's methodological experimentation with the Collaboratory to a new level. Ultimately, we found a way to combine both concerns, even though that caused a number of irritations and required repeated processing which, after all, we managed to conduct successfully though.

As to the Collaboratory being perceived as "academic", "rationalist" or "intellectual", this seems to be as much – or more of a characterization by certain perceivers than of the Collaboratory itself. The fact that participants from more "mainstream" contexts, as for example in Rastatt (see case study), had the exact opposite critique and rather saw it as "esoteric" (meaning: irrational, not serious or academic enough) seems to indicate that such labels are a matter of perception and very much relative to the preconceptions and assumptions of the respective audience themselves. However, what we can learn from this is that similar comments and feedbacks might be indications of a need to better address specific sensibilities, habits and expectations in the way we frame our work in order to better translate it into the hosting context.

Interactions between the hosting and the facilitation team

The following section looks at some areas where tensions arose between the hosting and facilitation teams, including differing expectations, partly unclear roles and communication challenges.

From the perspective of the hosts, the purpose of this event was to enable not only networking, encounter, thematic reflection and having fun together, but to experiment with living a temporary intergenerational community. For them, the Collaboratory was the “heart piece for adults and older teenagers”, besides other subevents, which were: the programs for older children and teenagers, the teenager film making workshop, the “*motiva*” game stand, the forest kindergarten, and some parents floating around freely with their little children next to the residential community in the ecovillage, some of whom therefore took part in the thematic event only selectively. A larger, overall frame was created to hold these different subevents together, especially during ‘in-between-times’ such as breaks and meals, for instance by singing at the beginning and at the end of most Collaboratory sessions when children were brought back to their parents. This created a clearly structured frame time-wise that left almost no space for prolonging any session.

There was no consensus about this “separation” between the adults’ and children’s program which caused mixed and, in some cases, even resisting behaviors. In her introduction to the public event, the young adult from the hosting team mentioned her hope that the children and adults be present as “one group”, rather than two separate groups. Simone equally mentioned that she wanted the weekend to work across generations, which she saw as a key challenge for living in community: she expressed the ambition to find out how to break up the separation between generations (“Schubladen für Altersphasen aufbrechen”) while at the same time creating spaces for the specific needs of each generation (Räume für eigene Bedürfnisse). This seems to relate to a point of unclarity throughout the program which provided different dynamics with chances and challenges.

Bettina’s perspective:

I would maybe call it paradox (which is typical of a development towards “integral”), but it depends from where you look at it.

Ideally, we would have been able to hold, frame and integrate these tension-points, and we might be in the future, the better we can jointly create an embodied integral and transpersonal field.

Giving more time to all of these different needs, intentions and plans for the whole weekend might have helped to clarify and understand the whole picture and overall frame. At the same time, many participants appeared late, and hardly any session could start on time. Nevertheless, a successful practice often applied in 7Linden had also worked here: starting with some music and dancing motivates people to come, and

those who show up on time can have fun and connect easily with each other.

There also have been some communication and translation issues between what the author perceived as the different ‘cultures’ of the “community people” on the one hand, and the “LiFT people” on the other. The Collaboratory concept was perceived as “too academic”, partly meaning “too structured”, by the hosts. Furthermore, they found the word “Collaboratory” too complicated and the (partly English) terms and facilitation language used within LiFT as inappropriate and creating distance. Therefore, everything had to be adapted and translated into German. For instance, the Collaboratory was renamed into ‘vertiefender Prozess’ (deepening process) in this case.

Another fundamental problem that became clear in the course of the process was a certain lack of clarity about the assignment (Auftragsklärung) and the specific role of the LiFT team. This became evident in hindsight, for instance in relation to the communication about LiFT’s role in the announcement of the event by the host. The LiFT team was mostly presented as “professional facilita-

tors”, while the fact that LiFT was co-financing the event as part of its experimentation with the Collaboratory method was left out. Also, many participants had probably come more to have a good time together than for the method and this specific kind of process itself. This probably created some unrealistic expectations and therefore partly also a lack of appreciation for the LiFT team and the process by the participants and other co-hosts. We will come back to this aspect several times in the following explanations.

Finally, a challenge was the perception of the group of participants as “the community people” people and the LiFT team (including facilitators and observers) as ‘external’, i.e. not living in community, therefore lacking the experience of living in community, and the connection between the two. Partly because this “cleavage” was also presented to the LiFT team as a challenge beforehand, several members of the LiFT team seemed to feel the need to somehow “prove their expertise”. For instance, they shared some experiences of community life in the introductory round, even though it had not been asked for.

A LiFT team member recalls: *“My feeling is that this was not planned but very natural and as a form of finding a common base”*. Another voice from LiFT said: *“Maybe this was a strategy for establishing a connection with the host, to give them the sense that we have some shared experience and know where they’re coming from. Perhaps there was even an underlying feeling of having to legitimize our involvement in this process based on some prior experience with community?”*

So in some sense, the framing about there being two groups with different cultures, that had happened before the event, occasionally seemed to cause a sense of unclarity or maybe even insecurity on both sides.

B. The Collaboratory itself

Overview of the process

In the following section, the actual process of the Collaboratory is described, following the design structure and the different phases, looking at the actors, roles and contents involved. The following table gives a high-level overview of the whole process:

