Convergence Research Report

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1. Introduction

In Fall 2021, Naomi Joy Smith and Aimee Fenech assembled a team including Cândida Shinn, Maria Prieto and Annaïk Le Net. Bringing r**epresentation from the International Permaculture Convergence Council (IPCC), IPC14 team, IPC13 team, the International Permaculture CoLab and a former member of International Permaculture Research Network (PIRN)**, we conducted this first phase of research with the intention of reaching out to organisers from the worldwide permaculture community, who have been involved with events across many scales (local, bioregional, national, and international) and formats (in-person, online, and blended).

The purpose of the Convergence Research Project was to learn about common challenges and ethical solutions in the field, and to provide a place and catalyst to share, discuss, and work on challenges as a worldwide movement, especially with the rapid changes brought about by Covid-19 and the increasing digital revolution. Particularly, Aimee and Naomi became motivated to explore opportunities to work with online tools and **more fairly distribute their creative and beneficial possibilities, opportunities and practices.**

The research team involves members who speak fluent English, Spanish, Galician, French, Portuguese and Italian, so we were occasionally able to conduct interviews in the interviewee's native language.

1.1. Initiation

The Convergence Research Project was initiated following a conversation about the Digital Circle receiving funds from the Capacity+ Project aimed to support the European Permaculture Convergence with their technology in October 2021. The budget line used for this research project was **originally intended as a prototype for an online permaculture convergence**, raised prior to the pandemic in 2020.

As a representative from the IPC14 team, Cândida had previously worked with Naomi in a working group on 'blended convergences', exploring ways to involve virtual participation at the International Permaculture Convergence in Argentina in 2022. When no in-person gathering was possible in 2020, this working group (a.k.a.

"blended convergences taskforce" or "bct") suspended the development of the mentioned work.

Meanwhile, nobody proposed driving an online convergence prototype in place of the in-person international event. When Digital Circle requested to use some of the associated funds for the EUPC, Naomi was concerned about utilizing this resource for a European-centered event, rather than building something to benefit the permaculture community worldwide.

With their work on the EUPC, the Digital Circle were interested to **build replicable models and/or shareable "digital commons."** However, it felt critical to learn about the needs which organisers have, so that further investment in digital commons were responding to real needs shared by the permaculture community in various contexts; to find common "pain points" and support those who need help the most.

1.2. Historic Context of the Permaculture CoLab

The International Permaculture CoLab was formed in response to the 2017 Next Big Step report *Permaculture, Practices, Passions and Priorities for Collaborative Working*, a significant survey of the permaculture movement which aimed to determine "the next big step for permaculture." Following discussions at the IPC in Jordan, in 2011, and later in the UK in 2015, this effort has grown from **observations about inadequate organisational capacity in the movement**.

Converging every 2 or 3 years (noting it has been now over 4 years since the last IPC in India) is too infrequent, and also limits the relationships comprising an "international community" to those who can afford to travel, to be away from their home, and are willing to use the carbon miles to get there.

For this project, the team has used Slack as a communication and networking tool and a collective creative space for written discussion and meeting. Slack is an open-source collaborative online platform that allows the user to navigate and operate through a digital workspace in order to collaborate with several projects and teams and team members at the same time, across many levels of interactive complexity.

Until the Permaculture CoLab created a Slack workspace to begin working together, the permaculture movement relied heavily on Facebook groups (whose ethics do not align with those of permaculture), Google docs, and privately owned-and-managed websites such as permies.org and permacultureglobal.org. Efforts to move the ownership of these websites to a commons, managed by a group of people who are accountable to and appointed by the international community of permaculture practitioners, have so far failed. Currently, the CoLab congregates on a Slack workspace. However, Slack's ethics are not much better than Facebook's.

Recognising that in order to convene online, the CoLab would need to focus on **building the capacity to host space online**, Philipp Grunewald incubated the Digital Circle shortly into CoLab's journey. Aimee Fenech currently leads this circle.

A former member of the Digital Circle, Hannah Apricot Eckberg, had a vision of creating Weaver Network to operate as a virtual home for the permaculture movement. During 2020, Naomi consulted for this project and met Jillian Hovey and Lauren Minis through this work, who also subsequently joined the Permaculture CoLab. During this work, we grew a solid sense of the social, ethical, organisational and technical challenges involved in this effort.

This is the background on which this research was prioritised and funded.

If the permaculture movement is to **gain 'coherence and effectiveness'** (as in Permaculture CoLab's vision statement), this requires support for grassroots organisers and bioregional networkers, whether that support is in the form of increasing digital literacy, building better connections with each other, financial or business model development, technical services, or more.

1.3. Research Topic, Aim and Objectives

The meaning of the word **Convergence** in this report relate to permaculture gatherings and events which bring people together:

"Convergence is when two or more things come together to form a new whole, like the convergence of plum and apricot genes in the plucot." (vocabulary.com)

The Convergence Research Project focuses on reporting the current state of the organization of permaculture convergences worldwide, through ten case studies.

The aim of this collaborative research project is to reach out to organisers from the worldwide permaculture community to **learn about common organizational and digital challenges and ethical solutions** in the field.

