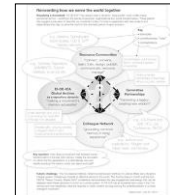


Re-imagining our common future

The emerging need to reinvent the dynamics of the spirit movement for the 21st century

David Dunn

The purpose of this talking paper. A first talking paper, written after the May Archive Sojourn month in Chicago, reflected on the need for re-imagining the Global Archive as a repository dynamic—a focal point for interchange and learning, grounded in both historical documents and contemporary experience. Now in early August, following the ICA-OIKOS conference at Oklahoma City University, I want to reflect on the emergence of new working relationships among the Ecumenical Institute, the Order Ecumenical and the Institute of Cultural Affairs. My purpose in this second talking paper is to create a context for proposing new ways to release the power of our colleague network as the sine qua non in the reinvention of the ICA and its success as a prominent actor in the 21st century world. (Note the graphic on page 3.) A third talking paper will follow with concrete proposals for roles that need to be played and income that needs to be generated to sustain new ventures that we might undertake together.



Three surprising events. For me, the presence of the historical church at the Mathews Symposium in Washington, DC last December redeemed the Ecumenical Institute from obscurity and regret. A second event, the May Archive Sojourn month in Chicago, offered an energizing vision of a decade-long community project to transmute our heritage into resources for 21st century movements. A third event—the “Peace, Poverty and Planet Earth” conference jointly sponsored by ICA USA and the OIKOS Scholars Program at Oklahoma City University—has just been held in Oklahoma City. Thirty-some ICA-related colleagues joined faculty and students for presentations, workshops and follow-up planning. The same keen interest, intensified engagement and deep collegiality was present in all three events.

Why are we suddenly drawn together and surprised by our motivity? A part of the answer may be our relief that ICA USA shows signs of life, health and vision. There are prospects for working partnerships with Wesley Theological Seminary and Oklahoma City University that will engage many of us. OCU’s interest in our movement’s experience has focused our attention and given us tangible reasons to work with our archive, document the last 25 years and create relationships with university faculty and students.

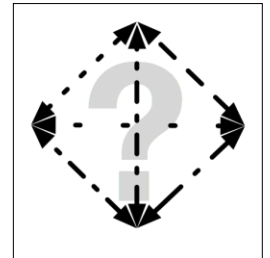
There are surely additional currents to notice and name, but I’ll describe my own experience as a case in point that may shed light on what might be going on among us. I experience a level of necessity for the first time in several years. It was necessary to be in DC last December, to join colleagues in Chicago for the archive sojourn month and to be in Oklahoma City for the ICA-OCU “Peace, Poverty, Planet Earth” conference. The loss, dismay and grief of recent years are dissolving in the face is missional necessity. There is work to be done.

I experience vitality of memory but limitation of capacity. I’m keenly aware of living in a radically different world than the 1960s with wisdom and tools that can seem anachronistic. I feel the urgency of transposing and sharing what we learned about being a movemental people with people who need to be movemental today.

Even though I am aware that colleagues have depth life experience to share, I’m isolated from this information at the very time when I want to tap, synthesize and share their wisdom with others. I’m sitting on a trove of wisdom with no easy way to share the treasure I know lies just beyond my reach.

Everything old is new again. The experience of necessity, urgency and isolation hint at relationships that are very real but remain under-rated and under-served. We are devoted to, but only loosely connected with, our far-flung collegial network. We hold deep memories of corporate service but have limited ways to access our common memory. We know that communities of practice provide specialized knowledge and services and new partnerships extend the breadth and depth of many colleagues' outreach. But the relationships among these important specialized initiatives are unclear and potentially fruitful give and take with others remains under-developed.

The graphic diagram on the next page, with this diamond and question mark shown here at its center, helped me visualize the varied configurations of our movement. The “aha” after several weeks of toying with this image was the realization that EI, OE and ICA constitute a dynamic, interrelated and, yes, imbalanced system. We leave the question of which play the foundational, ordering and meaning-giving parts for another time. My aim here is to suggest that all three facets of our movement have essential roles to play and that it will be fruitful to ponder the practical tasks required to rebalance effective dynamics among them.



The “Transforming the Legacy” symposium at Wesley Theological Seminary, the Archive Sojourn month in Chicago and the ICA-OIKOS conference in Oklahoma City illustrate the revitalization of these interrelated dynamics. The Ecumenical Institute was again called onto the historical stage at WTS last December. The Order Ecumenical reconvened in a Global Archives workroom in Uptown in May. The Institute of Cultural Affairs declared itself open for business and ready for partnering at OCU on July 12. The importance of these three events lies in the involvement and synergy among our three institutional inventions: a (dispersed and fallow) ecumenical training institute, an active movemental order and a renewing trans-establishment not-for-profit.