| Time | Collaboratory phase | What happened design elements, facilitation tools | Who was in charge |
|--------------------------------|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| DAY 0 <i>evening</i> | | arrival of facilitation team in the ecovillage, meeting and socializing with hosts | Iris |
| DAY 1 <i>morning</i> | Preparation | Internal team meeting: alignment between the facilitators and the entire team (including observers), going through the whole process, bonding ritual | Elke all |
| <i>Afternoon</i> | Kick-off event: Official opening with the incoming participants | Introduction by the local hosting team, playful welcome in the amphitheatre | Host |
| <i>Evening</i> | Opening, introduction | Host has lead: getting to know exercises, introducing the topic, logistics, introducing the facilitation team, inviting workshops for next morning | Host, Iris, facilitation team |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|---|----------------------------|
| DAY 2 <i>morning</i> | Pre-downloading: getting familiar with the topic and related contents | two open workshop phases for participants to connect around shared interests; members of the LiFT team observing and summarizing burning issues | Iris, Bettina |
| <i>Over lunch</i> | Last alignments | Team meeting: facilitators and hosts Generating the Collaboratory question(s) | LiFT team, host |
| <i>Afternoon</i> | <i>Phase I: open mind</i> <i>Phase II: open heart</i> | 1) Fishbowl 2a) Dialogue groups | Elke, Toni Toni, Collin |
| <i>Evening</i> | | 2b) Dialogue groups with young people | Host |
| DAY 3 <i>morning</i> | <i>Phase III: presencing, open will</i> | 3) Visioning: dream journey <i>In parallel:</i> visioning offered for children in a separate tent 3a) harvesting the vision: painting, small group exchanges, 3b) children bringing in their vision pictures | Bettina, Toni, Iris |
| <i>Afternoon</i> | Sonntagscafé (a tradition in 7Linden that could not be cancelled) Break, leisure time | Processing during free time, get together, café, theater, games etc. for all | |
| <i>Evening</i> | <i>Phase IV: Prototyping</i> | 4) Systemic constellation to create projects, group formation, open space workshops | Elke, Collin |
| DAY 4 <i>morning</i> | <i>Intermediate reflection</i> | Sharing, personal emotional exchange, reflection of process with the ZEGG Forum method | host |
| | <i>Phase IV: Prototyping (continued)</i> | 5) Re-configuring constellations of projects, more time for working groups | Elke, Collin |
| | | 6) Harvesting from working groups | Elke, Collin |
| <i>Noon</i> | <i>Phase V: Closing</i> | 7) Closing ritual: commitment basket | Iris |
| <i>Afternoon</i> | | internal Collaboratory de-brief with host | LiFT team |

The process in detail

The following section spells out what happened in the different phases, drawing on our reflections and intentions behind the rationale of their design, as well as on observer notes, feedbacks and interviews. Thereby, it also looks at how the actual process differed from what had been planned beforehand and why.

DAY 0

After the arrival of the facilitation team, consisting of Iris Kunze, Elke Fein, Bettina Geiken, Toni Bünemann (IFIS) and Collin Bootsveld (professional from Brussels), the latter had an informal check-in meeting with the hosting team before dinner, which was continued later in the evening. The aim was to get to know each other in a short introduction round. There was also some time for an internal meeting among the facilitators who had so far done all their preparatory work online.



DAY 1, morning

Here we took about three hours for checking in with the whole LiFT group that had meanwhile arrived. Besides the five facilitators, eight more members of the LiFT partner organizations had come to 7Linden to experience and support the hosting of this Collaboratory. One aim of this prep meeting was to update the new team members about LiFT's work so far and to explain the specific setting at 7Linden, as well as the challenges connected to it. Second, we walked the whole team through the entire process design, thereby clarifying details and logistics. Finally, the meeting was about attributing roles to the LiFT team members. Besides their observation roles, other support roles included taking part in smaller working groups and reporting back burning questions from them.

For the first time in LiFT, we also invited the observers to form a group of their own and self-organize their work. While until then, we had attributed specific observation roles and prepared instruction sheets for each of them beforehand, we now just shared some experiences from past events to inspire the observers to come up with their own ideas and self-organize around these. One of the Swedish LiFT members took over the role to coordinate the observer team.

Afternoon

Before the start of the event, there was some time left for another meeting of the facilitation team, for further clarifications about roles, tasks and responsibilities. After that, we also met with the entire team, including the hosting team and their local supporters, for team building and alignment. We did a motivating ritual and a hand circle. Then we took some time together with the hosts to show and prepare the room.



The official opening and Kick-off of the event in the outdoor Amphitheatre started at 16.30h and was guided by the local hosts. In their introduction, they framed the entire event with a personal welcome, intergenerational singing and playing. Every one of the participating communities was shortly introduced, as well as any other existing group, including the facilitation team which was welcomed separately at the end.

Reflection: Facilitated by the local hosts, this was the opening of the overall event – not the Collaboratory itself, yet. Yet, what to us, LiFT people, seemed like a very long ritual of connection and arriving, it was a good occasion to dive into the “community culture”, its rituals and practices.

Evening

A more thematic introduction for the (adult) Collaboratory participants was offered after the smaller children had left for bedtime. Once again facilitated by Simone and Karina from the hosting team, thematic constellations were used to see who is in the room. Other practices for getting to know each other while at the same time bringing in the topic included asking participants to throw in personal wishes that others could then ally with.

This playful kick-off running over time, only 10 minutes remained for introducing the LiFT team and the Collaboratory method, including some background about the U process and LiFT's observation and documentation practices. Simone and Iris told the story about their personal interaction and how this Collaboratory came to happen in 7Linden, and Elke said a few words about LiFT and the method. The session was concluded with a final announcement that everyone could offer a workshop the next morning by putting a note up on the board.



Reflection: The participants clearly enjoyed the playful style of the warm-up exercises offered by the hosts. Given that LiFT only had a short time to introduce its core intentions and ideas and that this happened right in the end of the evening, where many people were tired after having travelled to 7Linden from far away (some even still having to set up their tents outside), this LiFT introduction, again, apparently came across as “academic” and “too much to handle” at around 10 p.m., at least for some of the participants.

DAY 2, morning

Every morning, the hosts would start by a guided assembly and circle on the village square, checking in for the day with some games for the whole group (children and adults). The intention of this was having fun and connecting between generations. These playful morning circles provided an important community building factor. They also set the tone and raised the mood for the event.

Pre-Downloading: Open space and Workshops

Back to the plenary, the workshops that had been offered so far from participants were shortly introduced and assigned different rooms for each of the two workshop phases (1,5 hours each). One of the considerations behind the choice of this design element was the fact that the hosts wanted to give some space to participants' needs and ideas beforehand and allow them to have some open exchange between each other before we would go into the Collaboratory process. The facilitation team made creative use of this phase by collecting the burning issues of the participants. One reflection about this phase was that it might have been good to have notetakers capturing the discussions, or at least the main points. To what extent it makes sense to support similar small groups by providing some kind of facilitation is an open question. In this case, the facilitator likely needs a clear and explicit role and a certain detachment from the topic.