The **objectives are the following:**

(1) To learn about the real needs and common 'pain points' that organisers have and support those who need help the most, so that further investment in digital commons may respond to the needs shared by the permaculture community in various contexts;

(2) To provide a place and catalyst to share, discuss, and work on challenges as a worldwide movement, especially with the rapid changes brought about by Covid-19 and the increasing digital revolution;

(3) To explore opportunities to work with online tools and more fairly distribute their creative and beneficial possibilities, opportunities and practices;

(4) To build replicable models and/or shareable "digital commons"; and

(5) To build something to benefit the permaculture community worldwide.

2. Our Process

When Naomi and Aimee first discussed this project, Naomi generated this concept summary which guided the project and the questionnaire, with some later additions and refinement by the team.

After receiving funds and assembling the team, we began to meet fortnightly through November 2021 until the holiday break. During this **'forming' phase**, we discussed our approach, weaving our insights from permaculture design into the project design. We discussed about how to decide (using rounds and the consent process from sociocracy), how to administrate the meetings (rotating roles of facilitator and note-taker who prepares the agenda, set up on a rolling 'backlog' document), where to store our files (Nextcloud), how to be sensitive with data, how to integrate information from the wider ecosystem (reading the Next Big Step report), how to distribute our funding (following the equitable waging guide and estimating our hours based on which parts of the work we were attracted to; invoicing through OpenCollective twice, once halfway through the project and again when this first phase is complete). In addition, we considered how the research process itself could catalyse mutual aid and solidarity in the field of permaculture organisers (e.g., offering a Nextcloud trial in exchange for time taken for the interview, and adding a question about whether each organiser *wanted* to be connected with other organisers, and if so, for what topics/reasons).

Naomi **mapped out the project** steps using a Dragon Dreaming tool called "karabirrdt" (see the tool below) and assigned the tasks based on each team members' work interest statements. Annaïk gave an interview about IPC13 and Cândida gave an interview about EUPC, and these experiences were reflected on to improve our questionnaire and interview process. We noted there was scope to add more areas of enquiry but were concerned about these interviews taking any longer than 2 hours each. Ideas were noted with the idea of securing further funding later, for more thorough research.
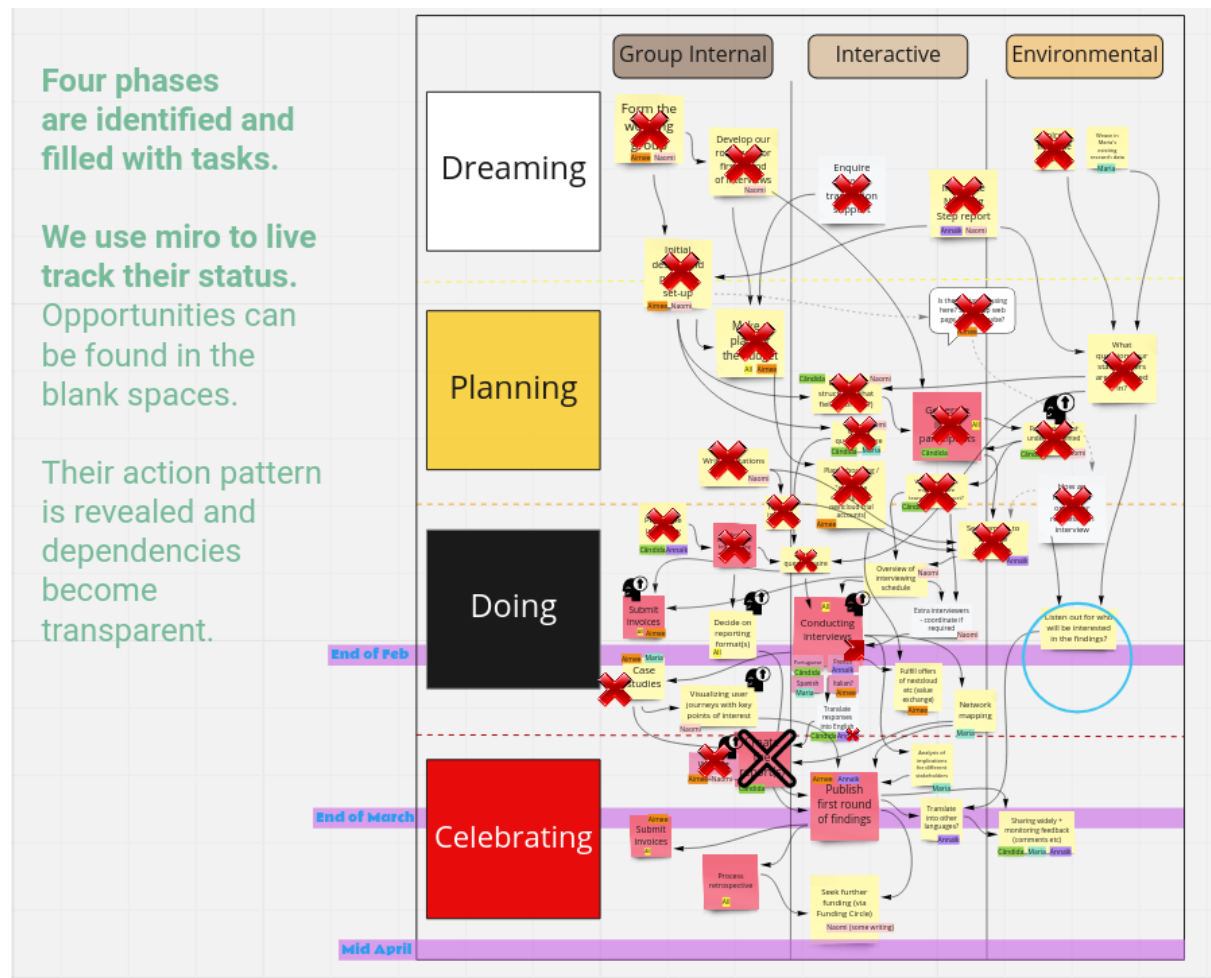
Team Karabirrdt

