

Letter from Musagetes



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Musagetes promotes the role of creativity, the arts and artists in transforming contemporary life by convening Cafés and provoking creative and artistic interventions.

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Since our last correspondence a few months ago, Musagetes has been very active in further enriching a number of ongoing initiatives—among them, the Musagetes Café series, DodoLab and Scenario Thinking in the Waterloo-Wellington regions.

While we won't be hosting a café in 2009, we will be launching two new ones in 2010—one in Rijeka, Croatia and one in Sudbury, Ontario. Our new café strategy addresses the need to link the global conversations to local action and ensure that Musagetes' participation in a locale can be measured in years. The two cafés are well underway in their development, and partnerships have been established in each city. Over the next few weeks and months we will be inviting café participants, further researching the cities, designing our community engagement strategy and pursuing financial and non-financial partners.

DodoLab has become much more significant among our programs since its enormous success at the World Environmental Education Congress in Montreal. Musagetes has committed to making DodoLab an ongoing part of our interventionist work by partnering with the University of Waterloo School of Architecture. Andrew Hunter, an artist who crosses disciplinary boundaries with ease, will direct the program full-time and the DodoLab laboratory itself will be based at Waterloo Architecture. To be launched in December, a new DodoLab website, designed by Sergio Bregante, will become another tool in our community engagement toolkit.

The scenario thinking process for envisioning possible futures in the Waterloo-Wellington regions continues to expand to include more stakeholders from a wide range of sectors and disciplines. We pursued this initiative to explore how a systems-based approach could integrate all aspects of society and community into finding solutions for today's most pressing issues. We all recognize that to look at solutions only through the lens of one discipline, one practice or one organization would further perpetuate the segregation that gave rise to the problems in the first place. The scenarios ([available here](#)) and the ongoing collaborations pursue commonalities across organizations and sectors to explore system-wide solutions that are often considered in isolation.

The first year of our agency relationship with Cape Farewell has concluded and we're exploring ideas to deepen our connection. David Buckland continues to travel to Canada regularly to develop relations in Toronto and Waterloo-Wellington.

Sincerely,



Shawn Van Sluys
Executive Director

Musagetes Cafés are an open forum for the circulation of ideas that lead to social action and cultural change.

A café is a meeting place where ideas become actions; it is a public forum facilitating collections of conversations around a scattering of tables. While the forum is itself an open and public arena, the participants collecting around each table find themselves there by invitation. The discussions that take place are extra-institutional, unscripted and ideal for the exploration of alternative perspectives and unusual lines of argument. For a café, free-flowing conversation is its purpose.

Cafés are at the centre of cultural shifts that social change engenders and requires. The open flow of ideas in the piazzas of Florence and Venice and the coffeeshop meetings of the 1800s all led directly and unequivocally to actual social change and concrete results. It is not possible to separate the idea exchange of the café from the implementation of social action that follows.

Building on our experience with the Cafés in 2007 (London) and 2008 (Barcelona), we have spent this year redefining and expanding the program to connect the Café conversations directly to experimental, transformative projects that have been identified by the local community as levers for social change. The next Café will look at a number of ideas generated by invited artists for the transformation of a particular site and project in the selected city. An artist residency will be established to develop a concept in collaboration with all stakeholders in order to see the project realize some of the ideas that are generated during the Café conversations.

Last year, Musagetes was invited by Ms. Nina Obuljen, the Croatian Deputy Minister for Culture, to consider hosting a Café in a Croatian city. After extensive research and consultation, we have decided to hold the Café in Rijeka on June 14-17, 2010.

Rijeka is an important industrial city of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the most important harbour in Tito's Yugoslavia, a point between Middle-Europe and the Mediterranean with overlapping Austro-Hungarian, Italian and Croatian political layers. As a city that is gradually redefining itself from being a Communist-era industrial centre to an education and cultural centre of the Republic of Croatia that thrives on knowledge, the arts and humanity, Rijeka is the right place for Musagetes to undertake this initiative. We have chosen Rijeka because of the incredible support of the local arts community and the enlightened municipality. It will provide rich opportunities for engaging community, reinvigorating sections of the city and providing another example of Balkan resilience and ingenuity.