Plenary

In this case, each member of the LiFT observation team had participated in one of the workshops and now reported the essential issues and questions back into the plenary. Not always could there be



Schedule for the participants: colorful and flexible

achieved a consensus on one joint issue or question as asked for though. The graphic harvester captured a sensitive point from one of the summaries: the perceived gap between the communities that were present and the society. This was an underlying issue in the room, addressed time and again since then. Our observers also saw some participants with rather critical and even “rebellious” attitudes towards structures. Those were perceived as potential candidates for skepticism also against the Collaboratory structure.

Noon: Organisational meeting for generating the guiding Collaboratory question

Over lunch, the facilitation and the hosting teams met to fine-tune an adequate question for the fishbowl based on the issues which had emerged out of the morning workshops. One of the hosts led the team through an attunement visioning on mental, emotional and intuition levels. In result, two questions were chosen that were still quite vague and not even strongly related to the topic of the weekend, focusing on children and youth. Astonishingly, the hosts did not come back to the questions that were in the invitation of the weekend. So there was some tension between either giving more attention to the “real” question(s), versus focusing on co-developing one ideal guiding question, “for the sake of the process”. Wanting to get everything ready on time in an as perfect manner as possible caused a somewhat stressful or hectic energy.

Afternoon: Kicking off the core of the Collaboratory

1) Fishbowl

Before the LiFT facilitators took over for the first phase of the Collaboratory, one of the hosts started the session by guiding a small exercise to help people into their body. After that, the two lead facilitators of this session introduced the guiding questions and guidelines of the fishbowl, which, in fact, is a well-known tool in this community. Spreading ideas and experiences was encouraged. Five people were asked to open the Fishbowl, by sitting in the inner circle and sharing their perspectives on the guiding question. Gradually a total of thirteen people came to sit and speak in the inner circle. It had been the hosts’ wish to select and brief experts only at very short notice. Especially with the young adults, it had been hard to make plans beforehand. Hence, the framing and setup of the fishbowl could not really be agreed on beforehand with the experts. This resulted in the difficulty of having a broad spectrum of perspective in the fishbowl, as well as in some disorientation, lack of congruence, and even resistance towards the format.



An observation of the process

The atmosphere was calm and the listening was focused. Different perspectives enriched the process, but did not really give a complete picture on the questions in focus. Many of the contributions were rather emotional. Since some participants made several, partly long points in one go, this became tiring.

An observation of the facilitation

The initial instructions were unnecessarily long and one facilitator spoke a bit low, which made her hard to hear. Then the facilitators moved outside the circle and put the talking stick in the middle without getting into personal contact, which would have been important in this context of community people. It might have created more connection between the facilitators, the people talking in the fishbowl and the participants, if the facilitators had started to talk while sitting in the inner circle (at the same level as part of the fishbowl).

This also had the effect that those who ultimately ended up in the center circle as kick-off speakers did not take responsibility for the structure by the experts, including the host.

Elke's perspective as a facilitator

I could feel the tension in the room, some of which seemed to be connected to the very fact of using the fishbowl method at this point. It was not clear to me what exactly caused this tension, yet it seemed to run counter a number of expectations that apparently had not been made explicit. Maybe some of it also was about *how* we used this format.

As part of our introduction we had framed the fishbowl as part of the larger process and had given some explanation as to its function in the latter. Then, we essentially let the conversation flow without intervening a lot, as we would usually do in our Collaboratories, despite the mentioned sense of discomfort on some of the participants side. It was certainly an experience of and an exercise in being comfortable with the discomfort in service of the larger process.

2) Dialogue

The dialog phase consisted of three different elements in Sieben Linden: first, two rounds of small group dialog facilitated by the LiFT team (2a) and later on in the evening, an informal getting together in "livingroom atmosphere" organized by the hosts which was specifically designed to give a forum to the young peoples' perspectives.

Dialogue groups (2a): LiFT process

After a break ending the fishbowl and downloading phase, about a third of the participants were missing. During the next phase, the young people were present, but many of the older participants no longer attended.

After a small change in the facilitation team, the two facilitators introduced the procedure of the dialog phase: initially, groups of three were invited to come together to share whatever had arisen for them during the fishbowl. While one person would talk, the others would be invited to listen, and the task was to come up with questions, not answers. Later, groups of five people were formed, and in this second round, deep listening was encouraged by asking participants to take two deep breaths before speaking, noticing any thoughts and/or emotions during the breathing.

Our sense was that the question-based dialogue of answering questions with another question, seemed to work fairly well, despite some resistances and difficulties. I personally perceived a sense of deepening, a deep presence in the group and a feeling of connectedness. In fact, most participants seemed to be very open and quite used to this form of sharing and to have liked that. Several partici-

pants confirmed that a very interesting question came up during the dialogues. They liked the idea to focus on questions, not answers. Some therefore would have liked to have more time to reflect on each question. One participant mentioned that a lot of emotions had come up in her group about the well-known topic and phenomenon of transferring responsibility (“Verantwortungsübergabe”) towards children, expecting them to improve or “save” the world.

In the second round in groups of 5, several groups had trouble following the guidelines of remaining silent (2 breaths) after someone had spoken, and of sensing into the inner responses. Some rather had more of a mental discussion or discussions that went a bit off topic. Even though there also was feedback of appreciation for really listening, giving time and paying attention to what comes up in oneself, several participants found the method too structured, thus a bit stiff (“steif”) and missing the liveliness (“Lebendigkeit”). One of those who explicitly complained about “too much structure” in the instructions for the 2nd dialog immediately after they had been announced in the plenary round, thereby somewhat irritated one of the facilitators, causing her to make a soft move to come to meet the questioner and keep the flow going (“Ok, I’m not giving any more structure”). So here was another occasion for facilitation to practice being comfortable with and responsive to the discomfort. We do not know whether these critical, or even “rebellious” voices ultimately represented a majority of group or not, yet this kind of meta-level challenge was certainly specific to this Collaboratory.

