



The Round Table

"We facilitate open dialogue spaces for citizens to experience how powerful each individual can be".

By Harald Schellander and Roswitha Pietrowski

LiFT Leadership
for Transition



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"In the spirit of the original idea, Round Tables should take place in as many places as possible."



About this project

For the Austrian LiFT partner, the Institute for Future Competencies (IFZ), their participation in the Erasmus+ project Leadership for Transition *politics* LiFT 3.0 resulted in a new project. During an interview that was taken with the director of Museum am Bach, Alex Samyi (+2022), for the LiFT series "Pioneers of Politics", Alex came up with the topic of Round Tables that he had been organizing for some time for the community of Ruden/Carinthia/Austria as a form of citizen participation.

Harald Schellander and Roswitha Pietrowski from the IFZ team were so fascinated by the idea, methodology and results that they took up the Round Table format and started to use it both online and in person since June 2021. In this way, they are creating open spaces for dialogue for citizens, who experience how powerful each individual can be.

Meantime, Roswitha and Harald have organized more than 25 Round Tables with over 300 participants and have further developed the design based on their experiences. In the spirit of the original idea, Round Tables should take place in as many places as possible.

By describing the background, the concept, the methodology and personal experiences from the field, this manual aims to encourage people to take the initiative and set up a Round Table themselves – in their own families, as well as in schools, associations, organizations, companies, communities and regions.

Brief history of the Round Table

Round tables have a long history. From King Arthur's legendary round table to the Potsdam Conference in 1945, where the post-war order was debated, to the permanent seat of the UN Security Council in New York – this special arrangement is usually meant to signal: Here everyone meets at eye level, everyone is equally important.

However, in fact, in politics at the (inter)national level, the round table often serves to cement hierarchies.

The **idea of a round table** (French *table ronde*, English round table, Welsh "Bwrdd Arthur") was first introduced into the story of King Arthur (English name version usually Arthur) by the Anglo-Norman poet Wace (c. 1150). In the following centuries, the idea of the Round Table developed into a fix element of the Arthurian legend in the popular narrative genre of the Arthurian novel in various Western European literatures. The number of its members was not limited (French texts of the 13th century speak of 150, 240 or 366, Layamon's "brood" of 1600 knights). In modern times, a more selective conception prevailed: According to John Dryden, King Arthur's Round Table consisted of twelve knights, whereas according to Sir Walter Scott it consisted of sixteen knights who fully embodied the ethic of chivalry. Consequently, medieval literature does not know a fixed squad of members of the Round Table. Rather, it was always the "most important" and the "best" (i.e. those who play an important role in the novel) knights as members of the Round Table.

<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tafelrunde>



One of the most famous round tables of our time is in the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC) meeting room** at the UN headquarters in New York City. The room is a gift from the state of Norway. Designed by architect Arnstein Arneberg, the room is decorated with a mural by artist Per Krohg depicting a phoenix representing a new beginning after the Second World War. Other symbolism is found in the blue and gold silk hangings: Anchors for faith, ears of wheat for hope, hearts for mercy.



The seating arrangement reflects the hierarchy of decision-making and is based on the colors of the seats: At the round table, the delegates of Council member states (on dark grey seats). On the blue chairs, their advisers. The red seats are for other members of the UN who can attend a meeting but do not have the right to vote.

Photo and information taken from:

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Security_Council_of_the_United_Nations#Meeting_room

The first use of round table as an independent term comes from the **round table talks in Poland, which** took place during the transition period from a socialist state to a democratic republic between February 6 and April 5, 1989.



Photo: <https://de-academic.com/dic.nsf/dewiki/2536567>

Participants were representatives of the ruling Polish United Workers' Party, the opposition trade union Solidarność, the Catholic Church and other groups. The first round table meeting took place on 6 February 1989. In "The miraculous table" is how Philipp Goll describes these negotiations at the round table, which was nine meters in diameter. More info at:

http://www.philippgoll.net/text/pg_derwundertaetigetisch.pdf

"For the first time we talked to each other using the violence of the argument instead of the argument of violence."

Lech Wałęsa

In the **German Democratic Republic**, a **Central Round Table** was set up in the course of the peaceful revolution on the initiative of "Democracy Now". The symbolism of its name was based on the Round Table in Poland, but it did not adopt the round shape. Rather, it was rectangular. It met for the first time on December 7, 1989 and strongly influenced the work of the Modrow government in the period leading up to the Volkskammer elections in March 1990.

Information from:

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Round_Table



Starting point: The Round Table in the municipality of Ruden

Three meters in diameter, divided into eight movable segments and as colorful as the rainbow, surrounded by armchairs in different shapes and colors. "That's a round table we like," we thought to ourselves when we first saw this object in the café of Museum am Bach in Ruden, a small community in the south of Austria. The extraordinary museum, which specializes in art-based research on social models, and its director Alex Samyi came to our attention during research for the Erasmus project Leadership for Transition (LiFT). Sadly, Alex passed away in January 2022. His wife Ulli Egger Samyi is currently running the museum with the association "Friends of the Museum am Bach".

Around this round table, Alex had built both a manifesto and, as a concrete action, a citizens' council with its seat in the museum. "The purpose of the regular meetings is to discuss wishes and plans, to find solutions and to pass them on to the local council.

Unlike referendums, which are simple yes/no votes on legislative initiatives, citizens' assemblies fulfil the requirement of real political participation," Alex told us during our visit.

For him, the Round Table was a vision of a world united through self-organized communities, namely as United Communities with museums as new political centers. "Museums are per se places of self-enlightenment. And like Round Tables, they generate a certain form of equality in the negotiation of knowledge and social concerns," Alex said. "The Museum am Bach Round Table assumes that equal rights for all can be a realistic goal. Every person is invited to participate in shaping the world." According to Josef Beuys, who would have turned 100 this year, society is the social sculpture that everyone can help to shape. And it is through this creative possibility that people can be called artists. In the well-known short form:

"Every human being is an artist."