In Rijeka, the specific projects of interest include the transformation of a 19th-century cigarette paper mill into a youth culture centre, expanding on an existing five-year, spontaneous music festival. The mill survived both Fascist and Communist regimes, multiple wars and revolutions, only to fall victim to globalization over the last two decades. The city has recently taken over a two-kilometre, water-break pier that runs parallel to the industrial sea front, with the intention to marry the imposing industrial-Gothic architecture with a recreation area. Rijeka has a solid track-record of cultural efforts often supported through infrastructure contributions by the City. These include an extraordinary 1970s cinema dedicated to art films and documentaries, and is increasingly used as part of the elementary visual literacy program; an independent bookstore with biweekly readings and cultural events; a new apartment dedicated to the City's newly-established artist residency program; and underground tunnels and bomb shelters are used as alternative recording studios for emerging punk and rock bands.

We will also be hosting a Café in Sudbury, Ontario in September 2010. (This Café is still in the early stages of development and further communication will follow shortly.) As the two Café projects will take at least two years to complete, we have an opportunity to explore commonalities between two post-industrial cities that are transitioning towards strengthened knowledge economies rooted deeply in the arts,

innovation and creativity. Both Rijeka and Greater Sudbury have a rich sub-culture of grassroots artistic interventions and organizations supported by the city.

There are six components that comprise a complete Café project over a 2-3 year period:

1. The support of City officials and local communities;
2. The three-day Café conversation with 15 public intellectuals, invited locally and globally;
3. The establishment of a residency for artists and creative practitioners;
4. A feasible project for critical reflection and creative re-imagining;
5. An integrated and creative consultative design process with local communities (e.g. DodoLab); and
6. The dissemination of knowledge and insight generated by the project through the Café conversations, the residency and the community.

Musagetes Café efforts concentrate on small to mid-sized urban centres in circum-Adriatic countries and in post-industrial cities in North America. Over the course of the next three years, we will attempt to generate six concrete examples of projects with associated critical discussion to provide a model for applying creative social interventions elsewhere in the world.



A post-industrial, two-kilometre waterfront pier is slated for redevelopment as a recreational area. As one project to be discussed at the Café, artists from around globe will submit their comments and ideas for its repurposing.



The Hartera Music Festival, attracting over 10,000 young people every June, has animated this abandoned 100-year old paper mill for one weekend each year. Now the City wants to bring the industrial space back to life as an alternative youth culture centre.

DodoLab is a collaborative, process-based project that engages the public in public to establish dialogue around the barriers to change and adaptation.

DodoLab is a collaborative project of Musagetes (www.musagetes.ca) and the University of Waterloo School of Architecture (www.architecture.uwaterloo.ca). Led by Andrew Hunter with Lisa Hirmer, DodoLab involves an expanding and changing team of creative researchers with knowledge, experience and a commitment to engaging environmental and social issues and who see design and meaningful innovation as central to their work. DodoLab works with like-minded organizations and its current collaborators include *proboscis*, Broken City Lab, Green Corridor, fD (freeDimensional) and EASSI (Emerging Art Space Initiative). A new DodoLab website will be launched in December.



The fundamental focus of DodoLab is simple: What are the barriers to adaptation and change? In order to address this, we work to uncover underlying – and often unperceived – ideas, beliefs and assumptions that affect (or even govern) what we do or don't do. We want to reveal these ideas so that we can examine and discuss them openly, and so become more aware, purposeful and ultimately more resilient. DodoLab is convinced that being open to change is critical and that we desperately need to develop richer and more generous and creative adaptation strategies if we do not want to go the way of the Dodo.

DodoLab focuses on a core challenge: the conviction that we are severely burdened by established ways of doing things and by the maintenance of the infrastructure of dated models on a variety of scales. Youth and emerging ideas don't get the respect and attention they deserve. We believe that out of simple interactions and dialogue, innovative thinking will emerge. We promote through content. We bridge critical thought to the everyday. We learn by doing. We engage the public in public.