Dialogue groups (2b): youth story telling

In the evening of the same day, we managed to weave a sharing session that had been organized by the teenagers and young adults autonomously into the overall dialog phase. About 12 young adults, teenagers and kids who had been raised in community were given special spaces to talk both between themselves and with all the adult participants of the conference in what they called “living room atmosphere”. Three small groups were set up for this, on in a yurt, one in the in community pub, and one in the sofa corner.



The yurt group (see picture) created a trustful, cozy atmosphere with fire in the middle. Teenager and children spoke freely about their life. Anyone was invited to ask questions, based on own experiences in community or on curiosity about it. Children and young people responded to these by sharing their own experiences.

The sofa corner group also created a very intimate and sensitive atmosphere of empathic listening and differentiated dialogue, even though more calm and reserved. The pub group turned into a hap-

py gathering led by young adults. This seemed to fit well with what most people were expecting and liked (personal exchange and being together in a cozy atmosphere).

Content-wise, the sharing revealed some controversial positions as to what it is like to grow up in community (e.g. young adults disagreeing over how “hard” it was to grow up in communities). Furthermore, criticisms came up, such as the perception that the adults’ degree of openness could sometimes be too much for a child. Some also voiced more conventional issues such as a lack of contact persons, not being heard and seen as children and the feeling of loneliness despite of many adults around them.

One meta-reflection at this point was that this quality of sharing seemed to be the kind of space that participants were truly here for: to exchange experiences on a very personal, subjective level. The U-process, in turn, as a strategy for making progress on finding shared answers and projects could provide space for this, but had to go beyond – and thereby challenge – the need to have *only* this. Facilitation team members perceived this as “a big contrast to what we tried to do before.”

“It was a very intimate atmosphere, sitting in couches, chairs and on the floor. The young people were very willingly sharing their experiences of growing up in communities and how that has formed them and their lives. They were very open and trained in communicating. No hard words, very “non-violent” very much touching, supporting and hugging each other.

The atmosphere was friendly and the adults were mostly listening and asking questions. It seemed as if the young people really have been waiting for this chance to share not only with each other but also with the adults and to be heard. Some of them were very engaged in making a difference for the coming children in communities and with finding new ways to live together.”

Observation from a facilitation team member

On the next day, a short sharing from the three spaces was planned, but the young adults did not want or were too tired; nevertheless, this additional dialog element added a lot to the overall atmosphere of the Collaboratory.

DAY 3: morning

3) Visioning: After the morning games on the village square, a collective toning exercise opened a beautiful, calm, harmonious space that was very helpful for tuning in to the visioning. We noticed that many of the young people were not there, probably still sleeping as they had been partying all night before. People were then invited to find a comfortable place on the floor, relax their bodies and close their eyes. The visioning was phase divided among three facilitators. The first one gave some initial framing and instructions. The second one led participants into the relaxation, and the third one guided them through the visioning journey into “the community of the future”. The invitation was to “feel free to follow whatever shows up, no expectations, let yourself be surprised”. The atmosphere during the visioning was calm and concentrated and, besides the facilitator’s voice, the birds sing outside were the only sound.

While the visioning exercise worked very well in the given group and context, it might have come a bit too early, given where this group was in its process. Also, in hindsight, we found that it makes more sense if just one person is guiding, holding and reading the entire visioning.

3a) Harvesting the vision

For harvesting the vision, people were invited to remain in silence and start writing or painting what they had seen in their vision of “the community of the future”. Later, groups of 2-3 were invited to join their visions and produce a joint poster of their collective vision. During both drawing phases, the atmosphere in the group was focused and intense. Participants came up with lovely, funny and descriptive images of the visions which were then put up on the walls as an exhibition. After a short break, everyone was invited to visit and go round the poster gallery, asking questions to the artists of each group.

“An image says more than a thousand words.”



The visionary posters remained up on the walls also during the public event of the afternoon and during the next two days.

3b) Children's visioning and harvesting

During the large group visioning process, the children program hosts had provided a visioning journey for the children in parallel to that of the adults, with the children also painting their visions. At an agreed time before lunch, the children entered the room, and their supervisor, the children program host, asked the children to present their pictures explaining each of them (see picture). This presentation understandably took quite a long time, going through many drawings and honoring all of them.



While these younger voices did challenge some of the ideals the adults had come up with, integrating the children ultimately felt somehow disruptive for the visioning process as a whole, not so much because it was very chaotic and loud with all the children. Also, the adults had to stop their own harvesting, condensing and crystallizing work in view of arriving at a more shared picture – and didn't really get time for it later anymore. At some point, the facilitator tried to draw the attention back to the adult's pictures and use the remaining time for some kind of wrapping up, yet without much success. One of the participants tried to get people to sing, which was only partly successful as not everyone joined.

So here again, two logics – and many different opinions – clashed to some degree: the logic of the Collaboratory process on the one hand, and the desire to integrate and be together as a whole, comprehensive group. This tension was not so much between the LiFT process and the participants, but also among the participants. Some would have preferred to have more time for the adult process, some only wanted to be and sing with the children.

Again, some voiced their discomfort with parts of the process explicitly. Even though the presentation of the children's pictures was facilitated by the children program host, one mother approached the facilitator team quite angrily, questioning whether presenting every single child's picture was appropriate. She perceived this as summoning the children ('vorführen').

Having agreed to accept the children's sharing mainly "to honor the children", and as a way to bridge the existing tensions in the room, rather than because it contributed significantly to the process, the LiFT facilitators did not take on this critique.

The session was finally wrapped up in a playful way, by singing a children's song and by making a long tunnel holding hands in pairs (see picture). Through these group activities, the session ended with a lot of fun.



Lunch was served earlier than usual on this day, at 12h already, because from 1 pm on, Sieben Linden's traditional Pentecoste Sunday cafe which is open to and much appreciated by the larger regional public, took place in the room where we had the Collaboratory. Therefore, the room had to be cleared and prepared for the afternoon.