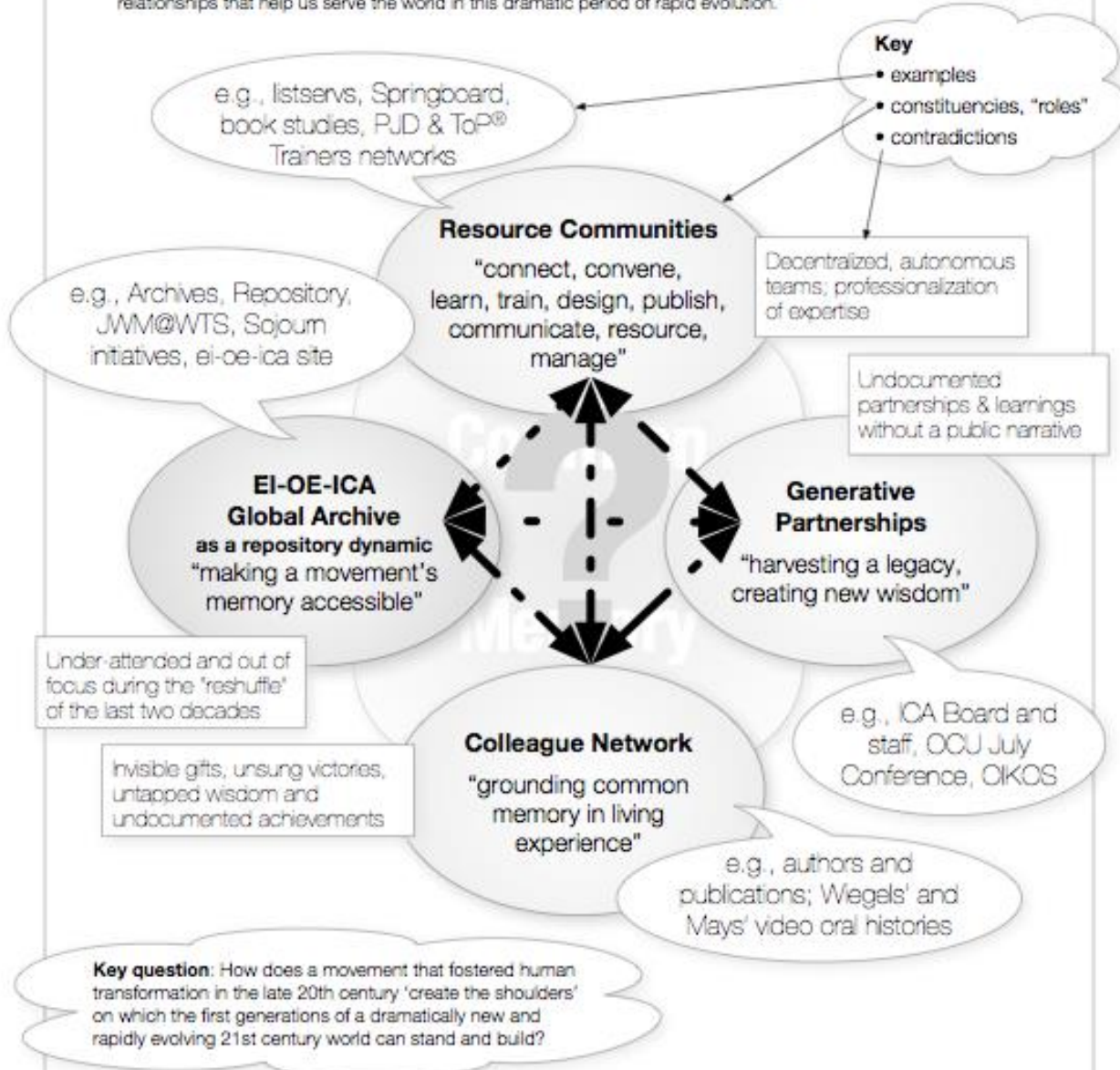
Though “the movement” never went out of being, we are being called into a new being again. Jim Wheeler has just written a striking declaration of the need to reinvent the Ecumenical Institute as an inter-faith movement for planetary spiritual transformation. Bill Parker has written about the need for a new pedagogy and a new order. The Institute of Cultural Affairs will soon be focusing our attention on the 40th anniversary of its incorporation soon after the historical appearance of the “Earthrise” image. Day-by-day, the need for transformative planetary social change and a global spiritual evolution become clearer and more urgent. Over the next decade we will certainly be stretched into a full appreciation of the necessity of our creative role in these great works.

While the last 25 or so years have been the occasion of deep learning, invention and accomplishment, the adhocery that we have practiced with devotion is no longer adequate to the needs of the moment. Our common memory ends in the mid-80s and we share only the sketchiest narrative and information about what we’ve done in the last quarter century. Many people will be needed to engage our collegial network—the Order Ecumenical in the broadest, most inclusive sense—in documenting our work so that individual initiatives and connections can enter our common memory.

We have important projects that might fly under the banner of “transforming the legacy” or “bridging the generations.” My personal mission is to provide the creative services that facilitate these initiatives so that all of us can help create the shoulders that new generations can stand on. The third talking paper that will follow will suggest some practical roles and arrangements needed for this collaborative effort.

Reinventing how we serve the world together

Visualizing a movement. "EI-OE-ICA" has always been a dynamic, living puzzle—fluid, a little messy, somewhat ad hoc—working in the arenas of personal, organizational and social transformation. These graphic bits suggest some ways to describe our movement today. It's time to experiment with new projects and relationships that help us serve the world in this dramatic period of rapid evolution.



Futuric challenge. "The Ecumenical Institute, Order Ecumenical and Institute of Cultural Affairs are a dynamic, integral system. Imbalances impede its effective service in the world. The "Transforming the Legacy" Symposium, Archive Sojourn month and the ICA-OIKOS "Peace, Poverty, Planet Earth" conference demonstrated the new engagement and energy that can be released when these dynamics function as a whole system. EI-OE-ICA has an essential role to play in the 21st century and new leadership roles are required to foster creative synergy among the potential players in a newly emergent movement.

David Dunn, July 30, 2010