Despite an **insufficient budget** to pay all hours dedicated to the project, the team members agreed on volunteering to continue the work until the publication of a first report.

2.1. Methods and methodology

In the new year, we continued meeting weekly. Although we agreed to a **goal of 10 interviews**, there were challenges making contact with our leads. Some did not respond, one declined, one responded positively but did not reply to set a time despite multiple follow-up messages from the team member. Attention was paid to cover different continents and different convergence formats. We asked around our network for recommendations and finally reached ten interviews.

Each interview was **peer reviewed** by a different team member, assigning by language skills where relevant, and then availability. The decision was made to use

to submit the data, so that interviewees had the option to review the questions in advance and self-submit any answers if not the whole questionnaire if that suited their time better.

2.2 Questions

We asked questions about **economics, governance, skill-building succession pathways, building and sharing knowledge through evaluation and research, and appropriate technology**, in an attempt to surface the popularity of **applied social permaculture** and our relationship to online tools as well as sourcing and financing hardware and other infrastructure for events. We also took the chance to ask about the **value of connecting** to the movement globally, and what **forms of support** organizers had at different scales.
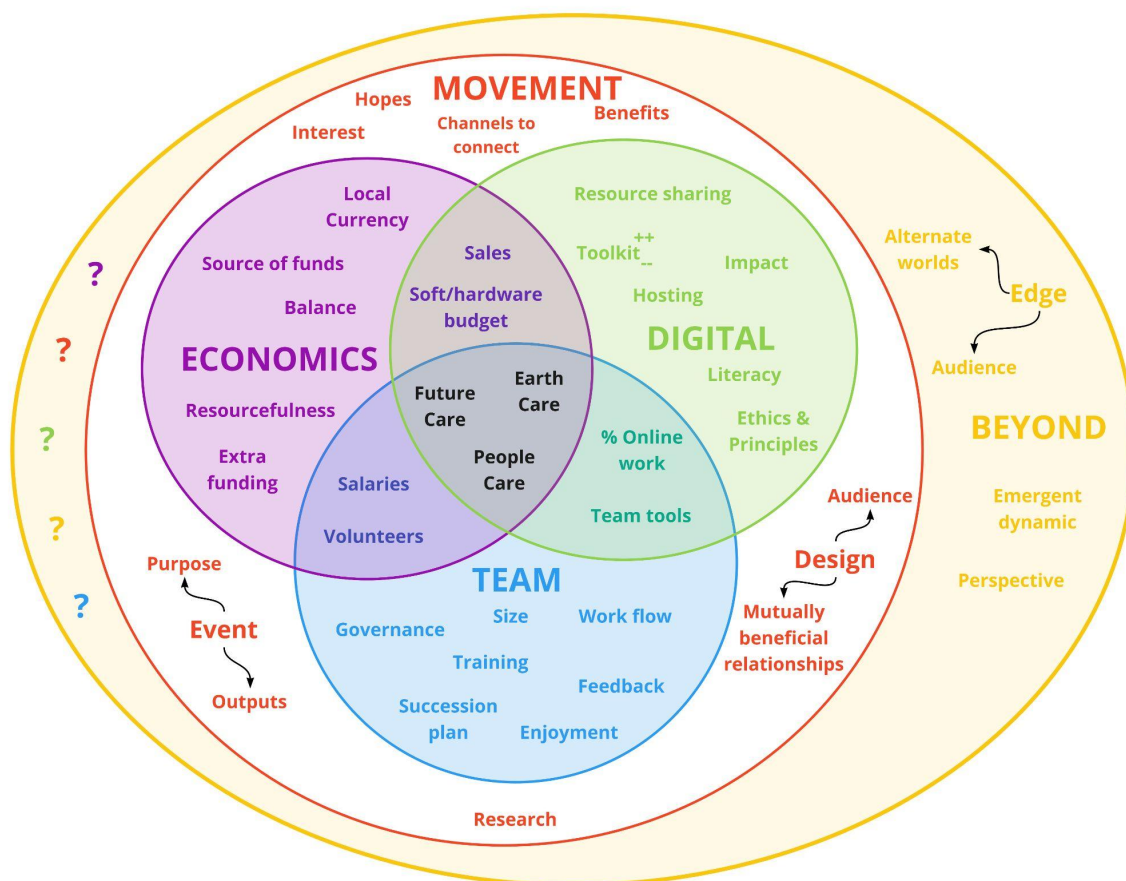
Questionnaire overview