We made creative use of this external given for a reflective team meeting, while coffee and cake were offered inside and outside the building, besides guided tours through the ecovillage and theater for children and parents. Later on, in the afternoon, the hosts joined our team meeting as well.

Moreover, we found that some time to digest peoples' visions would be rather supportive for the overall process.

Evening: 4) Prototyping & Open Space

The prototyping phase started after dinner and would continue on the next morning. The facilitators started with a short silence to connect with and dive into the vision from the morning again. Based on that, and since the morning session could not be closed adequately as described above, they guided participants into a second short visioning which steps could lead towards implementing their vision, and what their personal contribution could be.

They then invited people to move and cluster with whom they were intuitively drawn to, exchange about why they moved where they had moved and come together to offer open space topics. Based on this, five groups were formed, then had 45 minutes to meet and discuss their suggested projects asked to prepare a flip chart poster for presenting their ideas to the plenary afterwards, which was done during the last 15 minutes of the session.

Several ideas and projects were proposed by the participants, some with a lot of traction, some with less or only the “inventor”. Some of the suggestions revolved around existing projects which did not emerge immediately out of this Collaboratory (e.g. orientation years for young people from communities (Orientierungsjahre), or transition rituals. Some of them had already been brought in at the beginning of the workshop. While it is hard to say what exactly the impact of the vision work was for them, the groups that formed around them enjoyed and were glad to have time to focus and deepen their exchange about their ideas.

One reflective insight we came across in this regard is that some people (especially in the community context) seem to hold a certain resistance towards the idea that open space meetings are “work”, rather than co-creative spaces. So framing similar sessions could also include wordings like “deepening the exchange” or “further developing your ideas”.

DAY 4: Morning

An element that had originally been scheduled for the very end of the workshop, as a kind of reflective space to look back onto the Collaboratory process among the members of the hosting community was the ZEGG Forum⁵. It is a method providing space for empathic listening and deep, personal sharing that is very widespread in the community network and is used to process implicit tensions of all kinds. Due to a need felt by some, the social forum was now pushed up on the agenda and thus turned into an intermediate element.

The ZEGG Forum was facilitated by two community members of Sieben Linden who are trained in this method and had been participants in the event so far. It ran for about an hour and opened up a reflective space that was more familiar to community members, giving room for substantial comments, discomforts, frustrations, and feedback that could be expressed by participants in a personal and emotional way. Some of what came up here was about aspects of the topic, some also about the process and method. In fact, it also functioned as a space for creative meta-reflection between the LiFT team and the participants, for instance when one LiFT team member stepped into the middle of the Forum circle and shared his perception about the tensions between the former and the partici-

⁵ The ZEGG Forum method has been developed in the ZEGG community (Zentrum für Experimentelle Gesellschaftsgestaltung/Center for Experiential Cultural and Social Design, <https://www.zegg.de/en/>) since 1978, based on earlier roots in the community performance and social art movement. The group gathers in a circle. Whoever feels drawn can enter the middle to share their current inner experience. The circle supports the presenter with their full loving awareness and presence, and the facilitators guide the person through his or her own process with questions and suggestions. The facilitators play a major role in this process and need a profound prior training. They act as “midwives” to assist the authentic process which the presenter undergoes.” For more information on the method see: <https://www.zegg.de/en/community/social-and-communication-skills.html>.

pants: “I thank the forum moderators for this beautiful pulsating structure: it shows that structures can be good. I say I have the impression as member of the Collaboratory team to receive a number of projections from the community. And I would like to deposit those right here in the middle.”

Asked by the facilitators to be more precise and to name the projections, he was invited to put a cushion for each of them into the middle of the circle. Three projections/cushions appeared:

- 1) “Struktur ist Scheisse” (structure is shit);
- 2) “Diese LiFT Leute sind nur im Kopf!” (those LiFT people are only in their heads);
- 3) “Diese LiFT Leute nehmen nicht genug teil” (the LiFT people do not participate enough).

While the projections were named, many participants started laughing, which seemed to relieve a lot of tension. The facilitator asked who was ready to take these projections back on. The first and second one were picked up quickly. As the third one remained, the LiFT member in the circle said: “I wasn’t sure about this one and take it back myself.”

Later, another LiFT facilitation team member went into the middle, sharing her perspective. This was equally well received and again, helped to improve dynamics.

So the ZEGG Forum method was integrated productively into the Collaboratory. Compared to the previous Collaboratory elements, it allowed the participants to more intensely go deeper into things (probably as they knew this format very well). It also provided space to express one’s emotions, which was gratefully taken up. During the Forum, some underlying issues were finally touched and made accessible to further processing.

From the perspective of the hosts and many participants, the Forum was finally giving them some space to breathe after what was perceived as rigid Collaboratory process tools.

The female Forum facilitator said in her introduction: “now that so many structures helped us move forward with our discussion in the last days, we are going to have a moment where you can freely express yourself”. *From her perspective*, it seems that she spoke as a community representative, doing her best to be constructive about the Collaboratory process so far.

From the LiFT perspective, the funny thing is that the Forum format and method is of course very structured itself. It requires a very firm structure, even though the latter might just not be identified as such anymore by community members, because it is so well-known. Therefore, as a “liberating structure”, this structure does not create resistance anymore. So the tension might have been more about how familiar one is with certain structures and processes, rather than “structure” per se. In this sense, blaming “the structure” might be a way to deal with the sense of not knowing. The actual point obviously was not about structure. It was about providing space to express one’s emotions, which the ZEGG Forum finally offered and which was gratefully taken.

In retrospect, it was a brilliant idea to change the program order (taking the ZEGG forum first, before the Collaboratory wrap-up). As a powerful tool for allowing participants to share and express their own inner processes and emotions, and thus for bringing emotional issues into consciousness, it helped to create empathy and mutual understanding. The forum cleared and released emotional tensions and prepared the ground for better dynamics during the rest of the event. In some sense, we wondered whether the Forum had actually triggered the deepest point in the U process. In that case, it might be an appropriate tool to integrate into the Collaboratory when working with audiences who are predominantly community and feeling oriented. If the Forum had been used earlier in the

process, it might thus even have given birth to more impactful actions and outcomes. Nonetheless, it clearly lifted up motivation for the final session.

