

MERGING FOR EMERGENCY!

An initial report on the EMERGE!2010 Global Youth Conference
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I. Context: Now is the Hour

“Am I really helping people? How can we possibly change the society or transform the society? What is within the Philippines that makes it so special—that even non-native people prophecy that something's gonna happen here? How can we make the people hear the cry of nature? How can we help people? How can we possibly revive our culture? What is my culture?” – Shalom Villalva, participant

The original impulse of EMERGE! started for us in 2008. At that point, the popular perception of the youth was that we were apathetic, and that we couldn't care less about what was happening in society. However, a series of conversations with Filipino youth painted a completely different picture. After a year of conducting World Café dialogues, we began to sense the need for spaces and avenues wherein young people could articulate what was truly living in them. Our mission: to invite Filipino youth to imagine a new Philippines, to strategize means to achieve this vision, to renew and rebuild the system, and ultimately, to sustain this renewal. We saw ourselves carrying out this mission in four years. But first, we needed a trigger event.

Coming from a cultural background, we explored the idea of street culture and transformative art. We sought the advice of our mentor, Nicanor Perlas, and he told us about the strong underground hip-hop/rap culture in the United States, as well as the different young leaders he'd met around the world. EMERGE! was initially scheduled for the last week of September 2009. Fortunately, the universe conspired against this event—ultimately saving us, as that was the same time that Typhoon Ondoy struck, effectively submerging Manila under several meters of water.

We knew that EMERGE! was something that needed to happen. The sociopolitical and economic situation was worsening, with the Philippines being deemed as the most corrupt country in Asia. Nicanor Perlas's decision to run for the presidency shone a flicker of light in the darkness, a brave attempt to start a revolution in the political realm. For the first time, Filipinos were offered an alternative to the political traditions of patronage and impunity, but it seemed necessary to first burn old paradigms and birth a new consciousness before New Politics could take root.

In late January 2010, we met Seth Jordan and Jordan Walker. As passionate advocates of societal threefolding, they were in the Philippines to work on a documentary about the Perlas campaign. While we were discussing different ways to bring about societal transformation, the topic of EMERGE! came up. Excited with the possibilities, we sat down to explore the idea further, along with Louise Far, the third core member of PAGASA Youth. We all agreed that this was an opportunity to allow the cultural realm to step into its power.

“The idea of returning to help facilitate and take part in a social training rang true immediately, and like other gifts of purpose and grace, didn't need to be agonized over. The die was cast at first mention.” – Jordan Walker, organizer

II. Preparation: Ready to Emerge

“Actually, I am a composer. I compose situations. It happens as a workshop, conference or consultation. I compose situations in which people can perceive with a higher awareness. And, based on that, can change themselves and the world.” – Walter Siegfried Hahn

The process of creating EMERGE! is a testament to how individuals can transcend space and time to realize a vision, given enough passion, commitment and technology. True enough, EMERGE! was organized in two months over Skype and email, defying all logical limitations. Within a week after the Jordans returned to the United States, other international organizers started coming in. Vassag Baghboudarian from Canada and Adrian Wagner and Cornelius Oette from Germany resonated with the impulse of EMERGE!, and agreed that now was indeed the hour.

The task seemed daunting at first. Our belief and determination kept us going, but we would have given up if it were not for the seemingly impossible support that came at every step. Finding the perfect venue was the first validation. Camp Explore was a place we were considering two years back, but it was only when we saw the place and learned about its history that we knew that it would truly happen. Camp Explore was a reforestation project that embodied the impulse of EMERGE!, a threefolded initiative that provided a nurturing space and a vessel for the healing of the earth. Volunteers began to pour in, mostly young people in transition who were searching for meaning in their lives. Investors also began to pledge support, engaging in a kind of sponsorship that didn't ask “what's in it for me?”, but was about building partnerships in full freedom.

Instead of lecturers or keynote speakers, the organizers felt the need for mentorship that transcended hierarchies. The mentors were there to share their experiences and guide young people in fully expressing what was living in them, not to impose their knowledge on others. We were fortunate that Walter Siegfried Hahn, Nicanor Perlas, Joey Ayala, Orland Bishop and Jose Jay Cruz accepted our invitation, bringing their own unique gifts and perspectives to the process. (Otto Scharmer signified his intention to help or participate in some way, but was unable to be there given his schedule. He instead sent a powerful video message that inspired the EMERGE! community and beyond.)

With all these elements in place, the EMERGE!2010 initiative was launched with a VisionCafe process that affirmed the urgency of our task.