Thoughts about the Round Table

"These Round Tables are one thing above all: round! They know no even or odd, no beginning and no end.

Everyone is equal at these Round Tables. Their center is opened upwards, thus representing both the center and the container of every contribution. Here, a new concept of power and participation emerges.

These Round Tables relate to community concerns, as well as global issues. Here, everyone wants to contribute with their personal interests, special talents and abilities for the good of all humanity. It is about mutual consultation as well as inspiration and at the same time about developing new appreciative manners with kindness and humor.

At these Round Tables, the principle of independent truth-seeking applies.

These Round Tables strive for justice. They are the place where the balance of give and take in the energy budget of society is regulated. It is here that political goals are determined. Everything is a voice. Every voice has the same weight.

The Round Tables bring into exchange what serves the good of all.

These Round Tables are one thing above all: round! They know no even or odd, no beginning and no end."

Alex Samyi



*Lippitzbach Bridge with art installation
"Forbidden Fruits" by Alex Samyi*

Impact of the Round Table in Ruden

Whether in a museum, guesthouse or gym, according to Alex, citizen's assemblies only really make sense if, as it is the case in Ruden, they are also officially linked to the political institutions of a municipality/ community. This format took place once a month in the museum café and was considered the official citizens' assembly of the community. Suggestions from the meeting were reported directly to the municipality.

The IFZ team's further development of the Round Table

As we have shown, the round table is a symbol from history whose functions and contents have always been adapted to prevailing circumstances.

Even though the ideals of freedom, equality, fraternity and meeting at eye level are attributed to the Round Table, they are still too rarely present, especially in politics.

The Round Table of the IFZ team, which we will be talking about now, has these ideals and wants to create a quality of togetherness that is the prerequisite for peace, joy and quality of life on our earth. A togetherness in which we inspire, encourage and support each other to ensure a future worth living.

The method, so-called table rules or attitudes practiced at the Round Table are described in detail in the following chapter.

In short, it is about listening, respectfully accepting other opinions and an authentic encounter at eye level, where hierarchical thinking has no place. The coming together is enriched by creative elements from art, music and culinary arts, so that the balance of thinking, feeling and experiencing gives space to all abilities that can be success factors for a good life on our earth, and which ideally lead to action.

Our experience shows: The most valuable quality of togetherness is found where we manage to listen to each other without looking for answers or evaluations.

Whoever invites to this Round Table can be seen as a "host for a humane future".

With these attitudes, the Round Table can certainly vary in size and shape. Then even at square tables, „round“ dialogues are possible.

"Beyond right and wrong there is a place, where we meet."

Rumi



The methodology of the Round Table

The methods underlying this type of Round Table include Bohmian dialogue and non-violent communication.

Orientation towards Bohmian dialogue

The Bohmian dialogue was developed by the physicist and philosopher David Bohm. His method is suitable for any kind of dialogue, hence, also for the Round Table.

What is special is that peoples' coming together does not have to be about a specific purpose of some common work.

Accordingly, both in the Bohm dialogue and in our Round Table, no substantive topic for discussion is pre-given.

Bohm gives the dialogue the form of a circle in the middle of which there is a speaking stone that a dialogue participant takes when he or she wants to speak. This automatically decelerates the exchange.

This slowness is also essential at our Round Table. However, we do not use a speaking stone, but trust that each speaker knows how much time he or she needs and can expect the others to take. At the end he/she goes into silence. In the middle of the table there is a hole in which – metaphorically – there is room for the knowledge of the many and for the new that has emerged or wants to emerge through co-creation.

Just as with Bohm, the following also applies at the Round Table: those who speak, speak from their hearts. And those who listen do not judge, but simply listen in an uncensored way.

All participants have the opportunity to practice the core skills of dialogue over and over again:

1. **Embody the attitude of a learner.** Because in the beginner's mind and in the wish to learn, there are many possibilities – many more than in the mind of the expert.

2. **Respect:** Even more active than tolerance! I try to see the world from the perspective of the other(s).

3. **Openness:** It arises when two or more people are willing to break away from their own convictions. (David Bohm)

4. **Speak from the heart...** and be brief! "I speak of what is really important to me in order to show myself instead of appearing to be." (Martin Buber)

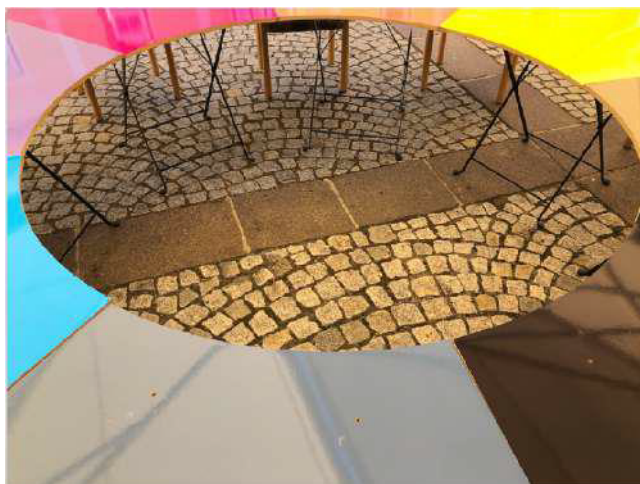
5. **Listening:** Genuine

listening can trigger creativity, healing, a sense of belonging.

6. **Slow down:** I refrain from reflexive reactions; I let what is said sink and give space to the speaker.

7. **"Suspend"** assumptions and assessments: In conversation, I a) notice my own assumptions and evaluations, as well as those of the others and b) at the same time hold them in abeyance (suspend them), i.e. take note of them in an attitude of complete openness without judgement.