5 + 6) Marketplace to re-configure and harvest projects

After a break, the LiFT facilitators took back over. They had asked a drummer from the community to beat his drums, first, to invite the participants back in. They were then invited to sense into themselves, while still dancing, and to move towards people they were drawn to, based on the open space work from the previous evening. This session gave space for groups to make changes and updates to what they had come up with so far. It was a dynamic kind of constellation process. While music and dancing was going on, new groups formed (like the “parents group”) and new connections were made. At some point, the drums stopped, and people were invited to communicate about what had attracted them to their current place in the constellation. The newly emerging constellations were given another 30 minutes time slot (maybe a bit too short, as one observer felt), with groups spread up in different locations, to look into what they wanted to do in the groups they ended up in.

Towards the end of the session, participants reconvened in the seminar room and one participant from each group was invited to summarize the results of their conversations, including plans and actions. This resulted in a productive final sharing of the working groups (see box below).

7) Closing ritual with personal commitments

As a symbolic gesture to wrap up the Collaboratory and to hand its results back over to the hosts, participants were invited to write their intended follow-up actions on pieces of paper. In a kind of ceremony, a facilitator then invited them to announce their commitments loudly in front of the group and put them into a nicely decorated basket. After all contributions had been collected, the basket was handed over to Simone as a symbolic act (see photo).

Besides, we also circulated an upcycling bag for feedback for the facilitation team, which actually remained empty though. Whether there was no energy left, just contentment or some insecurity about making a clear statement towards the Collaboratory process at this point, we don't know. It seemed that participants were tired after five intense days. Maybe, it was also due to the positive, ceremonial mood, focused on commitments which just did not fit well with anymore mental reflection.

Besides an overall calm, happy and constructive mood brought about by the commitments of individuals and working groups, the final gathering was then moving towards its ultimate highlight. In the end, the children and younger teenagers joined back in and presented their freshly made film about the event (<https://vimeo.com/236609517>). Both the final sharing of commitments and the film contributed hugely to the good end of this process. We closed with a positive, cleared and joyful spirit.



After lunch: General closing ceremony

The Collaboratory having been the core of the larger event, the latter was both opened and closed by the local host. The closing ceremony took place outside on the village square and in the Amphitheatre again. It started on the village square with a dancing walk into the Amphitheatre, lead by the hosts, with everyone singing and holding hands. At the Amphitheatre, each group of voluntary contributors to the event was acknowledged and received a special applause, as well as a symbolic blessing with “stardust”.



C. Post event activities, outcomes and follow-up

Besides the commitments proposed during the final ceremony (see box below), some more tangible outcomes emerged from the event:

Film Docu: Sebastian Rost (“Filming for change”), a young filmmaker from the community of Tempelhof had offered a workshop for teenagers to make their own film about the event. The first draft version that was shown in the closing session was later updated and expanded into a beautiful direct take-away from the workshop. It can be watched online at: <https://vimeo.com/236609517>

Orientation coaching for young adults: The breakout group working on this topic had a lot of energy. After the Collaboratory, three people formed a core team setting up a ‘roots & wings’ camps for young children as an orientation offering in the community of Lebensgarten Steyerberg in early October. The group continues working on their ideas.

Workshop at the biannual GEN Germany meeting:

The event host, together with several participants and other community members co-founded a social issue working group in the German ecovillage movement to present the topic at the following GEN Germany conference. The networking and exchanging during the Collaboratory event had fos-

List of resources, ideas and outcomes of the Collaboratory process

- *Build up a Next-Gen Academy offering orientation years for young people*
- *Host intergenerational camps for the GEN network*
- *Article for GEN Germany newsletter*
- *Develop and implement transition rituals for young people*
- *Build up a school for parents*
- *Children’s table gASTWERKe*
- *Circle of exchange for older children in Sieben Linden*
- *Coaching for children and parents in the community of Jahnishausen*

tered their motivation to go stay in touch and support each other. An article for the GEN Germany newsletter was written by a participant.

Next event: A group of participants committed to set up another camp like this one two years later in a different community.

Half a year after the Collaboratory workshop, the host resent the list of the commitments which had been collected in the basket to honor, remind and motivate people again to continue following their own ideas.

D. Reflection

Below are some more systematic meta-level reflections about the specifics and learnings of the Collaboratory in Sieben Linden, focusing on some of its core tensions and challenges:

- **The tension between diverging expectations and the inherent potential and rationale of the Collaboratory format**

Even though the Collaboratory had been announced and communicated in the invitation as a tool “to make progress on an issue and, ideally, develop tangible solutions to it”, and even though this was indeed the intention of the local host, the Sieben Linden seminar center (lead by Simone), this message apparently did not land with many – or even most – of the participants who showed up. On their end, at least for some, a wide-spread need and expectation was simply to meet, connect and exchange ideas about the topic, besides that of enjoying playful days with family and other community members, rather than to make a more focused effort to develop workable solutions.

In connection with this, the tension between participants’ longing for deeply felt immersion into a group process on the one hand, and the more structured step-by-step approach of the Collaboratory on the other was an overall challenge throughout. Moreover, if the aim is primarily to meet, connect and exchange ideas, the Collaboratory cannot unfold its qualities and might not be the best choice of format. This tension could be bridged to some degree in various phases of the process, by navigating somewhat flexibly between the felt needs and the prepared design elements. However, a certain tension – and thus, discomfort – remained on both sides, the facilitators’ and the participants’ (and hosts’).

- **The tension between preparation and tuning into the flow of each moment**

While some of the meta-level reflection was about what and how we could have better prepared and, for instance, made clarifications around LiFT’s assignment, everyone’s roles, the coordination with the host, the guiding question, as well as individual elements of the process, it turned out that the hosts did not want to plan more upfront. In their perspective, planning beforehand is against being tuned into the actual field. In turn, they rather found that the facilitators failed to go into deeper emotional contact with the participants and really tune into the emotional field, which is part of this community culture. While this tension, again, has been an issue in almost every Collaboratory context, it was certainly particularly strong and particularly sensitive here.

