

The Gathering Gates

Community Hubs for a More Beautiful World

Foundational Vision

Mission

Setting up urban and land-based community hubs in East Anglia and inviting a living inquiry into how we can become increasingly regenerative and innovative as together we respond to the multiple crises of our times and take bold and imaginative steps towards a more just and beautiful world.

Taking one step at a time, inviting the power and wisdom of the collective, evolving a culture of integrity and trust, and playing our part in reinventing and re-localising our economy.

Tending what is broken and lost in ourselves, in our communities and in our lands, celebrating what is good and whole, and exploring important life questions about such things as meaning and purpose.

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About Us

Welcome and thanks for reading. The contents of this document have been produced by Jenny Haycocks and Eliza Day. Inspired by the idea of setting up a Climate Emergency Centre, we've been meeting together – and with our friends K2, Abie and others – to explore the question of what's happening and what's needed in our corner of the world. The foundational vision set out here is the outcome of this inquiry.

In formulating this response, we have considered how we might do it differently, shifting our ways of being, knowing and doing to a more sustainable level, and attending to the 'why' and the 'how' as well as the 'what'.

We see this project as part of a movement of movements that is gearing up to unleash a wave of grassroots innovation and transformation. Our hope is that, by coming together in the intentional way we have envisioned here – in community, in connection with the breathing living earth, and attuned to the spirit of the universe – we will be better able to turn and face the very real dangers in our path at this time, and play our part in the rapid adaptation that we (and many others) believe is being called for in these times.

The Driver below is a short statement of the core motivation behind this project, the 'why' that is moving us to act. In the Aims, we set out the essence of how we hope to respond to what we're seeing. We then offer a Vision of what we want to bring about as we take steps towards achieving these aims. All of this is interspersed with questions – an invitation for you to consider what these words evoke for you, and to engage with this document in a spirit of collaboration.

We hope you will feel inspired by what you find here, and perhaps encouraged to take a step towards connecting with us, and with this vision.

Driver

Multiple crises

Our understanding of current world events is that they are the manifestation of a long-term state of crisis in the ecological, social and spiritual realms that has been unfolding for many years. As a result, the health and wellbeing of humans and all species appears to be in jeopardy and economic collapse seems all but inevitable.

Does this resonate for you? What are you seeing in your world that might indicate we are facing dangers and perils in our evolutionary journey as humans? What does the word 'spiritual' mean to you?

A window of opportunity

Many of us are also sensing at these times an unprecedented window of opportunity to radically re-evaluate and restructure our way of life. This is accompanied by a growing desire to re-align ourselves with the land and with natural and universal cycles of regeneration, to restore our communal bonds, and to withdraw our consent from the structures that are destructive of life.

Do you experience a unique sense of possibility at this moment in history? Do you have a sense of something seeking to align in you? How are you connecting with the natural world and with your community at this time?

Creative responses

We feel there is a need to provide spaces where we can gather together in person, in community, to take the future into our own hands and to set the tone for positive change. We also need to consider ways in which we may recover from what is evidently an epidemic of burnout and overwhelm, and to address the unnecessary suffering in our midst. In all this, we sense the need to invite ways of knowing (and unknowing) that go beyond the usual approaches that are no longer adequate.

What would it look like to you to invite a collective focus on kindness, connection and gratitude? How would you name the things that deplete you? And how do you connect with what energises you? How can we think outside the box, invoking our powers of imagination and ingenuity in order to protect what we love?

Towards a new world

We believe that attending to these needs, and addressing the questions they raise, will enable us to move from fear and paralysis and to fulfill a vision of freedom, abundance and liberation for all. This will involve, amongst other things, confronting an endemic loss of power and control at the grassroots level, and activating our innate authority to discern and decide, and to act together for the good of the whole.

Aims

Community

To build a community based on shared purpose, collective meaning-making and connection with nature through establishing one or more urban and/or land-based hubs in East Anglia.

Sustainability

To facilitate an ongoing inquiry into how we can move forward together in ways that are increasingly regenerative and sustainable; giving priority to questions, not jumping too quickly to solutions, and seeking wisdom in the spaces between.

