

## **Brief Encounters with the Taos Institute**

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By Kenneth Gergen

### **Why Do We Attend Conferences?**

Recently I returned from the World Appreciative Inquiry Congress in Ghent, Belgium. It was an enormously impressive event, with over 600 participants from over 30 countries. Yes, there were pleasant moments galore. There was a chance to re-connect with so many of the Taos Associates from around the world, and to delight in their activities. And I so much enjoyed listening to the Associates featured so prominently on the program – David Cooperrider, Diana Whitney, Ron Fry, Gervase Bushe, and my collaborator at the event, Danielle Zandee. It was also engaging to see a new evolution taking place in thinking and practicing AI. The conference theme – “scaling up the generative power of AI” - really brought these new developments into the spotlight. And, of course there were the perks of spending time in this beautiful city, and the many other conference niceties.

However, when I ask myself what I came away with that was truly valuable, my answer would be something like “inspirational energy.” Constructionist ideas point to relationships as the source of what we take to be real and good. Yet, I believe it is also in relationships that we find our greatest source of passion for what we do. When others speak with excitement about what they do, we live that excitement vicariously. And when others respond to us with enthusiasm, we then carry their enthusiasm. Our activities are affirmed, and we find their place in a movement of significant consequence in the world.

And now I begin to dream of the next big Taos conference, on “Relational Practices in Peacebuilding, Mediation, and Conflict Transformation” this Nov 14-17 in San Diego, CA. Sure, there will be luminaries there, and already there is an impressive array of workshops and presentations scheduled – treating topics from the interpersonal to the international sphere. The venue on the water is also exciting. But what I really look forward to is the enthusiastic spirit I will carry away from that conference. I will learn, I will re-awaken languishing friendships, I will find pleasures aplenty. But when I leave San Diego, I will carry with me inspirational energies to last the winter.