3. Data Analysis

3.1. Team Organization
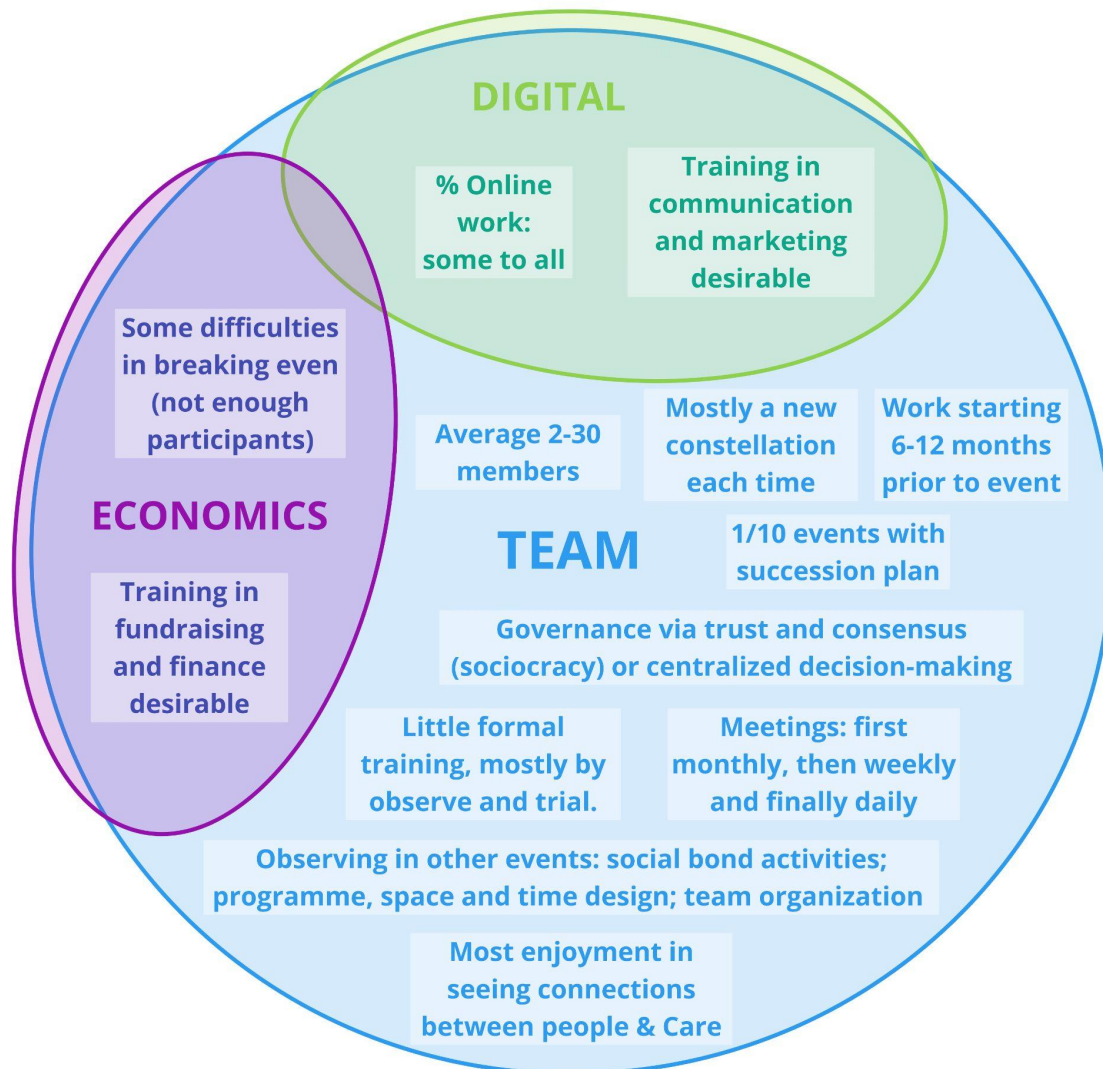
'Team Organization' answers overview

The **definition of team** and the **team size** vary a lot from one event to another. Some interviewees replied mentioning the core team dedicated to the organization of the event while some others included circles of volunteers that were dedicated to specific tasks. In answers, the team size varies a lot from 2 to 30 (one replied 100).

Most of the time, the team of people were new to working together; occasionally the organisers will be from an existing organisation which provides some structure to responsibilities, and may assign some staff to the project team (e.g., EUPC 2021). In

that case, they are usually joined by additional people from outside the organisation which may prompt a rethinking of work patterns.

Project Rhythm

We can observe the following pattern in the **team organisation**: the teams usually start working together from one year to six months before the event and meet on a monthly basis at first. The pace of the coordination meetings increase as the event gets closer from weekly three months beforehand to daily in the last weeks. Depending on the nature of the event, the year and the area where the event happened, the answers regarding how much work was done online vary from some to all. Online tools used are developed in the "Going digital" part of the report.

Governance

Two different patterns can be observed regarding **governance and decision making**: on one hand, some teams have very open and organic governance systems, based on trust and consensus, sometimes inspired by sociocracy without strictly applying its principles (e.g., EUPC); on the other hand, other teams are coordinated by one or two main persons, leaders of the host organization, who are the ones making decisions (e.g., IPC India, CLAP).