A sample of current DodoLabs:

Windsor – 2010

A year-long collaboration with Broken City Lab, Green Corridor and the University of Windsor focusing on the challenge the Windsor community faces in making the transition from its traditional auto industry base to a new, more diverse and resilient economy. Land use and urban design are central components of this program.

Prince Edward Island – ongoing (launched 2009)

An ongoing collaboration with the Confederation Centre and Mount Allison University's CHARTS (Centre for Humanities and Arts Research in Transdisciplinary Space) exploring farming and agricultural research, public and common space, guerrilla and urban gardening, and perceptions of what is "green," "sustainable" and "natural".

Waterloo/Wellington Region - 2010

Working with Musagetes and SIG (Social innovation Generation), DodoLab is developing a year-long series of community probes designed to enhance and build on the Scenario Planning work led by Adam Kahane and Reos Partners in 2009. The Scenario Planning process resulted in a set of narratives describing potential futures facing the Wellington and Waterloo regions. DodoLab will engage the public in further exploring these ideas.

fD (freeDimensional) and EASSI (Emerging Art Space Initiative) – 2010-12

DodoLab is developing a residency/exchange program with the fD/EASSI community of arts centres in developing countries and at-risk communities. Representatives from fD/EASSI centres will participate in a Canadian DodoLab and a unique initiative will be designed collaboratively for their centre.

Scenarios envisioning social change have become a key working concept for an ever-expanding team of creative, socially engaged individuals in the Waterloo-Wellington region.

With a strong belief that complacency about our collective future will lead to unhealthy communities, a team of “scenario planners” convened to envision what our communities might look like by the year 2020. They were propelled by a sense of urgency—a sense that without understanding the differentials of collective and individual action, we as a society will continue to spin our wheels in the failed economic and social models of yesterday.

The question around which we convened over the past year was this:

How can we ensure access, belonging and well-being for all through the design of our built and natural environments?



By creating a space for thinking deeply together about and across their collective community-related activities, this group—with facilitators Adam Kahane and Jeff Barnum of Reos Partners—embarked upon a journey to explore a variety of future scenarios that understand the system-wide, integrated nature that is intrinsic to the concepts of “access, belonging and well-being.” Our hope is that this stimulating, collaborative activity will help transform Wellington and Waterloo into exemplary communities with the capacity to reflect, learn and design steps forward to a future scenario that, for now, we can only imagine.

The participating individuals operate in a variety of sectors, ranging from creative and cultural sectors to business leaders. Their common denominator: a strong intuitive understanding of the need to think differently and an appreciation for the complexity of the problems we face as a region and a society.

Musagetes' interest in the scenarios and ongoing collaborative process is in exploring the ways in which meaningful collaborations can be forged to deepen our understanding of what this systems-based approach can achieve. Too often we see arts and social justice organizations working in isolation, without fully engaging the socially transformative role that their work can play. We want to see organizations with artistic integrity working closely with other groups to make manifest these urgent transformations. After all, the arts ensure that our humanity continues to encompass all that is human. There is much richness in this which we will continue to explore with our scenario thinking partners.

Musagetes and Social Innovation Generation are committed to continue playing a leadership role by regularly convening the expanding group of engaged individuals to realize the positive characteristics of the scenarios and avoid the negative ones. We will be launching a strategy to promote public consciousness of the scenarios, with DodoLab at the core of this effort. DodoLab will be running a series of scenario-related, one-day labs in public spaces throughout the Waterloo-Wellington Region.

A number of action seeds are taking root as a result of our ongoing meetings. One team is organizing a RiverFest (working name) that will seek to connect many existing festivals through a common focus on our watershed. Another team is developing strategies to provide greater opportunities and work-live spaces for artists. A third team is engaging youth in social change work to empower them and give them a voice.