III. Process: Emerging Together

“When you dream for something (especially when your intent is pure), the universe will conspire for it to happen. So from this thought, I will never stop dreaming and I will never stop hoping. Obstacles and down moments are part of the process, these are instruments to bring out your inner strength and courage. I will never give up. Another important thought for me is that to become whole as a being, it is important to be part of a community. This is where we can draw strength from the wholeness of each other, especially when working on a common goal. This is where we bring out our inner gifts; this is our shared reality.” – Kevin Marie Becira, participant

The event design evolved continuously over the two months of collaboration and preparation. The central image in our minds, however, was that of a flame burning in the darkness. We saw EMERGE! as a bonfire of celebration, gathering young people from all over the world, each person sharing his or her own flame to nurture and sustain the fire of the collective. For those who heeded the call, the EMERGE! journey was a reminder of the divine spark in each of us, and how a community could rekindle our latent fires of creativity, helping us carry that creative impulse in our work, in our relationships, in our communities, in the world.

Although EMERGE! was an international event, we saw the need to ground the process in Philippine soil. Thus, three creative events were designed as bookends of the training week: ALAB-DIWA (“Thought-spark, or “Flame of Consciousness), SIKLAB (“Fireburst”) and SACRED SPACES. The main purpose of these events was to highlight

indigenous culture, while inviting more people to participate beyond the international training week. The venues were of special significance. ALAB-DIWA was held at the University of the Philippines, the hub of intellectual freedom, nationalistic fervor and youth activism, while SIKLAB and SACRED SPACES were held at the Bantayog ng mga Bayani, or the memorial for the Martial Law martyrs and heroes. The intention was to honor the spirit of these places, paving the way for healing and renewing these repositories of history with the New.

“My most inspiring moment was during the second Education Strategic Circle meeting. After dividing ourselves into duets to talk about our experiences in Education, everyone was asked to share it with the rest of the circle. When I was sharing, I kept on apologizing to everyone else, mostly foreign participants, because I kept using the Philippine Educational System and my experiences with it as examples and I thought that was a bad thing – until Orland Bishop stopped me from apologizing because it’s not, then the whole cabin went silent. He went on speaking and eventually, told everyone that “the future will change because you are here” – “you” was not just me, but everyone in that strategic circle, with our collective consciousness, and our experiences. If during that morning, I was planning to quit Emerge because of doubting that all this might be useless to me as soon as we leave Camp Explore, all those doubts just disappeared after that meet.” – Jaimee Baliton, participant

Keeping true to the impulse of emerging something new, we realized that our best-laid plans paled in comparison to what arose out of authentic dialogue and collaboration. Each participant, volunteer and mentor brought an abundance of knowledge, skills and experience to the table, their synergy becoming a constant source of gratitude and awe. It was evident that we did not need to “teach” anything. We just had to hold a space for people to share who they were and what they had to offer, merely providing maps for understanding what they experienced.

The overall framework for the week was the Lemniscate Process and Theory U, which were both reflected in the experiences and insights of the week. The training week began with drawing out the current state of global youth, as well as the challenges we face today. Guided by their burning questions, the EMERGE! community went through an individual and collective journey. Each individual went deeper into knowing himself/herself in relation to others, accessing a fundamental creative source before collectively bringing that creativity into the world through new and existing initiatives. Both the Lemniscate and Theory U manifested through our experiencing the inseparable dynamic of the inner and the outer life, as well as the transition from old paradigms to new breakthroughs, from past identities to new, emerging selves.

Given the task of renewing the cultural sphere, these frameworks were grounded through three avenues: art, education and social media. These three strategic circles were conducted through dialogues about the nature and purpose of these mediums, as well as collaborative exercises that led to new perspectives and artistic creations.

Other important components of the week included body work (in the form of yoga, eurythmy and tai chi) as well as music and tonalities. Participants were also invited to explore and experience deeper sensing and silence, allowing them to connect to their creative source. The notion of social sculpture was another key framework, where the learnings of the week were prototyped in the streets of Manila through SIKLAB. Ultimately, the entire week was a social sculpture in itself, where each individual could realize that he/she is an artist, able to shape existing reality.

"I've realized that there are indeed infinite possibilities in this life & in this world. Also, the experience has reminded me that the Universe is unfolding as it should and we should TRUST THE UNIVERSE." – Katrina Tan, participant

IV. Synthesis: What has Emerged

EMERGE! exceeded all our expectations. While we all came to EMERGE! with questions about our identities, life and humanity, even more questions emerged in us after the entire week.

"Who am I? Where do I belong? What do I do with my art?"

"Why exactly am I here – not just for me, but for society? Learning these things for myself would be one thing, but would I be able to apply the knowledge in the real world?"

"How do I, as a woman and as an artist, create and cultivate pieces independent of the stage, of text, of the artifice that captures life?"

"How can we make peace quickly and stop the blood-shed among humans, animals, plants and the earth? And maybe, if a sudden shift occurs that opens up possibilities of change: What will have to take care of in order to make the best use of the possibilities?"

From an undefined yearning, we found our renewed selves, as well as a clarity of what we could do in the world.

"I am coming back to school. I will do more meaningful work related to visual art and a little bit on song writing. I am currently working on a tentative 365 day/weekly/monthly social sculpture. My current burning questions now are: How do I prioritize/ focus the different passions and dreams I have? Where do I begin?"

"I'm back in my studio & painting again. I just finished a piece on "moving forward into the future" & I'm currently working on a big one inspired by the "sense of togetherness" we had at Emerge. I'm taking life one day at a time, balancing "doing" with "taking a step back & letting the Universe respond & unfold as it should." Also, I have friends & relatives who are sick/dying and I make sure I "burn my flame" for them as well. My burning question for now is "I am called to do all these things (creating art, sharing art, being here for my self & being there for others, etc.), but how do I do them all?" The only response that comes so far is to simply take things one day at a time---to wake up and be present, sleep & wake up to myself all over again."

"It was kind of difficult for me, before we went off the camp I had the question... what and how will I act in the real world after this? because at the camp it was so perfect. It was so beautiful and amazing. When I saw my orgmates they said I was different, I had a different aura. At home, I cannot eat meat. Many things in my perspective of life CHANGED, I know I am transformed and many ideas have emerged, I wanted to do a lot of things. I am so overjoyed!"

Stories about EMERGE! began to spread like wildfire. The pictures we posted on Facebook was a particularly interesting trigger. Even without knowing what EMERGE! was about, people saw a certain quality and essence to these images and asked how they could be part of it in the future.

These conversations validated our belief in the need for this kind of healing work to be done in the world, for more spaces and avenues for youthful creativity to emerge. Apart from the deep friendships and destined connections that solidified during the week, the greatest gift of EMERGE! to us was the realization that the transformation we are looking for in the world is already with us. We only have to remember it. But since it is so easy to forget, there is a need to build communities that allow this sense of knowing and responsibility to grow and flourish.

This is only the beginning.

V. Next Steps: More Emergence

“There is one thing though, that I wish to strengthen in the future - real, authentic, non-judgmental relationships with each other - most of all, responsible relationships. We in Emerge are all powerful and personally, I would like to use my power in a responsible way - I see Emerge as a healing, selfless, creative and loving community that welcomes more spirits into the fold. And for this to take form, I would like to be responsible and make sure I contribute, and do not, contaminate people with my energy. Next time around I will be more responsible and take the initiative because in order for the prototype to become reality, relationships - harmonious relationships that are so comfy there is no fear of discord or darkness (which is part of the beauty of life forms)- must be the strongest foundation. We are not just body, mind and heart - we are everybody else and simply ourself. And to embrace that split and union is the very core of Merging.” - Angelina Kanapi, participant

We are only closing the first leg of the EMERGE! process, as lot of things are about to unfold. From this initial prototype report, a more comprehensive documentation will follow, including:

- A book of the entire process, with an online mirror at whatisemerging.net;
- A documentary from the material shot by our amazing photographers and videographers;
- Music videos for the songs that emerged;

--all with a scheduled launch of September 2010. This would serve as a necessary transition to the next round of EMERGE! events, which are set for the end of the year. PAGASA Youth is currently in serious conversations with people who'd like to carry EMERGE!Mindanao and EMERGE!Cebu, the target period for both processes being late November-early December 2010, to coincide with the Mindanao Week of Peace (which is also the anniversary of the Ampatuan Massacre).

VI. Directions: PAGASA Youth

PAGASA (or the Peoples Assembly for Genuine Alternatives to Social Apathy) Youth is a cultural network that advocates inner transformation towards social transformation. Our main work is to create and facilitate different platforms and spaces where young people can come together to articulate their highest dreams and aspirations, and then collaborate creatively in initiatives that can be of service to society and humanity. Although the main thrust of our work is in the spiritual-cultural realm, the idea is to encourage people to move in a threefold manner—to be able to come from a free understanding of culture, but also create positive change in the economic and political realms.

2009 – IMAGINE: What will it take to create a new Philippines?

- PAGASA Forum Series (February - November)
- PAGASA Youth Workshops— on-going activities (from April onwards)
- Event: ALIW-IW Dance Forum (June)

2010 – ACHIEVE: How do we make it happen?

- EMERGE!2010 International Training for Cultural Creatives (April-May)
- Events: ALAB-DIWA, SIKLAB and SACRED SPACES
- MERGING FOR EMERGENCY!: The EMERGE Book, documentary and videos (September)
- Whatisemerging.net
- PAGASA Youth Workshops—ongoing activities (from June onwards)
- EMERGE! Mindanao and EMERGE! Cebu (November-December)

2011 – REBUILD: How do we renew the system?

- CONVERGE!2011 Body Conference (June)
- Initiative: “building new structures and communities”
- PAGASA Youth Workshops

2012 – SUSTAIN: How do we sustain this renewal?

- Initiative: “sustaining transformative structures and communities”
- PAGASA Youth Workshops