Training

In the questionnaire, no specific question was asked to list what are the **skills required** to organize such an event and that could be something questioned in the future but interviewees were asked about whether they had followed a specific training or planned their succession. Regarding **training**, only one interviewee mentioned a formal training in digital event organisation (Culturas Permanentes). For others, training happened by observation of other events they had attended before. Some others spoke about 'baptism of fire'. If they had the opportunity to be trained, most interviewees replied that they **would be interested in training on fundraising and finance or in communication and marketing**. Some others mentioned the need to grow their skill in **managing online events**. It seems that attracting enough participants to the event is quite a lot of stress to break even and some organisers

expressed their will to **be more inclusive** (language, capacity to spend money, young, minorities…) without really knowing how to go about it. Overall, there was **no succession plan** in place except one person, expert in event organisation, mentioned that apprenticeship was available with him. Some express that they would like to access more content about previous events to help themselves organise their own event.

3.2. Movement building and networks with other movements

MOVEMENT

Interest in permaculture increasing

Channels to connect mostly online, international networks both established and emerging

Benefits from the global movement:
inspiration, integration, doors opening, funding opportunities, FRIENDS, diverse perspectives, interconnectedness across continents

Hopes to reach/gather more people and go more main-stream to provide solutions in times of need

Offer other organisers: Solidarity, mutual aid, coaching

Event

Aimed outputs: gathering people, support, workshops, People Care, celebration, Networking

Audience from within and beyond permaculture, urban/city dwellers. Less focus on marginalized groups

Design

Programme reflects Reciprocity, Love, Care, Symbiosis, Diversity, Local Community inclusion

Most event organisers have been to an International Permaculture Convergence

Research: "*The edge between Permaculture and the scientific method is more productive than the sum of the two*"

ECONOMICS · DIGITAL · TEAM

Alternative education, traditional farming, social equity, alternative economy

Edge

Deliberately and/or inadvertently attract people from other ecological/social movements

BEYOND

Evolve towards less judgement, community building tools, human rights discussion, business development

Perspective: permaculture has much to provide to "other fields" & vice-versa

'Movement building and networks with other movements' answers overview

Event organisers **planned or aspired** to bring people together, increase awareness, gather with friends, create community, support, workshops. Key aspects were taking care of people (both those already into permaculture and those new), celebration and networking.

Half of the interviews were of one-time events that took place prior to the **covid pandemic**. In general participants were found to be more "trained" for an online event after the arrival of covid, but still wanting to be face-to-face if it wouldn't mean travelling too far - citing ecological footprint as an increasing concern..

Interest in permaculture in their area/region is **increasing** which is in-line with their main hopes for the permaculture movement of **reaching more people**. There is a common goal for permaculture to be widely shared so as to provide solutions in times of needs that are already here.
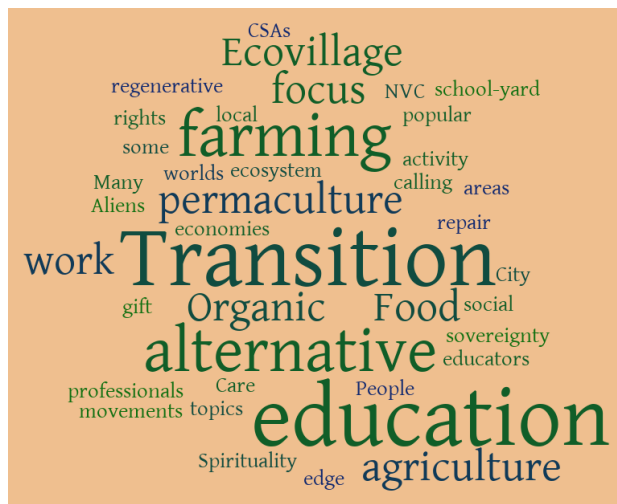
Event organisers connect with the permaculture movement beyond their area mainly via online connections at an international level (through already established networks or emerging ones such as CoLab). The closer the people are the less formal are the means to connect. Older people and those from South America tended to be more specific and direct regarding names and means.

Benefits from the global permaculture movement

All interviewees replied YES. They received inspiration, integration, doors opening, funding opportunities, FRIENDS, diverse perspectives, interconnectedness across continents. Overall, a sense of increase of the functional capability from the complementary interconnection. Most event organisers had either **attended an International Permaculture Convergence** (some more than 1), or a colleague had been.

Regarding targeted audience, the main focus is mostly to **attract a diversity of participants** both from within the movement and also beyond. There is special attention to bring in urban/city dwellers but much less attention with regards to marginalised groups and avoiding speaker lists dominated by western-white-males.