Being confronted with the ambivalent intentions of the hosts and participants, we had to choose repeatedly between holding on to our concept (sometimes against some resistance by the group) and letting go of it. Thus, we learned and practiced to “not know” all the details of the process and to trust that things will unfold, and to be ok with this. This became easier, knowing that we were going to have regular meetings along the way to sense in and adjust. As compared to an approach of plan-

ning the entire process beforehand and of “knowing” all the details in advance, training and developing this capacity to embrace “not knowing” was a good experience.

As a side-effect, we also learnt that the perceived “structure allergy” of some participants was primarily active in relation to a “foreign structure” (the Collaboratory, which does not have as primary aim to invite a free expression of emotions), but not when the structure was well-known, catering for the need of self-expression, and thus not perceived as a structure at all (ZEGG Forum).

- **Tensions arising from unclear and sometimes paradox expectations and needs on the hosting and participants’ side**

One aspect which illustrated this tension throughout the process was the question of whether and how to include children into the process. While the topic was of course precisely about that, growing up and living together in communities across generations, it was originally not intended to include children into the Collaboratory. Understanding that such a process would require a minimum degree of focus and thus, undisturbed quality time slots in order to work, the hosts had organized a paid child care service. It was put in place precisely to look after the smaller kids, so that adults and parents would be able to participate in the Collaboratory.

Yet, it turned out that there was no homogeneous opinion among participants and host about the issue of integrating children. The ambition of some parents to be together with their children *and* participate in the Collaboratory caused major logistic challenges. This created the dilemma for them to either stay outside with their kids or bring them into the Collaboratory space, and the facilitation team ended up having to deal with this issue, despite other arrangements before the event. This situation might have been due to a lack of clarity and precision in the way the purpose and character event had been communicated in the hosting network in advance.

Similarly, differing expectations and agendas about whether or not the event should produce some tangible results existed inside the hosting network – and partly ended up being blamed onto the facilitators. Simone, as the host, wanted to work towards some results during the Collaboratory, be it networking, creating structures for community education, or similar outcomes. Yet, this expectation of the host – and some implicit pressure it put onto the participants to produce results – seemed to have been somehow projected back onto the Collaboratory team.

The Collaboratory concept itself was also a target for certain frustrations of some participants who simply wanted to celebrate. This might have been one aspect of some people’s rebelling against the authority of the facilitation team. In hindsight, the latter appeared as a projection screen for dissatisfaction and was made responsible for misplanning, not integrating children into the process etc., most of which was actually the responsibility of the hosts.

- **The tension between conflicting roles, needs and agendas inside the LiFT team**

As far as the LiFT facilitator (and to some degree also the observer) team is concerned, the above mentioned constellation translated into the challenge to perceive, hold and act upon different kinds of needs and discomfort in productive ways.

This challenge was further increased by the given set of roles that was present within the team. While most LiFTers came in from outside, the initiator of the event and main author of this case study, Iris Kunze, was both part of the LiFT team and of the hosting community (a person ‘in between the cultures’), and therefore to some degree torn between conflicting roles, pretensions, needs and expectations. Living in Sieben Linden, Iris was well aware of the established habits, practices and sensitivities of her co-community members and clearly felt the concern to accommodate their basic

needs. At the same time, she saw the Collaboratory as a way to build bridges between the community network and what she – or they – tended to perceive as the more “academic” world of structured, step-by-step approaches. This, in fact, turned out to be her implicit “agenda” – in some sense causing tensions inside the LiFT team, the rest of which was focused more on the Collaboratory method as such and on how to best implementing it in the given setting. Even though the team did take some time to process these diverging perspectives and concerns, they remained present throughout the event.

- **The tension between two (perceived) cultures**

One challenge connected to this was the perception of two “camps” or “cultures” clashing at the event. A participant thought that the external facilitators were not really aware what kind of field they were entering. Another felt that the facilitation team “possibly underestimates how quickly we can enter into deeper processes”. Similar comments were made around what many perceived as a too rigid and “academic” structure: “The process is structured too much.” “We cannot get into the creative flow anymore. It is not so joyful”, the creative potential was left unused. For these voices, used to go with the flow, and to sensing what happens and emerges, it was difficult to really arrive in the process. For these participants, the ZEGG Forum proved to be an important anchor point for truly arriving at the bottom of the U and getting new energy.

Some practical insights about facilitation in this regard are that

- it is not necessary in every case to explain the whole process beforehand; explaining less in favor of just doing can be helpful in an emotion and process oriented context
- it might be useful not to not give too many instructions at once – only if participants are truly interested – and rather lead them through the process with instructions happening on the spot
- it might be useful not to immediately react to the loudest voices and rather ask the quieter ones, to find out whether individual critiques are really broadly shared.

From a LiFT observer's perspective

We noticed that the hosts and a majority of the participants have perceived the Collaboratory as an *academic approach* and the facilitation team as *intellectual*, which for them apparently was negatively connoted. As Simone said: “The moderators were only partially successful in really reaching the people.” We could sense that some people partly distanced themselves from that or at least had inner conflicts about it (interview with Karina).

At the same time, the construction of two “camps” or “cultures” might also have happened implicitly, as part of a way to internally frame the conflicting roles that the initiator of the event was holding. People like the local host indeed perceived and appreciated the incoming facilitators as “having similar values” and “opening up” to the topic to a considerable degree. Similarly, the young adult host thought that the Collaboratory made the process much clearer than did the approaches that are usually implemented in community exchanging events. At the beginning, she was a bit afraid that it's too caught in structures, with always too little time. But then, she found it very pleasant. Some other members of the hosting team were also very happy with the process.

Elke's perspective

I would consider the fact that the Collaboratory was perceived as “academic” primarily as an expression of the given culture and its ways of seeing and doing things, rather than as a “truth” about the Collaboratory or a shortcoming of the facilitators’ approach. Having used the format also in completely opposite cultures, I have experienced, that it was (at least partly) perceived as “esoteric, not serious” or “weird” there, but certainly not as “academic”, a quality which, in those more traditional cultures, is rather positively connoted.