We can, and must, create more beautiful, accessible, sustainable, prosperous and resilient places to call home. It is our hope that this project may serve to surface common goals and support the many initiatives that are aimed at addressing the challenges of creating a better, more sustainable life for all in Waterloo and Wellington. Solving local problems is the first step towards addressing the pressing global concerns of the economy, the environment, community health and collective generosity. As with all of Musagetes' endeavours, we believe that working on local problems provides a window to globally-relevant solutions.



Cape Farewell works with Musagetes to bring Canada more fully into the international climate change call-to-action.

The first year of our agency relationship with Cape Farewell has concluded and we're exploring ideas to deepen our connection. Cape Farewell has strategically married the arts with science to advance environmental education using expeditions, mass media and youth engagement as their core strategies. Cape Farewell and Musagetes believe in the centrality of the Canadian context to climate change, not only due to the exploitation of our massive natural resources, but also as stewards of the Arctic Ocean.

Since September 2008, as Musagetes' agent, Cape Farewell has involved numerous Canadian participants on their expeditions and in their programs. The voyages draw attention to the most urgent issues in climate change both from an international and Canadian perspective, and highlight how the arts can play a major role in mediating those issues to a wider public. Both voyages in 2008 and 2009 enabled the participants to gain an understanding of how climate change is impacting both Greenlandic culture (Disko Bay expedition) and Peruvian culture (Andes expedition). The introduction of Canadian voyagers has been a highly successful way to promote interdisciplinary understanding between the artistic and scientific communities. A key aspect of the expeditions is the immersive environment of research that is produced for artists and scientists to understand each others' disciplinary modes of research and knowledge production; develop respect and curiosity for each others' professions; challenge conventions of thinking; open up new lines of enquiry; identify shared intentions and possibilities; and create long-term relationships and dissemination networks.

Canadian participants in the 2008 Disko Bay Expedition were Leslie Feist (musician), Martha Wainwright (musician), Graham Hill and David Noble (activist). The Canadian participants in the 2009 Andes Expedition were Yann Martel (writer), Brenndan Macguire (sound artist), and Kathryn Clark (scientist).

The youth component of Cape Farewell is central to their modus operandi. Twenty-eight students from eight nationalities participated in a youth expedition in 2008. The expedition had a Canadian focus and over 500 Canadian students were active participants in the programme. The Cape Farewell website received over 4 million hits from international visitors between January 2008 and March 2009.

To better facilitate Cape Farewell's work in Canada, they are currently setting up a Canadian charity, Cape Farewell Canada. Because of the enormous success of the Andes expedition, Cape Farewell is considering future expeditions to locations outside the Arctic, among them an urban expedition in Toronto.

Musical improvisation is an innovative working model for social policy development.



On September 9-11, 2009, Musagetes, the Guelph Jazz Festival and the Improvisation, Community and Social Practice (ICASP) research consortium presented a colloquium on Improvisation, the Arts and Social Policy at the University of Guelph.

The colloquium aimed to investigate how interdisciplinary research in the arts and humanities can and should participate in the development of public social policies in order to integrate improvisational understanding into the decisions of policy-makers. The core question was what it would mean to place improvised artistic practices at the centre of both broad public debate and informed policy decisions about the role of arts in society. Topics included an analysis of government commissioned reports on arts funding; a consideration of how musical improvisation might help us approach policies of citizenship and participation; and case studies in which musical improvisation has been used in both Western and non-Western communities in order to facilitate reconciliation and forgiveness, or to bring about social change.

Over the next few months, several of the colloquium speakers will reconvene in a workshop to further develop some of the ideas that were generated.

ICASP is led by Dr. Ajay Heble at the University of Guelph. The project's core hypothesis is that musical improvisation is a crucial model for political, cultural and ethical dialogue and action. Taking as a point of departure performance practices that cannot readily be scripted, predicted, or compelled into orthodoxy, ICASP explores the innovative working models of improvisation developed by creative practitioners who have helped to encourage new, socially responsive forms of community-building across national, cultural and artistic boundaries. Improvisation has much to tell us about the ways in which communities based on such forms are politically and materially pertinent to envisioning and sounding alternative ways of knowing and being in the world.