All event organisers aimed for a programme reflecting **design for mutually beneficial relationships**. Some key expressions that mirror this nicely were:

"*In Andean culture we have "ayni", which is reciprocity. 99% of presenters' response was satisfaction and happy.*" (Daniela de Oliveira – Culturas Permanentes 2021)

"There is care, love, symbiotic relationships. Can call it magic, lots of opportunity for the angels to make you bump into certain people." (Michael Pilarski – NW Permaculture Convergence, USA)

"Most of the time the programme was designed to include the local farmers with a dedicated programme translated in their local language... The programme covered a lot of diverse topics to meet a lot of different expectations." (Annaïk Le Net – IPC13 India 2017)

Connecting to other movements

Most event organisers deliberately and/or inadvertently **attracted people from ecological and social movements beyond permaculture**. On occasions local communities and people of influence in society were also deliberately included. The main **alternate worlds or movements** noticed on the edge of permaculture were alternative education, traditional farming, social equity, alternative economy, and licensed professionals such as agriculture specialists.

We asked event organisers **what perspective or emergent dynamic** they notice coming from **participation outside the permaculture sphere**. Most expressed that permaculture has much to provide to "other fields", while a few revealed some aspects that can evolve within, such as less judgement, social and community building tools, human rights discussion, business development. Some interesting comments shared are below:

"The borders of permaculture are not strict boundaries, there is a lot of permeable boundaries." (Annaïk Le Net – IPC13 India 2017)

"We are very divided, need a worldwide movement for change." (Michael Pilarski - NW Permaculture Convergence, USA)

"Not spend too much energy convincing others that permaculture is THE solution." (Daniela de Oliveira – Culturas Permanentes 2021)

"People from outside permaculture see me happier, healthier, they seen the positive change in me." (Daniela de Oliveira – Culturas Permanentes 2021)

"Other movements would definitely benefit as well from connecting with the permaculture movement - its design aspect." (Mugove Walter Nyika – IPC9 Malawi 2009)

Some event organisers are aware of having been **influenced by research in permaculture**, mostly from books and a few via informal research when learning from each other.

"We need more permaculture people doing!" (Michael Pilarski - NW Permaculture Convergence, USA)

All in all… *"The edge between Permaculture and the scientific method is more productive than the sum of the two."* (Francesca Simonetti – EUPC Bolsena 2016)
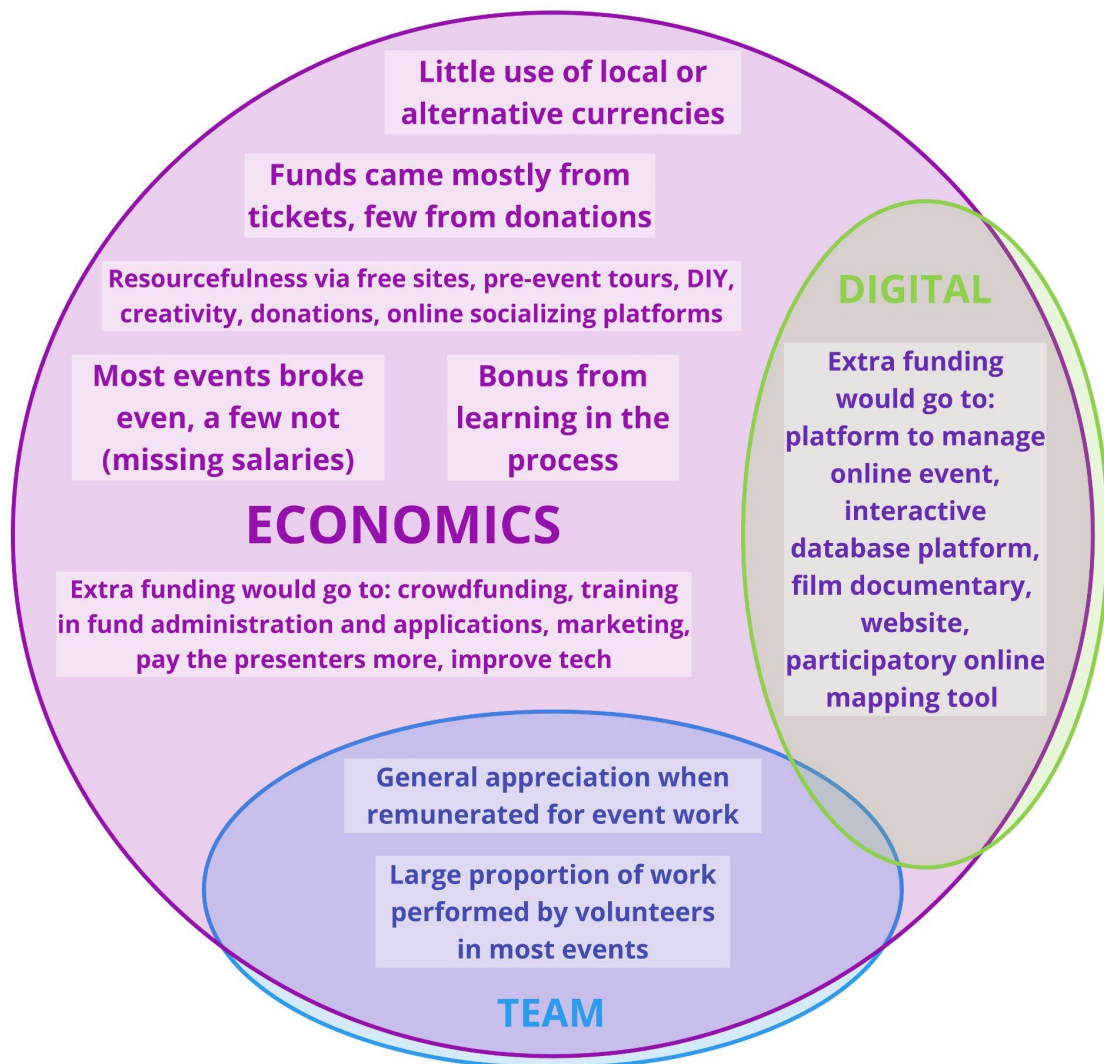

Community of Organisers

The main purpose to connect with other organisers was for solidarity and mutual aid. Besides this, many **can offer or would like to receive** mentorship/coaching in an area of relative competence, while a few are interested in **collaborating in the same supra-region** or working with others in the same or similar climate.