8. **Productive pleading:** I let my own way of thinking become comprehensible so that others can share my view. – How do I arrive at what I think and believe? What do you think about it?



9. Practicing an **exploratory attitude**: wanting to experience instead of knowing! I express my interest in the other person and his/her thoughts and feelings.

10. **Observing** the observer: I observe and share my own reaction to others' attitudes and opinions. "Whoever speaks does not talk about generalities ("You have to..."), but pays attention to first-person statements. Everyone speaks out what is coming up; there is no direct reply to the previous speaker. If someone did not understand something, they can ask for a concrete example: "What do you mean?" – "What does that mean to you in concrete terms?"

Information from Methodensammlung
Binnenkultur, www.integrale-politik.ch

"It is fascinating to experience how the collective intelligence unfolds in this kind of dialogue, which 'knows' more and contains more than the compilation of the individual viewpoints of the participants."

Harald and Roswitha

Orientation towards non-violent communication (M. Rosenberg)

The method of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) was presented by Marshall Rosenberg in four simple steps. However, steps that contain extensive knowledge and skills in the subtleties of this approach, and which ultimately, through application and practice, lead to the attitude that the Round Table strives for. As in the Bohm dialogue, NVC is a form of communication that aims to create or maintain a peaceful, unifying relationship.

Marshall Rosenberg was successful with these four steps, especially in peace work:

Observation means describing a concrete action (or omission) without mixing it with an assessment, condemnation or interpretation.

Instead of evaluating, it is about separating the evaluation from the observation so that the other person can safely understand what one is referring to.

Such an observation triggers a **feeling that can** be perceived in the body and is connected to one or several **needs**.

This refers to general qualities that presumably every person on earth would like to have in their life, such as security, understanding, contact or meaning. According to NVC, feelings are an expression of whether a need is currently fulfilled or not, i.e. a kind of indicator. Needs are important for good, connecting contact, because they point the way to a solution that wants to accommodate everyone involved.

The need then leads to the **request** to bring about a concrete action in the here and now.

In order for this request to be fulfilled, the difference between request and wish must be distinguished: Requests refer to actions in the present, whereas wishes are more vague, often referring to states, e.g. "be loving" or to events in the future. The former are easier to fulfill – and therefore also have higher chances of success.

Rosenberg also suggested formulating requests in "positive action language" – saying what you want instead of what you don't want. A distinction can be made between a request for action (for example, to clean out the dishwasher) and a request for relationship (for example, to describe how one feels).

Further information: <https://www.gfk-info.de>

The Task of the Host

Ideally, the hosts of the Round Table know about these methods in order to develop an attitude among the participants in which people meet each other benevolently, inspire each other and open up to each other. We do not explain these background skills in detail, but talk briefly and concisely about desirable attitudes at the table at the beginning (see right column). The moderation that a host assumes can also change over time and circulate among the participants, as can the other roles that the host typically holds: he/she invites and provides the framework of place, time, space, the art contribution, and possibly the culinary delights.



Summary of the attitude at the Round Table

The following basic stance is explained at the beginning of each Round Table and agreed with all participants:

Listen

The Round Table has no particular topic, goal or expectation. I let what I hear come to me. I really listen to the other person instead of just to myself. Listening means allowing something to have an effect on you out of an inner silence.

Respect

(Latin re-specter: to look again, to observe) means to renounce defense, blame, devaluation and criticism. Everyone is allowed to be the way they are. Every idea, every opinion is just as right and legitimate as my own, just as silent participation or leaving the Round Table at any time.

Explore

We adopt an attitude of curiosity, mindfulness and humility that enables us to ask questions that really move us. And to explore together and develop something that was not there before and would not have been possible on our own.

Slow down

We observe which reflexes, reactions, evaluations, thoughts and memories are triggered in us in response to another person's statement. Whoever is speaking is not interrupted. Each person is responsible for determining the time they take for speaking.

Challenges

A Round Table is full of challenges and opportunities. Of course, we have already experienced a lot, which we are happy to share here.

The way we want to meet at the Round Table is rather unusual in our society and therefore often foreign to many people. Old and still prevailing structures of self-presentation, instruction, power, criticism ... are not so easy to eliminate. The fact that the habit of finding a concrete course of events in the form of program items, which are to be "worked through", is not served, is a source of irritation and insecurity for some participants.

It is just as unusual that the dialogue that takes place at the Round Table is consciously and creatively enriched, by "planned unplanned" elements, such as art, actions or culinary contributions. Contributions are allowed to emerge from the mood of the now that might not meet everyone's expectations.



If in the end, it is ok if someone may not like it or may not understand it.

We have often heard this around the table:

"We are not here for pleasure." "We want to create something, that doesn't go with artistic performances or food. If you want art, go to a concert, if you want to eat, go to a restaurant..."

But the Round Table wants to address all senses in this variety of possibilities and give them space. Touch, especially through and for creativity, the experience of new and old should have space. Knowing that everything belongs together, the table is also a training ground to accept this diversity, to learn to appreciate it and to integrate it appropriately, or to reject it in an appreciative and dignified way.

Equally challenging is the necessary mindfulness that hosts and participants should develop. It has to become visible when old power games and patronizing ways of communicating are present, as well as judgement or not letting people talk.

The important thing here is not to fall into the trap of doing the same thing, namely condemning the. From experience, it is always about unmet needs that seek the best possible fulfilment, such as mostly appreciation, esteem and change.

Sensitivity is required to make these needs visible, which often really need nothing more than to be seen.

Sometimes it helps to ask for silence in such situations, with the possibility to feel into oneself, to breathe consciously, so that trigger points can calm down again and the path leads back to the center.