So while the Collaboratory does of course have certain core elements as part of its inherent rationale, it is also a rather flexible format in itself, which is never the same in any two cases and always needs to be “translated” to match the hosting context. At the same time, while it is able – and compelled to adapt to each new context to a certain degree, it is equally likely to challenge and stretch any given context’s existing habits. The varying degrees of (un)clarity, frustration or discomfort that different people tend to have around this, admittedly, are dynamic factors to be navigated at any moment. In the course of this, meeting everybody’s needs and expectations all the time might not always be the best choice (see comment on leadership below).

Iris' perspective

My insight here is that – on a deeper level – it is not about the Collaboratory structure, but about the habitus of our facilitation team. The community people want to be guided into a space where they can primarily express their emotions. The Collaboratory is focused on work. Plus Sieben Linden members hardly accept any facilitators outside the community movement. It seemed to be very important for them to be guided by someone who has the experience of living in a larger community. So the challenge for us as LiFT was to really meet the needs of these people and not come across as too “rigid, structured and academic”. It is about the empathy of the facilitators. Those people who are already more in their feelings, need facilitators who can hold such a space. Encountering one’s shadows can be very overwhelming, so people can fall into resistance if this is not held well.

Even though the initiator equally felt that the Collaboratory team was extremely open and actively connecting to this special ‘field’, it remained difficult for her to bridge the tension between the perspectives of the two groups (the LiFT facilitators, trying to best adapt their structure to the needs of the context, and some of the participants still expressing discomfort about what they perceived as “academic structure”). The challenge of “being comfortable with discomfort” thus remained present.

- **Collaboratory for deeper emotional group processes!?**

Compared to the previous LiFT Collaboratory cases, this was an extraordinary intense community with emotional bonding. The challenge for the facilitators was to really meet their needs to create a trustful space in such a social environment with an already very high degree of intimacy, because first, they have their own, elaborated methods (like ZEGG Forum), a large number of participants already have experience and some may even be facilitators for such group process methods themselves and second, they are used to be in process on a very emotional level while rather resistant to mental exercises.

The LiFT team members tried to adapt and welcomed their active openness especially for the rather ‘psychological’ phases of the Collaboratory as presencing. Already giving more space to these phases compared to other Collaboratory workshops still caused tensions when moderating these participants in terms of ‘advanced’ empathy, the ability for process feeling and to dive into deep emotional communication. The participants and the hosts had certain expectations towards the facilitation in this area (in the hosts interview, she said: “The moderators were only partially successful in really reaching the people”). The community culture and partly personal connection of participants had an unusual high degree of trust, intimacy and emotional depth to meet and keep up with in our ambition to facilitate a deepening into a U process. Furthermore, it was a special challenge that the topic of the Collaboratory in this case was an emotionally charged and personal issue.

In concrete, it could be seen in our intention to create the deepest point of the U with the visioning. Indeed, it was not perceived very deep because the level of intimate, personal interaction was not there. The last morning bloc of the Collaboratory with the ZEGG Forum method, hosted by two community members, was perceived by all as the deepest U point.

We still think that a Collaboratory process can be the right methodological frame also in such a case. It is rather about the empathy of the facilitators. Those people who are already more in the feeling need facilitators who can hold such a space. The methods need to be facilitated from a different level of consciousness (as the facilitators of the Forum did, in contrast to the LiFT facilitators), which people could feel. In this case, it would have needed rather a facilitator team who are very in tune with the emotional dynamics and are trained to feel these group dynamics.

- **Learnings about leadership**

As the above account of the event has shown, there were many leadership roles present at this event, not only on the end of the facilitation team. We saw implicit power struggles between facilitation and the group, as well as among the participants themselves, including self-defense and attachment to specific perspectives. We saw how quickly leadership can be lost, for instance to a dynamic of communication that was almost “self-evident” in the group (“yes, of course, let’s sing”), that it appeared very difficult to work against it when it started. So it needs a clear sense of boundaries and of points in time where facilitators can or should (not) let go of and hand over leadership.

In order to hold the process in a light way, allowing participants not to notice or think about it, requires a special kind of leadership. A good strategy supporting this is to identify and integrate key people in the hosting context who can then support the process. While this did succeed to some degree here (not least due to many conversations beforehand), even intense communication cannot always overcome diverging understandings and differing cultures.

One interesting question in terms of leadership, particularly in an egalitarian context and culture as the given community one, is to what degree some kind of authority or leadership role is still needed (in the sense of a steward of the system) to guide participants towards controversial points. For this might be necessary for triggering next steps which they would have avoided otherwise.

A Collaboratory works with the power of transforming a group’s awareness and consciousness towards deeper levels of collaboration. Therefore, the facilitators need to guide the group through processes, which include issues or aspects that they might not be aware of or (unconsciously) try to avoid. Therefore, the facilitation team must be aware that it might have to deal with resistance and should not give up too early. Rather, it should consider insisting on difficult steps, because getting uncomfortable is part of going deeper to experience friction. There is often an unspecific wish for change in groups, without the willingness to accept the costs of that change. The latter often requires extra courage, surrender and the willingness to accept things as they are. This might need to

be communicated more explicitly both inside the team and towards the clients. Thus, facilitators might want to raise awareness for the fact that reaching a deep point in the journey is not always pleasant and that being conscious and present in this and not letting yourself go into emotions can be necessary to make a next step.

Another connected learning from this case is therefore that it seems important to dedicate some focus to identifying possible resistances and difficult issues beforehand in order to be prepared for them. In the given context, it could have helped to take more time for explicitly looking shadow sides of the community culture. While we did consider e.g. inviting some “experts” into the fishbowl who had stepped out of a community because of certain shadow sides, and who thereby could have represented these blind spots, this was

discussed multiple times with the host, but explicitly not desired. So part of the blame for still having done a Collaboratory in this less-than-ideal setting remains with us, the LiFT team...