3.3. Funding / Resources / Circular Economy / Investments

'Economics' answers overview

The practices and skills related to economy present a wide range of creative dynamics and applications when organising convergence. Regarding **the integration of a local or community or alternative currency** only a few convergences have been involved with local alternative currencies in their organising process (e.g., Culturas Permanentes, with "muyu," and "iki"). Some others were already making efforts towards new economics, and others were open to study the possibilities at hand ("a lot of non-money exchanges," barter, work exchange at farms, work trade, seeds, creation of "post-Covid currency" like "luna" in Colombia, etc.). Others used national currencies combined with donations.

The cases in which there has been no implication in local alternative currencies is because the convergences organisers did not raise any budget and "found other resources to make the participation feasible for everybody" (e.g., Galiza), there was little or lack of knowledge of the local initiatives in this regard (e.g., EUPC 2021, Taiwan), there was little culture of the topic of the convergence in the selected locality (e.g., Educators Gathering; EUPC Bolsena), or the convergence was fully online (EUPC 2021).

In terms of designing and managing **sources of funding**, most convergences made their budget through ticket sales (e.g., CLAP, Culturas Permanentes, IPC India, Educators Gathering, etc.), and a few of them with by "selling t-shirts" (e.g., CLAP) or even taking the relay from the previous convergence (e.g., EUPC Bolsena), additional grants and donations (e.g., Africa, EUPC 2021), sponsorships (e.g., through 25% in exchange for publicity USA; IPC India), crowdfunding for scholarship (e.g., IPC India), fundraising auctions (e.g., Taiwan), EU funding (e.g., EUPC Bolsena, Educators Gathering), "applying for government support" while offering throughout the year proper permaculture design and teaching and book sales (e.g., Taiwan), memberships (EUPC Bolsena), by finding "a free-cost venue and inexpensive transportation and accommodation" (e.g., Galiza).

Most selected convergences managed **to break even** (e.g., CLAP, Culturas Permanentes, Educators Gathering, etc.), using surplus from another events (e.g., EUPC 2021, EUPC Bolsena, USA, Taiwan, IPC India used funds left by IPC London and IPC Cuba international crowdfunding), and even by learning "to use some haggling skills" (e.g., Africa). A few of them did not, as the organisers did not get paid partly or in full (e.g., EUPC 2021). Other did not raise any budget, as they found ways to make the convergence free and accommodation at the best quality and lowest price possible "to make the participation feasible for everybody" (e.g., Galiza).

The abovementioned practices impacted **the economic plan for the convergence design for the future**. Some convergences showed interest in applying the "money-pie" approach and ethos, that is, "the funds come from other sources than just registrations" (e.g., CLAP). In contrast, one convergence has accumulated experience in "running very big budgets (up to $50000)" (e.g., USA). Some organisers get satisfaction for the experience of doing the work and learning in the

process in many dimensions of being and permaculture (e.g., Africa), and others appreciate to be remunerated for the work they do during the organising process (e.g., Educators Gathering, Galiza). One showed interest in relating the theme of the future convergence to the present-moment events in their everyday (ecovillage) context which enact new informative networks that draw genuine satisfaction rather than just making money (e.g., Culturas Permanentes). One reflected that the convergence's duration would rather be shortened and "build on what we already have from previous year" (e.g., EUPC 2021). Another one stated that they would appreciate "to learn to organise with raising budgets that remunerate the organisers' work" (e.g., Galiza).
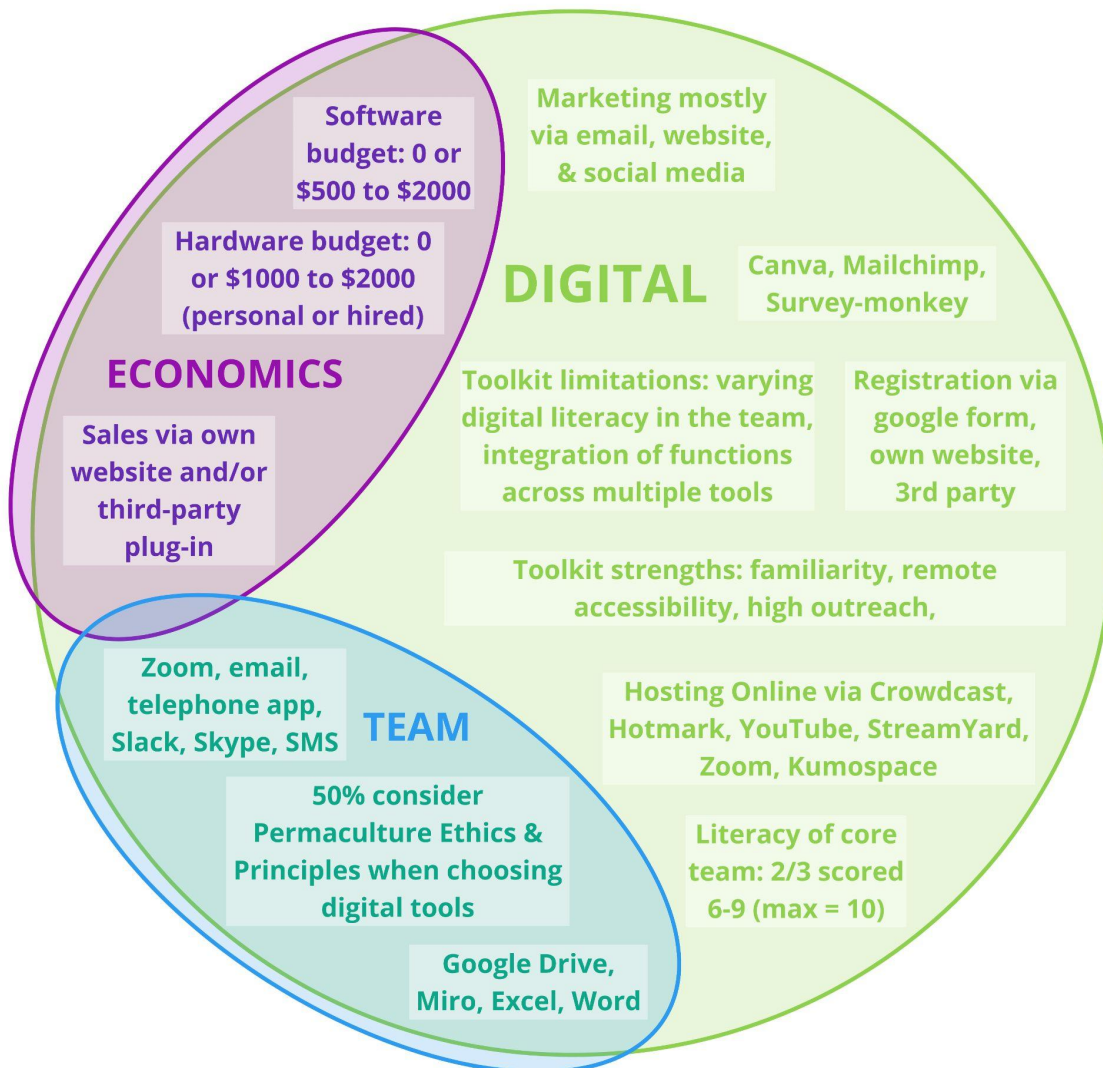
Regarding the possibility of finding ways **to pay a good salary to staff**, most convergences were organised **on a voluntary basis** (e.g., CLAP, Africa, Galiza, etc.). Very few convergences paid the organisers for their work, yet most of the times very little (e.g., CLAP, Taiwan). One of them had no expenses and no income (e.g., Galiza). One added that they had "a lot of benefits beyond money" (e.g., Culturas Permanentes). One manages to offer a "reasonable" payment to each of the 20 members of the organising team (e.g., USA). One important convergence considered that payments to staff were "satisfactory" (e.g., EUPC Bolsena). In one of the biggest, "only the coordinator, the convergence site manager and the communication assistant were paid" (e.g., IPC India), while many different resources (food, accommodation, PDC with Aranya, etc.) were used to make it feasible for most.

To reduce or share event costs, most convergences found ways to compensate costs with benefits, whether through volunteering, no pre-agreed salaries, free permaculture sites, pre-convergence tours, DIY, creativity in using available resources, donations, or using online socialising platforms, for example. One convergence considered the reduction of salaries because "only this way can it have participants in more vulnerable situations" (e.g., CLAP). A few convergences suggested interesting strategies, such as finding "permaculture sites" and organising a "pre-convergence tour" to "reduce cost of transport" (e.g., Africa), "using already existing zoom Pro accounts" and "using a free online socialising platform (kumospace)" (e.g., EUPC 2021). Many other possibilities were listed by some others, like "scrounging (looking for materials), material donations, DIY, team effort,

occasional donation[s] by team members" (e.g., USA). An important burden to the overall organisational work to be reviewed is the webpage set up of the convergence, and mainly when it is "from scratch" (e.g., IPC India).

Most convergences would offer new permaculture products and innovations, in case they had **extra funding and income**, such as crowdfunding, training for fund admin, training to present projects and respond to calls (e.g., CLAP), an ecovillage course, other courses of topics that the people need and want, a more aggressive publicity campaign, positive network events, a Permaculture "netflix" invitation (e.g., Culturas Permanentes), more publicity (e.g., Africa), "pay the presenters more, improve tech (good quality video gear), very large platform to manage online event with multiple breakout rooms and running smoothly" (e.g., USA), "impact measurements" (e.g., IPC India), sponsorship of participants, paying staff better salary, "pay staff better salary so that more and more younger generation can see their future in permaculture lifestyle" (e.g., