

Open Space RCE Session at 8th WEEC Conference Gothenburg June 30 2015 and a follow-up session on the 3rd of July

Part 1

Members of RCEs from around the world gathered with the curious and the adventurous to explore key issues of RCE development and implementation at the 8th WEEC Conference. The event was hosted by RCE West Sweden and, being scheduled for a 6pm start, began with a delicious vegetarian meal provided by RCEWS member Annette Fredman from her Trollhättan restaurant [Vegolyckan](#).



There were 42 participants and while happily eating dinner, each attendee introduced themselves to the group. Then [Zinaida Fadeeva](#) introduced the UNU's broad vision for RCE's as key players in the up scaling called for in the [GAP Roadmap](#). She argued that it was the RCE's feet on the ground that gave them the opportunity to take the GAP 5 Priorities forward. She acknowledged that this would involve a wide range of processes and was keen to hear what RCE teams saw as viable and exciting opportunities. She also acknowledged the challenges that upscaling involved. Her comments established the focus for this meeting in which participants used the open space approach to explore how RCEs could engage with the GAP Roadmap.

Åse Eliason Bjurström and Miriam Sannum introduced the basic principles of [open space](#) group work and, given there was only two hours for the session, invited people to immediately begin by writing down Working Group themes. These included: Strategy and Governance; Funding RCEs; Place Based Learning; Networking RCEs; Ensemble Learning as a Basis for RCE operation; Moving from the Local to the Global.



Visual Categories of Themes

Very soon people broke into interest groups and began exploring these themes. The themes were diverse but could be organised visually into seven key elements as in Figure 1:

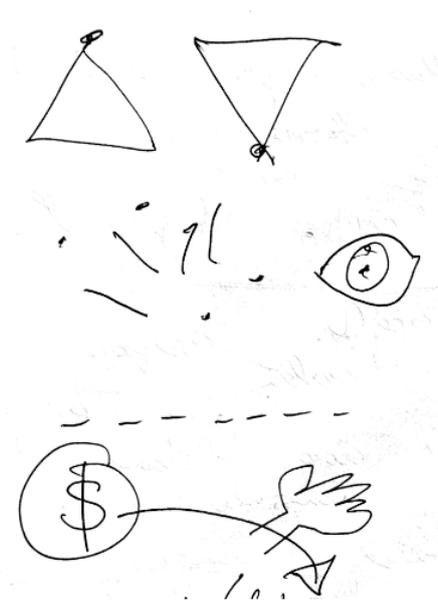


Figure 1: Visual Representation of Themes

The two triangles reflected the basic orientations of the themes. The apexed triangle represents working from a local or unique perspective to a global generic one with the inverted being the inverse: global to specific. The lines and dots represent the networked aspect of RCEs. Many were concerned that they felt isolated and needed to plug into broader RCE networks (the specific to the global) whilst others wanted to foster increased networks, taking networks and nodes a basic

principle of organisation for innovation and increased social cohesion (the Broad to the specific). The eye represents the need to research RCEs and their many attributes – the gaze should at times be critical and enabling.

The straight line of dashes represents two related aspects of the themes participants were exploring: the need for strategic action and also the need for continuity. Strategic action to generate national commitment for RCEs – leading to money flows but also to greater possibilities for affecting policy change and renewal. Strategy lies at the heart of the scaling up of ESD processes as identified in the GAP roadmap. Continuity in terms of partners and also stakeholders from all sectors was important and seen as an issue that impacted on energy to complete goals set by RCEs. The dollar sign of course targets the matter of energy and acknowledges that without sound financial backing RCEs will not achieve their goals. But, as continuity acknowledges, it is not simply a matter of money – success depends on the ongoing support of key institutions and other stakeholders. Finally, the hand represents a need for broader engagement with the competencies that support success and the scaling up of ESD projects.



Expanding on the key themes

Continuity has both a horizontal and vertical dimension. Horizontality brings on concerns about connectivity and the wish to avoid re-inventing the wheel. Networking is key here but also an awareness that mentoring offers access to lessons learned and also an induction into the RCE community. UNU can map RCEs potentialities around the world and more clearly foster RCE legitimacy and linkages through identifying RCE interest clusters and so on. Verticality acknowledges the temporal trajectory of both individual RCEs and also of the entire RCE movement. Who holds the memory, who distills the lessons? Is it UNU or is it up to the individual or regional RCEs to do so?

The question of Scale is important. What are the implications of scaling up for individual RCEs? Is it possible to get too big? Lose touch with the grass roots? Scaling up may call for some infrastructural support as in regional RCE groups that can lobby for support at regional, national and even international levels.

The question of ownership of RCEs also arose. Where does the self-interest lie in promoting them – with the formal institutions that often house them? With the stakeholders (or a subset of these)? Or can they be ‘owned’ by the communities they serve? Are there enabling combinations of stakeholders in RCEs that could foster robust competencies and also, given the nature of proprietorial processes, are there also risks that now ownership might limit these?

Humour and fun are seen as key elements in a vital and creative RCE discourse. They also have a critical function (critique) in disrupting networks and authorities, releasing blocked energy and in keeping the space open for the ongoing work of RCEs.



The session closed with Marcus Bussey offering a summary of key themes he had discerned in the various group meetings.

Part 2 Follow-up session on the 3rd of July

This summary and the group themes were taken to the follow-up meeting held on July 3, 10am to 3pm. This session was facilitated by Marilyn Mehlmann from Global Action Plan (GAP – not to be confused with GAP). Marilyn employed Fleck’s Synergy Method to help us organise time and the themes we wished to explore.



The session involved a series of investigations and reflections on aspects of RCE operation including:

- The October London Regional RCE Meeting
- RCE Networking and Competencies
- The nature of leadership for RCEs
- The role of Robust Ignorance in RCE functions
- Sociocracy 3.0 - <http://sociocracy30.org/>
- The importance of documentation and dissemination and the power of Action Research
- Strengthening of linkages between RCEs and UNU and UNESCO
- The floating of an idea for an RCE Conference in 2018
- The collaboration of RCE's with the NGO Global Action Plan in which tools and methods are adapted for RCE needs

The extended list of deliberations is to be found on the [RCEWS Blog](#). The meeting closed with an ongoing commitment to collaboration and communication between the RCEs present and an invitation for all RCEs to become more connected and active in the RCE community.