If these needs, which are palpable in the room, are ignored, the bill usually follows the next time when the respective participants do not return to the table.

That is why the hosting competences are so important, the orientation of which could be as follows: I prepare the Round Table in the best possible way so that everyone who takes a seat at it can feel safe and comfortable for a good time together. In doing so, I take into account the framework that the table provides in terms of attitude and structure, dialogue, art, culture and culinary delights.

In every step of the roundtable – from the invitation to its implementation to the communication afterwards – transparency is important for all participants. This includes to maintain independence.



"The organizers should not serve any system, be it politics, clients from business, the community, associations or organizations.

This independence, not having to produce any concrete results of any kind, creates the freedom for a trusting, open dialogue that enriches everyone and triggers the desire for repetition and/or imitation.

Roswitha and Harald

Experiences from the Community Round Table Finkenstein

Roswitha Pietrowski organized the first Round Table in her home municipality of Finkenstein in Carinthia in May 2021 and has since hosted it a total of eleven times. The following pages present her report on her experience.

Each Round Table is an autonomous circle, it is not something that continues and yet it is continuous. It is learning, practicing, developing trust for communities that shape a humane future in cooperation with each other. Just a moment ago, I thought it was going well, the essential trust had been built, and then the very next time, I am faced with nothing or at the beginning again.

In Finkenstein, the Round Table takes place monthly. After eleven meetings, which could not have been more different, it is more than clear to me: It takes the beginner's mind, which always switches to New, builds on nothing but one's own self-trust, and the belief, or even the knowledge, that this is exactly right the way it is, no matter how it is at the moment. That doesn't mean it doesn't matter how I do things! It means always doing the best you can, giving everything you have at your disposal and always doing it with a loving attitude.

It is equally decisive that something that is created and has come into being is always received favorably in the end. Far too often, I still criticize myself, find what I do too small or too little, do not appreciate enough what I do.



I find the right measure when I reflect on the steps of non-violent communication and make feelings and needs visible. I, Roswitha, who is writing here, do not always succeed in this, but I am getting better and better at it. It takes practice for increasing strength, which also makes you more patient, more satisfied and more confident. It's about sticking with it, reflecting again and again, adapting and not giving up too quickly, especially when only a few people come to the table several times in a row.

Each Round Table was a good experience of touching humanity, of realizing how much potential such a Round Table has, sharing knowledge, ideas and experiences. The challenges, especially when conflicts came into the room, were also part of the good experiences, because they led to greater depth and understanding, and no one was apparently angry with the other. This is a merit of the methodology at the table - the ability to listen, the willingness to understand, the goodwill, the demand for equality.

When the attitude and structure were not yet quite clear, participants often criticized the mayor and municipal staff. They voiced demands about what should or should not be done, demands instead of requests. This changed over time.

One participant was pleased that the municipality had finally fulfilled her concern completely after three attempts. "I was finally able to turn my demand into a request. That's what I learned at the Round Table," she said.

A local councilor who attended as a representative of the interest of the municipality said at the third table: "I am allowed to be here and don't have to do anything. This is very different from other contexts when everyone always wants something from me and I am supposed to work on projects."

During a Round Table, one participant listened to a topic for a long time, went to the bar in between and returned to say goodbye. "The topic is already ticked off for me and I'm leaving now, but I'd like to be there again next time." And he did indeed come a month later and stayed until the end.

The feedback of the mayor who was present the first time via zoom, can be read in an interview in a regional newspaper: "In the form of Round Tables, Finkenstein wants to discuss possibilities for shaping the future and a beneficial cooperation together with citizens. I am pleased about the many ideas that have been brought in. The main focus is on sustainability, regionality and better marketing of regional products, among other things."

More sound bites:



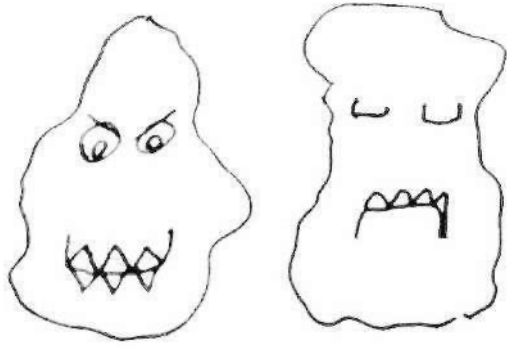
"Here, for the first time, I dared to tell others, outside my family, a very personal story. Elsewhere, I was always afraid of being considered crazy."

"I am not someone who talks a lot, but listen with interest. I can do that here at the Round Table without anyone forcing me to say anything. Elsewhere there are always these often endless rounds of introductions where everyone has to speak. I don't want that."

"I'm not used to people being allowed to speak their mind freely, or to this even being desired."

"The fact that people listen to me with interest is a new experience for me."

"Even though I expressed an attitude that everyone at the table didn't like, I was treated kindly during the interaction."



Possible stumbling blocks

The protocols that I wrote about the Round Table and sent to the participants and interested parties by email became a stumbling block. In them, I only reported on the topics and ideas and on the art-culture-culinary amount.

It was important to me not to publish lists of participants or names and personal stories or pictures of the participants, so that trust could remain.

The effect was: "Wow, that's great, please send me the minutes too, so that I am updated if I'm not there next time". Or the minutes were asked for afterwards because someone was not there and wanted to be informed.

The certainty of being informed anyway led some to stop coming. With this realization, I no longer wrote minutes. It also became clear that minutes cannot come close to capturing the mood at the Round Table.

I will close a parallel WhatsApp group to the Finkenstein Round Table after the summer at the latest. It has proven to be a space that, in its apparent anonymity, repeatedly leads people to criticize others or systems, to complain about God and the world, often without context. The reaction: participants leave the group without clarifying the situation, which is probably inappropriate or even unpleasant for them. In doing so, they also leave the community. The togetherness dissolves again without the possibility of clarification, which is always connected to needs.