Culture

To evolve a culture of integrity and creativity through collective learning and unlearning, seeking common ground together, establishing bonds of mutual trust, exploring the gift economy, and activating the innate goodness of human and non-human nature.

Vision

The vision set out here contains some ideas for getting started and what we hope is a good-enough-for-now structure and approach to facilitate sustained creativity and collaboration. Our intention here is to open a field of inquiry, and to put in place some foundation stones that we can stand on to support whatever may emerge as we take steps forward.

The invitation with all of it is to be playful, to conduct experiments, and to bring on board all our capacities as well as the many different approaches we have come to trust. We also want to encourage a culture of active curiosity, of living with questions and uncertainty, adopting a practical humility and allowing space for what we don't know we don't know to emerge.

Community Hubs

We envisage establishing a hub in this region -- or perhaps multiple hubs -- which could take one or more of three forms. The descriptions set out here represent three distinct intentions, which could overlap, and may even be incorporated into one single hub.

Activation Hubs

Locations generally near or surrounded by water dedicated to nature-based connection: drawing on diverse traditions and practices, and sharing knowledge and skills. Holding spaces for deep inquiry into questions around such things as spirituality, meaning and purpose; feeling our way towards a culture of sharing, giving, and abundance in all areas, including time and money, to counteract the dominant mindset of scarcity, competitiveness and lack.

Innovation Hubs

Self-funding, primarily urban centres bringing together diverse groups and individuals: enacting creative community solutions to the multiple emergencies of our times; supporting and celebrating the many regenerative projects already underway; and collaborating on a diverse range of projects and enterprises with the emphasis on mutual aid, care for the earth, and growing a circular, gift economy.

Land-Based Hubs

Self-sufficient sites for intentional co-living and co-working: growing our own food, renewing our natural affinity with the land (a process that seems to have accelerated already during this covid era) and developing regenerative practices in all areas, including in the communal, agricultural

and economic spheres. Exploring the diverse ways in which we can align with planetary and universal forces: connecting to our roots and to the mystery of what brings us most alive.

How would it be for you to belong in a web of community? Do you have a sense that this might be something that is missing for you? Do any of these descriptions resonate as something in which you might like to take part? What else is present for you in response to the motivation (the driver) and the aims described above?

Regeneration

Given the right conditions, all living systems, including the human body, move towards wholeness and wellbeing. 'Regeneration' is a word being widely used in these times as we try to understand what these right conditions might look like in our social and political systems.

There is a sense that, seeking more health-full and sustainable ways, means aligning with the essential goodness of our own human nature, as well as with the natural cycles revealed in the non-human world around us, and with the more-than-human realms too.

This means holding budgets, strategic goals, technology, structures and financial planning alongside such things as trust, flow, synchronicity, divine assistance, the wisdom of the ages and the deep time presence of the ancestors and the future-beings.

We've come up with the model of a Regeneration Wheel to help us work with this pattern of co-creation consciously and intentionally, as we seek to escape the perhaps more familiar 'Exhaustion and Burnout Wheel'.

Regeneration Wheel

The illustration in Appendix I offers an empty template organised according to the overarching cycle of death and regrowth which we see in the seasons of the year.

The place of winter, of dying back, of planting seeds and going inward. Emerging into spring, with the rising sun in the east, the time of green growth coming out of the dark soil. The tender shoots of life growing into fullness in the south, bringing abundance and vitality, a sense of ease and joy. In the west, the autumn, bringing in the harvest, taking stock and celebrating the fruits of the earth...

Cycles of dreaming, planning and action; and of rest, renewal and reflection...

How does all this live in you? How does it show up in your relationships with others – and in your projects?

Wheels Within Wheels

This illustration suggests different ways of understanding this pattern drawing on the Native American model of the Medicine Wheel and an approach known as Dragon Dreaming. (Try reading it in the round, one colour at a time, rather than from top to bottom).

At the centre is a generative capacity beyond our human powers of knowing, an essence that holds us and the universe in coherence. This we might think of as ultimate reality or mystery, or simply as being itself, a source from which we may derive meaning and power.

These are just some ways of looking at this cycle, there are other models too which different groups might explore as we bring our diverse inspirations and sources into the mix.

Might it be possible that everything we do could become in some way regenerative? What would it be like to experience all our living moments as both conscious action and regeneration: the inward flow, and the external gesture, the stillness and the movement?

By inviting a living inquiry along these lines, we hope to take this vision of the Gathering Gates in a direction that may be different to the community projects we have seen before. We want to explore ways of organising that will lean less heavily on both our human and ecological capacities and, with all humility, to manifest something that is genuinely innovative.

Regenerative Practices

We've sketched out a few core practices which may be helpful to work with, in combination with our Learning and Unlearning Labs (see below). Some or all of these might be familiar to you, and you will no doubt have others you can add to the mix.

With all this the idea is to discover the practices and activities that enable us to be super-regenerative and super-sustainable.

The Children's Fire

We are inspired by the practice of lighting the [Children's Fire](#), a custom originating from Native American peoples.

At gatherings where decisions are to be made, a fire is placed at the centre to invite us to consider the impact of our actions on seven generations. We think forward into the future, making sure no decisions are taken that could hurt those that will come after us (both human and non-human). And we honour the ancestors, whether that be our blood lines or the influences and traditions upon whose shoulders we stand.

Lighting a candle at the beginning of meetings might be a good way to invoke this deep time perspective.

Intentional Silence

We are also inspired by the practice of silence as a universal language that can help us get unhooked from the stories that no longer serve us, as we turn towards the common good.

Silence is what exists in the empty space between the notes of a musical score; without silence, there is no music. It is the fertile void from which new creation emerges.

Starting each gathering with a short period of silence could help provide a transition from previous activities and help us attune to collective intelligence.

Silence can also help bring us into communion with mystery and grace, with what we don't know we don't know. It's the place for pause, where we can regularly invite a time of rest to remind ourselves we're not the ones making the world turn.

Celebration

Celebrating ourselves and our projects is a powerful way of boosting our motivation and energy and reinforcing our communal bonds. Likewise, appreciating the good that we do and that we intrinsically are has a way of magnifying it.

Gratitude is also a subversive act: it helps dismantle the planet-devouring industrial growth society by refusing its insatiable demands for more. As we affirm the wealth that is relationship, community and nature's providence, living simply and consuming less becomes a more attainable ideal.

Feasting together, ceremony, dancing and singing, reviewing our achievements, approaching challenges as opportunities to learn... What are the ways you find to celebrate, and how can we weave this thread into our community-building?

Grief-work

We'd like to invite a culture of radical welcome, where everything that we are, and everything we bring is accepted, welcomed and celebrated. Sometimes this could mean opening up the darker side of our emotions and experience.

As humans we're not wired to hold our pain entirely in solitude. But in our culture we seem to have largely lost touch with the ancient ways of holding one another in our grief, in the web of friendship and community.

Naming and expressing our pain in the company of others – whether it be in a grief tending workshop, or by simply making space to name our hurts – is a powerful glue that binds us together, bringing us home to our shared humanity. Acknowledging our losses, and indeed our mortality, can also help alleviate our many fears and awaken us to the preciousness of life.

As well as bereavement, there are other complex losses that sometimes need attention. Embracing these aspects of our humanity – such as ancestral grief and pain for our world – can help bring us out of depression and despair into gratitude and vibrant aliveness.

What are the ways that are familiar to you that could help us bring our values and our actions closer together? What practices might you like to cultivate that would contribute to building community?

In this way, improvising and experimenting together to discover what works, our hope is that we may find our way to a place where life and our capacity to be generative comes to us, not as something we earn or strive for, but as something that is natural, effortless even. The idea is to live our way into a place where work and play and life are not separate, where we experience joy, and taste the mystery of grace.

Is this a vision that speaks to you?

Learning and Unlearning Labs

We plan to offer ongoing sessions, some of which will be 'core' labs that we will encourage those wanting to be actively involved to attend. In addition, any number of optional labs and educational activities can be woven in as more people bring different offerings.

Sociocracy

One of these core labs will be looking at and applying processes from a branch of sociocracy known as Sociocracy 3.0 (S3). The creators of S3 have built on the classic framework of sociocracy, with its lineage stretching back nearly two centuries, to evolve a wide range of practical guidelines to support effective governance and collaboration.

We are planning to work with S3, at least initially, to inform our decision making and to help with other aspects of our work. S3 offers readily actionable ways of accessing the ancient wisdom of the circle, and a discipline to help us refrain from polarising.

It promotes maximum autonomy within agreed constraints, balancing the freedom of the individual with the needs of the wider collaboration; and it facilitates decentralised, distributed leadership and self-organising systems.

Power-with

We are also looking to other live inquiries for inspiration as together we seek new ways of collective organising and decision making that enable a more balanced distribution of power. We want to place authentic connection and relationship front and centre, with wisdom emerging from trust, supported by good information and facilitation.

Building on the work of others in this field¹, we also want to look at how we can become more trauma-aware, with a focus on personal processing and mutual support, as we explore how we may transform potentially disruptive responses into empathy and compassion.

Unlearning

We sense that these labs will involve an element of 'unlearning' as well as learning, as so much of our way of life is up for revision at this time. We may also consider how we can restore some of the lost dimensions of our shared heritage as humans on this planet.

All this we envisage will invite an ethic of questions, helping us maintain an open fresh edge in our seeing as we reign in our cultural tendency to impose macro-solutions which can tend to reinforce patterns of domination that no longer serve us.

In this way, we may also bring to light unconscious bias arising from privilege, and gently challenge the colonising mindset that thinks it *knows* for everyone.

Renewing Democracy

We envisage these labs will offer opportunities to ignite, grow and harness our enthusiasm for a more uplifting and healthy way of life, establishing a common language and a framework for growing community and collaborating effectively.

The idea is to introduce processes that will enable us all to get as fully involved as we want and are able to; and to evolve a joined-up culture, drawing on expertise from a range of sources as well as looking to our own experience and innate wisdom to guide us.

The overall idea is to play our part in laying the foundations for wholesale systems change and for re-imagining and renewing democracy from the grass roots up.

Inspiration for Hubs

We have intentionally not filled in the picture too much, to leave space for whatever may arise as we invite involvement from others. However, have a look at the 'Inspiration' section below for a flavour of the kind of things that might be possible, and to discover some of our sources we are drawing on.

Activation Hubs

The idea of Activation Hubs has been inspired by a project called [Conscious Gems](#), which envisions a global network of locations dedicated to personal and communal awakening.

The suggestion that these hubs are situated by or near water seems apt for our East Anglian geography with its vast network of inland waterways and the surrounding coastline. The element of water has powerful symbolic and performative qualities; in many traditions it is

¹ In particular, [Grassroots to Global](#) and [Trust the People](#).

associated with new birth: with baptism and healing, and with renewal and blessing. With its face set towards the rising sun, it may be that these Eastern lands have a particular role to play in bringing to birth social, spiritual and economic innovations.

The history of creative arts camps in this region is one source we can look to for inspiration here. Beginning in the early 1970s with the [Albion Fairs](#), eco-conscious gatherings such as Dance Camp East, NVC camps, Green Man, Midsummer, Bender and Hare Moon camps (to name but a few) have been something of a social laboratory, offering experiences of living simply in community, close to nature. Drawing on diverse traditions and exploring a wide range of practices and processes for personal and cultural activation, the tribal earthiness of these gatherings seems to have met a deep need.

The lands of the North Folk are also home to a rich and prolific religious heritage. In medieval times, Norwich was a major English city, second only to London in its economic and cultural significance. All the religious institutions of Europe had a base here, with the city alone boasting some 22 monasteries and convents, 37 guild chapels and 10 hermit cells at each of its city gates. Nearly a thousand churches were built in the county, with an estimated 650 surviving to this day. The city also housed 36 anchorages (a kind of hermitage) one of which was home to visionary and holy woman Julian of Norwich, who in our times has risen to international status as a pre-eminent woman author and mystic.

It seems there is a powerful lineage of spiritual and cultural devotion embedded here that we can tap into. And of course the religious legacy of medieval times is just one expression of this; there will also be pagan and druidic elements interwoven into the spiritual fabric of these lands, as well as a rich (and ongoing) tradition of literary and artistic accomplishment and political radicalism.

Perhaps all this is in some way related to what we mean by the 'sacred': of that which is precious, and which brings life and invites our love and loyalty. Whether it be in a sweat lodge, in a prayer circle, at a 5Rhythms dance, through the application of permaculture principles, or simply by tending the hearth of land-based community, taking this legacy to new levels could help us play our part in bringing about the rapid adaptation and transformation these times are calling for.

Is there a particular aspect of our local heritage that speaks to you? What traditions and sources of wisdom do you have access to, that could inform and inspire us in these times, and help us build the inner resilience to meet what lies ahead?

Innovation Hubs

The [Climate Emergency Centre](#) (CEC) network is a brilliant source of information and practical examples of what we're calling 'Innovation Hubs'.

The concept lends itself to a huge range of possibilities. Activities could incorporate cultural gatherings around food and music, Gift Circles (for sharing resources, ideas and equipment), educational programmes, spaces for collaboration and networking - and much more. Shared agreements and principles around such things as earth care and the ethical sourcing of resources could also be a creative part of the mix.

For local authorities who wish to collaborate on delivering community solutions to the social and climate emergencies, an Innovation Hub provides a tangible next step. It offers a focus for sustainable business incubation as well as for improving community resilience, all of which will go some way towards supporting local mitigation and adaptation to the climate emergency.

The CEC network have put together a template (the CEC Handbook) mapping out key steps from deciding what sort of building and setup is wanted, to undertaking community outreach and setting up a legal entity. (The Gathering Gates currently has the support of a local charity, the [Norwich Contemplative Forum](#), providing an umbrella under which we can organise meetings and events, manage finances and apply for funding. In the longer term we may want to create our own legal body).

Some CECs have been working with an approach which it calls the 'Business Model', which involves first researching and identifying empty buildings. Next the landlord is approached with a proposal, and invited to form a partnership to negotiate with the Local Authority to seek up to 100% business rate relief. The understanding would be that the landlord then donates a percentage of their savings to develop the community hub. So, for example, a two-storey office block might pay rates of £70,000 and obtain 100% relief from the Council, with, say, 30% (£21,000) going to the project.

Aside from this model, there are other options to consider too such as obtaining a space through direct action, liberating or occupying a building, working with developers and/or the council, utilising existing social spaces, renting, setting up a coop or a Community Land Trust and buying a property for long-term community use.

The Business Model has been successfully pioneered by a number of groups, including one of the first CECs at Ilford in Essex, where they have converted an unoccupied building which was formerly the site of a Homebase store. With a two-year extendable lease, they have set up accommodation for a live-in caretaker and introduced a variety of projects and activities including a repair cafe, an exhibition space, a community cinema, a pop-up art gallery, and a library.

Land-Based Hubs

It seems the time is ripe for returning to the land, and there are many groups around the country that are beginning to mobilise and organise around this intention, as well as those already established such as the [Lammas Eco Village](#) in Wales.

Some of these groups are exploring possibilities for living on the land, approaching local landowners and farmers and 'collapse aware' investors. Others, like iFarm (Ikigai Farm Limited) for example, are working on projects to combat loneliness and social isolation and to provide access to green space, an objective that features high on the agenda of many local authorities. iFarm is a volunteer-led Community Benefit Society (CBS) with 11 acres of land on the borders of Norfolk and Suffolk. It has a vision for rural regeneration, led by a restorative approach to agricultural and horticultural business, and offering scientific, educational and cultural activities.

A task for the near-to-medium term might be to map and connect with some of these projects, with a view to sharing ideas and resources, and pooling knowledge and skills.

Get Involved

We envisage this initial stage as being about community building, team activation and putting processes and structures in places. That said, anything could happen once we let this cat out of the bag, and we're very much open to whatever shows up...

We'd love to hear from you or, better still, to connect with you in the flesh. With that in mind, we're planning a number of gatherings over the summer. We want to open the field, to explore further the vision set out here, and to build relationships with anyone who feels some resonance with this foundational vision.

[Sign up](#) to our mailing list to find out more. There's an option on the form for you to tell us if you'd like to get actively involved, what your interests are, and what you might like to bring into the mix.

We place value on informal and unstructured ways of meeting alongside the more formal stuff – simply spending time together and giving time, time is important too. We also want to weave in some more focused gatherings with a view to forming a core team – a Dream Team – to take this project forward. With that in mind we are planning some learning labs that will look at:

- collective visioning
- sociocracy training
- mapping areas we want to give energy to
- exploring our mutual skills, gifts and passions
- agreeing our shared values
- electing people to roles

Further down the line, we would like to give some time to exploring what it might mean to promote and be part of a Gift Economy.

In all this, we will be taking time to celebrate each forward step towards realising our vision; and we will interweave creative and connecting activities, with a view to ditching the whole idea of board (bored) meetings.

Meditation

In this meditation we're inviting you to sit quietly with all this material with a view to connecting with it at depth and in light of your own experience. (With thanks to K2 for these words of inspiration).

We're in a vision meeting, Liz, Jen and K2, exploring this idea of the Gathering Gates. We want to open up the meaning of *essence* as the heart of where we're coming from.

The metaphor of water has been offered, the deep waters, the sustaining clear waters, where we can drink and quench our thirst. Something in us knows when we encounter water that is deeply nourishing. It has a sense of natural purity. It has a taste of peace and refreshment, a taste of vitalisation, a taste of community and of deep and satisfying connection.

What would make my life more wonderful or more beautiful? What would satisfy my deepest needs, both in myself and together with others?

What brings the fresh edge and the forward movement that we can enjoy together? And the sense of meaning and purpose that invigorates us to be creative, generous, playful, spontaneous and whole?

How do we access a sense of the dance, the movement of responding appropriately and naturally to the world's calls for help?

Sitting in this invitation, what is the essence of what really matters to you? What touches your heart? And how might this contribute to the world? What actions might you do if you lived from this deep well of meaning, health and connection?

We invite you to sense your contact with the earth right now, through your feet or the chair, sensing the body, entertaining and being available to the felt sense of this deep water, this deep lake. It might be blue or green in colour, or clear. It might have lotuses blooming up and

blossoming on the surface. There might be many of them, like a community at different stages of growth, all together, offering their petals and their beauty to the world and to each other.

Resting here. With all of this.

Acknowledgements

With grateful thanks to friends and colleagues who have given their time, wisdom and support to help shape this initial vision, and in particular Abie Raynsford, Andrew Cook, Jim Green, Jo Guthrie, Liz Cannon, Mary Green, Simon McKibben (K2) and Vera Proudlove.

Thank you to Emily-Scott Bolton, whose generous hospitality and beautiful yoga studio (the first Gathering Gate) has supported and inspired our work together.

With gratitude and honour to the elements that give life: the air, the earth, the water, the sun... and to the living creatures and the more-than-human entities for the part they have all played in this creative offering.

We are finding common ground with and drawing inspiration from the following like-minded initiatives. We acknowledge with deep appreciation all they (and others too) are doing in service of the Great Turning.

Campfire Projects

Climate Emergency Centres

Conscious Gems

CTRLshift

Deep Adaptation

Freedom Network (and its local hub, Norwich Light Network)

North Norfolk District Council

Grassroots to Global

Imaginal Futures

Reworlding

Transformative Adaptation (TrAd)

The Greater Reset

Trust the People.

We are also, with all humility, standing on the shoulders of giants who have gone before us, and we particularly honour, amongst others [Extinction Rebellion](#) and [Transition Network](#).

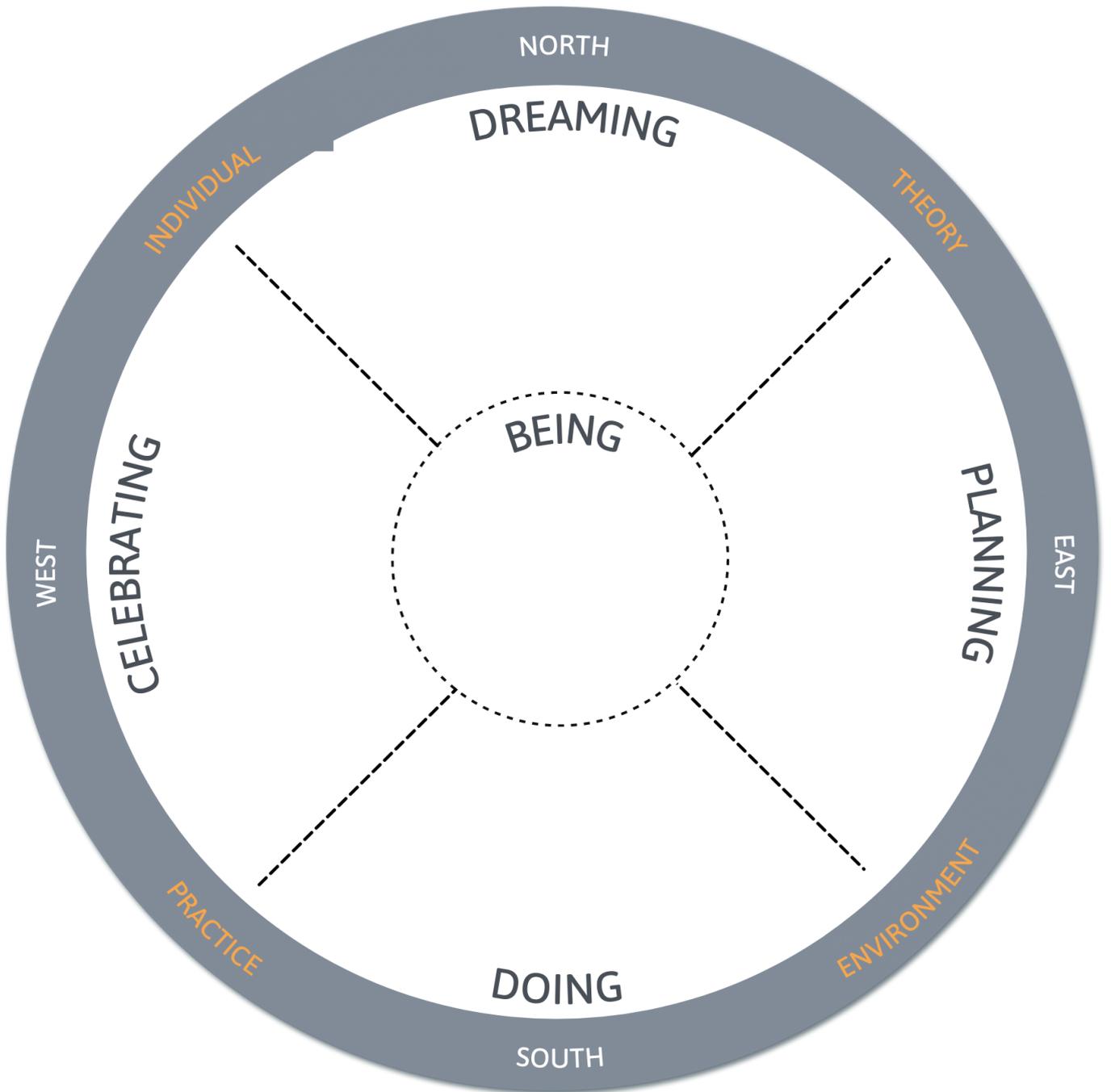
We are independent of these communities while at the same time welcoming partnership with all who broadly share this vision of a more beautiful world.

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Sign up

Join our mailing list here: <http://bit.ly/thegates-signup>

Appendix I



Appendix II