These are usually about understanding, sometimes also about comfort, a physical hug and the security of belonging – needs that could not be fulfilled by the WhatsApp group.

The role of the host can become a stumbling block if this role remains in the same hands as responsibility and organization. This is counterproductive in terms of togetherness and self-empowerment. Everyone should be involved according to their possibilities and voluntarily, so that everyone can feel connected and belong to the Round Table.

I have hosted Round Tables both online and offline. Both have qualities that, for me, differ in the physical touch and the use of the senses for the shared experience. Smelling, hearing, touching, tasting, seeing, sensing the atmosphere or mood are different experiences in an online event. At the beginning, I lacked the feeling of connection via zoom, but this can be learned and requires "getting involved". With each online event, I was able to connect better with the participants and let myself be touched inwardly. The clear advantage of online events is that less time and resources have to be used, such as travel, rent and catering.

Concrete results "planned unplanned"

The Round Table in Finkenstein created networks between artists and schools. All participants were able to expand their knowledge and take away ideas, such as the idea of creating a participatory market. A first meeting has already taken place in this regard. Furthermore, there were requests for the Round Table from organizations and projects that recognized the Round Table format as a basis to facilitate cooperation and make it more enriching.

People who did not know or notice each other before now see each other with different eyes and call each other or meet for a chat, a walk and other activities.

Communication and listening have taken on a different quality among the participants of the Round Table and are more appreciated.

The desire to become better acquainted with the methods of non-violent communication was clearly expressed again and again at the table. Some people took away a lot of strength and inspiration for their own lives or changed their behavior and perspectives.



A statement to this effect: "I have become more mindful of others and have more appreciation for people I knew before but now perceive very differently after really listening to them."

I myself use the attitude of the Round Table in all my events. As a result, the structures have changed significantly. I can no longer imagine a lecture in the usual form, because for me it now represents a one-sided lecture, far removed from eye level, dialogue and knowledge sharing. In short: Learning from each other instead of lecturing.

What will happen with the Round Table?

After the summer break, I will invite people to the Finkenstein Round Table again, perhaps with the question at the beginning: How was your summer and how should your autumn be?

I also want to offer the table in projects and perhaps in schools, always being careful not to dance at too many weddings, in order to keep the strength at the tables – the strength it takes to visibly and tangibly live my attitude of hostess and participant at the Round Table.

Sharing the experiences and visions of what the table with its attitude means for us on our planet is something I will continue to practice, so that this attitude can spread. I will certainly continue to practice the attitude of the table in my everyday life, for example in my existing Zoom groups "The art of having good conversations", or "Self-care in togetherness".

Creative and artistic contributions

Artistic and creative contributions such as inspiring texts, pictures, music or playful impulses and movements offer a good start to the dialogue. This can be linked to a question. There are no limits to creativity. The requirement is to come from what is seen, heard, felt, thought and knowledge into a connecting dialogue. There should always be open questions, questions that challenge more than a yes or no.

Methods from coaching or exercises from communication are also a possibility to lead into dialogue at the Round Table.

In Finkenstein, I always had a loudspeaker with music from my mobile phone, as well as a book that I found in my bookcase according to my feelings, or a poem from my collection. This serves as a stockpile, because I don't know if there will be gaps to fill. But there were also live performances by participants as a prelude to the dialogue, for example a piano piece by a local pianist or a drum concert by a couple."

Other examples that have led to dialogue at the Finkenstein Round Table:

"I love the playful design of such impulses. Play closes the space of right and wrong more clearly and gives a lot of joy and laughter. We adults play far too seldom, drastically limiting our opportunities for joie de vivre and joyful encounters. "
Roswitha

Discovery walk



Questions on cards formed the starting point for randomly drawn pairs to go on a 30-

minute walk through the community. In the subsequent conversations, a lot of information and knowledge was shared, which stimulated further dialogue around the table.

Image selection



As an offer: Choose a picture that appeals to you and share your thoughts about it.

The need chocolate

A wonderful dialogue was set in motion by labelled chocolate. When pulling a piece of chocolate, the inscription was hidden. Then we asked the open question: Does the chocolate label suit you and if so, why?



Methods are Dandelions

But be unintentional.



The impulses are about inspirations that are easy and playful for everyone to grasp, in order to set in motion enriching dialogues from which one can gain knowledge, information, insights and, in the best of

cases, love for the person who is telling the story.

And the dandelion in the round shape of the table shows with what ease the seeds spread and sow. Seeds like love, trust, joy and much more ...

The field that is prepared is always the human attitude that the Round Table sets through its format. The flower harvest is an enriching, loving community that is benevolent to everyone.

The following poem accompanied the first Round Table in Finkenstein as an impulse and artistic contribution. For me, it is a very meaningful, inspiring text that encourages us to keep at it and represents the attitude that the Round Table embodies.

"Across the Villages" by Peter Handke

Play the game. Endanger the work even more.

Don't be the main character. Look for the juxtaposition.

Avoid ulterior motives. Do not conceal anything.

Be soft and strong.

Be smart, get involved and despise victory.

Do not observe, do not test, but remain spiritually ready for the signs.

Be shakable.

Show your eyes, beckon the others into the depths, take care of the space and look at everyone in their image.

Only decide enthusiastically. Fail calmly.

Above all, have time and take detours.

Let yourself be distracted.

Take a holiday, so to speak.

Don't overhear a tree or water.

Forget the relatives, encourage the unknown, Bend over for trivialities, soften into the emptiness,

Piss away the drama of fate, disregard the misfortune, disperse the conflict.

Move in your own colors; until you are in the right and the rustling of the leaves becomes sweet.

Go across the villages.

I'll follow you.

(Deeple translate)

Further examples of Round Tables in municipalities

Community Obervellach

In the middle of the main square of the small community of Obervellach in a side valley of Carinthia, about 35 people sat down at the Round Table one summer evening. The initiative came from the head of the local entrepreneurs' association, who was enthusiastic about the idea and attitude of the Round Table and gave us all the freedom we needed in designing it. As a starting point, a local artist explained some of her works and thus created a nice transition into the dialogue.

The first person to speak spoke about some of the challenges in the village and in the entire valley, such as migration, lack of cooperation and infrastructure. In the same breath, he offered to work creatively on solutions. In this tone, the discussion continued in an encouraging and solution-oriented manner. During the evening, we also divided the circle into its eight individual elements, which led to breakout sessions with four to five people each sharing in a small circle.

Two bicycle travelers from Germany who were just passing by were invited to sit at one of the tables. Afterwards, the residents reported quite proudly, how much the holidaymakers loved their valley and the place, especially

"because there are such beautiful people here". This has now become a common saying in the village.

People who had often lived here for years got to know each other better, often for the first time. The subsequent get-together in a guesthouse was also important for these in-depth encounters.

At this Round Table we also reported about the "Summer of Pioneers" project in Germany. The inventor of this format, which brings a breath of fresh air to places with migration problems, is Frederik Fischer from Berlin. Two participants were inspired by our stories: Susanne Keuschnig and Lukas Patschg will now implement this new, cross-border regional development project together with Frederik Fischer in Obervellach from 2023. We are part of the organizing team of "Kollektiv Zukunft", which has now been founded and operates a co-working space in the municipality. The Round Table is to find a permanent place there as a central instrument of dialogue.



Community Reißeck

Shortly before the first Round Table took place in the municipality of Reißeck, a new municipal council had been elected. The balance of power was completely reorganized, there was still a lot of uncertainty and distance within the members of the municipal council, as we only learned in the course of the Round Table. Two of the parties newly elected to the municipal council, both led by women, wanted to improve cooperation through the Round Table and got all parties to jointly invite to the event.

The Danielsberg was chosen as the location, a prominent elevation in the middle of the municipality that divides it into two villages and is both a place of power and a connecting element.

The tensions at the well-attended table were palpable and could be eased by everyone engaging in dialogue. The local councilors present said at the end: "The ice was broken because we listened to each other and got to know each other better. The idea was to make the Round Table a permanent institution within the municipal council and for the citizens. Nothing came of it for the time being.

Steffen Geßner, a participant of this Round Table, contacted Roswitha a year later and wanted to organize a second Round Table. He had observed that in Reißeck people continued to talk more about each other instead of with each other and that an enriching togetherness was stagnating.

"I found the format of the table beneficial and releasing, I would like to bring back this atmosphere and develop it further," said Steffen in a telephone conversation with



Roswitha. To prepare the table, the two had sat down together via Zoom. Steffen had found the room, written the invitation and distributed it. All that was done quickly. But the desirable attitude for moderation needed knowledge and practice. The biggest challenge for Steffen was to not fall into a discussion, a "ping pong", as well as to pay attention to

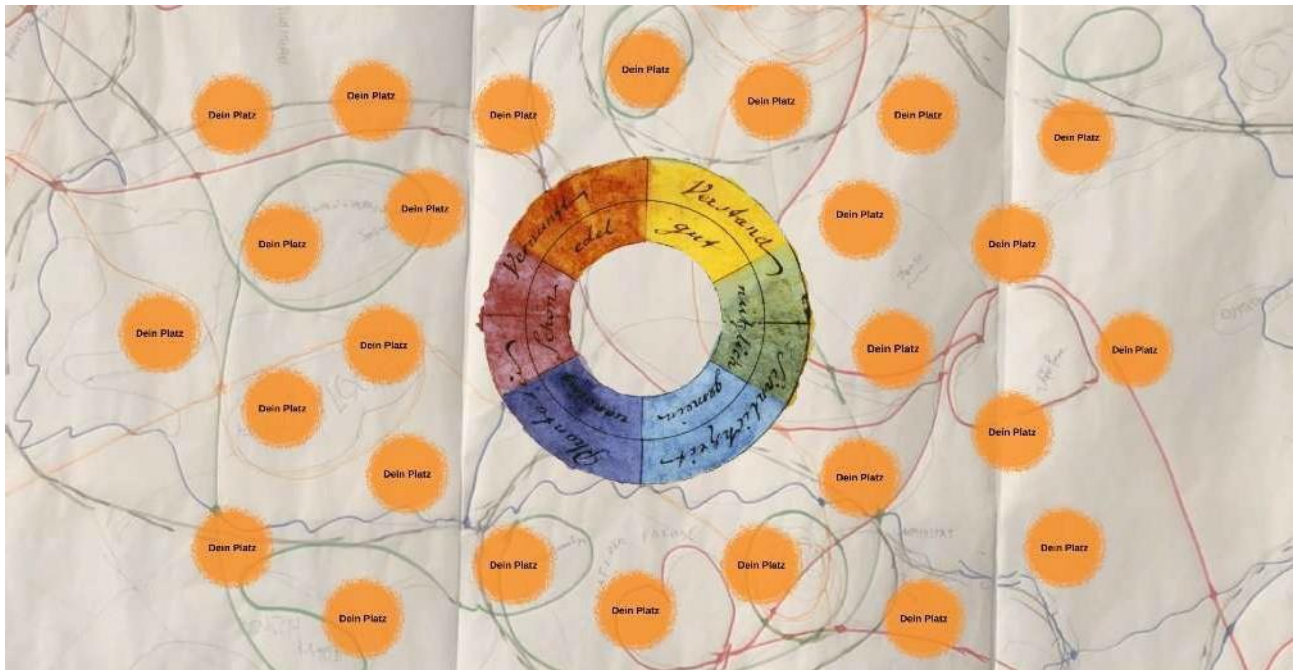
short messages and information in order to make the space sufficiently available to all participants instead of falling into long monologues. To come to the table without a topic and without expecting anything was unusual for him, but he was able to pick it up quickly and put it into practice.

Steffen still sees it as a great learning field to put a stop at the right places, with participants who go beyond the given framework with criticism, whining or long monologues. But he is not alone in this, it is the same for us who have been hosts for a long time. "No master has ever fallen from the sky, we are all practitioners and have to make mistakes in order to develop further. This sentence by Roswitha gave Steffen courage and lightness and led him to simply start and gain experience, as he says himself. Now in August it is summer break for the Round Table in Reißeck. It will take place again in autumn.

A tip that Steffen asked Roswitha about: Find a partner to be your co-host, that takes the pressure off and helps reflect in order to further develop the Round Table's attitude and not to fall back into old patterns. The long-term goal of a host should be to be able to hand over their role to someone else at any time.

Round tables online

"Days of the Future" 2021



Since 2010, the Days of the Future team had organized a total of 17 congresses in Austria on future topics. With the emergence of the Corona virus in 2020, we had to switch from face-to-face to online events. This also affected the Days of the Future 2021 which were hosted as part of the LiFT project. We succeeded in organizing a hybrid event where the Leading Team met live at Lake Wörthersee in Carinthia/Austria and jointly moderated the online congress from there.

At the end of the congress, we organized an online Round Table on the central topic of "Politics of the Future". All participants who had registered in advance could send us a portrait photo and a short text with contact details. Using Prezi, we created an interactive presentation in which we graphically placed the participants around a Round Table. We used Goethe's circle of colors as a motif, which radiates a more natural quality than a digitally drawn Round table.

This new version of a registration list

was sent to each participant in advance. In this way, they received much more information about the other participants than at many face-to-face events.

Another successful experiment was the simultaneous translation German/English, which we needed for our international guests among the total of about 50 participants. In the course of the dialogue, a woman spoke up and gave a very moving account of her negative experiences in male-dominated political bodies. This encouraged some other women to join the dialogue and give examples.

It became clear that women want more protected spaces like these to be truly heard and understood and thus gain the appreciation that is often still lacking in the public sphere.

"For a new togetherness"

In order to counterbalance the polarizing discussions on the topic of the COVID pandemic, the Days of the Future team offered online Round Tables from October 2021 under the motto "For a new togetherness". Here we wanted to gain new perspectives on the Corona crisis with the participants. Together we tried to better understand the causes and consequences of the current division in society and to find solutions to overcome it.

These Round Tables created spaces of trust where some entrenched positions were allowed to change. For here, as in all forms of Round Tables, it became clear that it is crucial that people have enough time and space to explain their personal motives in more detail.

No-one interrupts them, but on the contrary, emphatic listening takes place. We recognize each other again as people who, despite opposing opinions, share common needs. These include, for example, security, health, understanding, trust and a good life. Just being respected for being different brings us closer to each other.

Cross-connections

What project partners in the LiFT team think about the Round Table

Indra Adnan, The Alternative Global; Great Britain

"The Alternative Global is a political platform that asks the question: If politics is broken, what is the alternative? After five years, we have come to the conclusion that change has to start from the places where people can reconnect with each other across traditional political divides – so local communities are crucial. However, there is no infrastructure for this – people pass each other on the street and have no way to engage with each other.

The Round Table is a mechanism for social change. By simply putting it in the public space, you create a field for dialogue.

People are invited to sit down at a table and communicate with each other – the first steps towards a relationship that did not exist before. If only one or two people take a seat, that is enough to change the destiny of that community a little. But when the whole table is filled with people, endless conversations can be had that never existed before.

The multi-colored design of this table not only adds appeal, but also provides a framework for conversations about sustainability - about how our community can tackle climate change, or how we can be more resilient in the challenges ahead and in the face of warming.

For those sitting down for the first time, it may be an uncomfortable experience – they wonder if there is a protocol or rules for the game. However, after the first time, people will better understand that it is best to listen carefully to what others are saying and contribute their own thoughts when they are comfortable.

At a Round Table – more than at a long one – It is very easy to recognize when someone is dominating the conversation and to get that person to say a little less in order to hear a little more.

If a table can establish itself in a community for the long term, it soon becomes a place where difficult conversations take place. A place where people can try to understand something shocking or unjust. At this point, people might collectively decide to invest in more Round Tables so that more people have the opportunity to be part of the conversation.

Soon we will ask ourselves what we did before the Round Table existed.

We would like to experiment with roundtables in our Community Agency Networks, known as CANs, in the early stages."

"The European Commission established a [platform for coexistence between humans and large carnivores](#) in 2014. It has launched several projects to promote "regional platforms" to find ways to reduce conflicts over the presence of large carnivores in several member countries.

The conflicts have arisen from the successes in protecting wolves, bears, lynx and wolverines in Europe.

In Sweden, an attempt has been made to test the idea of local platforms where different stakeholders can come together to discuss at local level the conflicts mainly related to wolves and in some cases also bears. These stakeholders include farmers, hunters, representatives of government agencies involved in the management of large carnivores, representatives of tourism and conservationists.

Project funding limited the scope and two areas were selected to test Round Table discussions with stakeholders. One region was South Värmland, where stakeholders met to discuss farm animal welfare. The governor of Värmland county, county employees, farmers and conservationists met in Bergvik.

The second Round Table was set up in an area in Brengen in southern Sweden between Jönköping and Ulricehamn, where wolves had recently established a den and protests from local residents were very vocal.

The trial in Värmland has led to further efforts to set up local forums dealing with issues affecting rural people, such as water management, wind turbines and wolves. In the Brengen region, the Round Table group has already met several times and is willing to continue meeting. This group consists of representatives from two districts, hunters, conservationists, residents and farmers.

Round table discussions require extensive preparation and continuous follow-up and communication. The idea is to create a safe, neutral space where the parties can meet and exchange views. The [aim of these meetings is to develop mutual understanding and, if possible, to reach agreements on concrete, practical issues. This is particularly important in this conflict, where there is little trust between the actors.](#)

Our experience with testing Round Table discussions has been positive in both areas. In both cases, the fact that people physically meet has led to more trust and more positive relationships. The participants in the meeting had no previous contact with each other. After they had eaten and talked together, they stayed together for a long time after the meeting and had informal conversations - something that would never have been possible otherwise. [We also saw that the participants gained new insights about those they had previously considered "enemies".](#)

The Round Table discussions are crucial to the more formal forums convened by state actors such as the counties and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency. During a national dialogue in the same project, they expressed that they are out of touch with local residents and sentiments. The same view was recently expressed by the Large Carnivore Platform in Brussels.

We hope to continue the work with the Round Table discussions and, if possible, extend it to other regions in Sweden. Inspiration for this also came from the LiFT team."



Visions

What we would like to see at the Round Table

What has encouraged us so far: Many people who have come to the Round Table now want to take what they have experienced here back to their families, schools or organizations. It really needs a table as a recognizable symbol, because the attitude associated with it can be anchored and instantly retrievable.

"Let's sit down at the Round Table" could become a catchphrase for a culture of dialogue lived out in everyday life for better coexistence. Colorful Round Tables should and will change our society in small and large ways.

This is not a dream, but our experience from the tables that are already in place.

Everything is already there, it just needs to be done! You don't always need a big table with a diameter of three meters for that. Roswitha had an easily transportable 1-metre camping table converted for Finkenstein. The small version with a diameter of 12 centimeters fits into any handbag ... as a "Round Table to go", so to speak.

And the tiniest design comes as a pendant with a diameter of 1.5 centimeters and works as a (reminder) button as well as an ear stud ...

Simply get started!

Are you inspired to do a Round Table? Then you can start by going through the following list of questions, which you should enrich with your own visions, experiences and intuition, taking into account the basic form (page 27).

Ask yourself first:

Who do I inspire right at the beginning with the idea of the Round Table?

How do we share roles (hosting, organizing, etc.)?

For which circle do we want to do this (family, neighborhood, community, school, club, organization, company...)?

Should it be face-to-face or online? (which makes sense if the participants are widely scattered).

Where is the ideal place for it?

When is the best time when the people I want to reach might most likely have time?

How do I design the symbol of the Round Table (real table or online symbol)?

Do we want to make food and drink possible and if so, where does it come from? (Cooperation with a restaurant or homemade food or bring-your-bottle principle)

How do we invite people? (Email distribution list, social media, classic media, telephone calls, possibly flyers, posters)

How do we practice the hosting attitude in order to become free of expectations and goal attainment? (Do we need a test run?)

What do we need to start with to explain the Round Table? (our original impulse to do this; Round

Table attitudes, see page 10; explanation of the timeframe incl. the possibility to exchange afterwards ...)

What is the contribution from art/culture? Do we provide this ourselves or do we need someone else to do it?

How do we want to continue with the Round Table afterwards, or with

topics that might have arisen?

When does the organizing team meet after the Round Table to exchange experiences and insights?

Do we want to document the Round Table and if so, what does it take?



And then let's get into your first Round Table! It will give you more energy than you put into it ...

The process in steps - The basic form

Despite all the creativity and scope for shaping the Round Table, there is a fixed procedure. Without the following steps, it would no longer be the Round Table as we have experienced it as important and valuable – with the aim of promoting and demanding an attitude for an open atmosphere of dialogue.



1. Welcome (no round of introductions!)
2. The history of the formation of the Round Table - why are we doing this?
3. Presentation of the attitude at the Round Table - see page 10
4. Culinary offer- see host's task on page 11
5. Short artistic and/or creative impulse as an introduction to the dialogue - see pages 17/18
6. Dialogue with a question that has no claim to an answer, with the freedom that everyone can also bring in their topic, their questions or anything else.
7. Conclusion Reflection with questions, e.g.: "Was the table round?", "What are you taking with you today?", "What nourished you?".
8. Evening together, opportunity for informal meeting and mingling.

The total duration of the table adheres to the given framework of the invitation. In our case, it was 2-3 hours on average. A prolongation deviating from the invitation would be possible with those who wish to continue and those who agree to it.

Final reflections



In writing, I realised the quality and possibilities of the Round Table even more clearly. Reflecting one's format by writing down all the details proved to be enormously valuable for me. Its impact has now become even clearer to me. The result gives me strength and new ideas and makes it much easier for me to continue. The question in this transcript, 'What will happen next with the Round Table?' made very clear to me: I will invite people to Finkenstein again in September!

Roswitha

This manual came about spontaneously and in successful co-creation. This is also how Roswitha and I also approached the design of the Round Tables – each of us with their own ideas, which ultimately fitted together wonderfully. So here, too, our research and experiences came together to form a hopefully “round” and consistent picture. These were complemented by outside views from Bernard and Indra, to whom I am particularly grateful for this sentence: “Soon we will ask ourselves what we did before the Round Table existed.”

Harald

In the end, all that remains is for us to wish you and all those who want to organize a Round Table good luck, success, touching experiences and beautiful new relationships. May you and we create a dignified future for all people.

The responsibility for this lies in all our hands...and the Round Table with its attitude can be an important element for this!

Roswitha Pietrowski

H. Hell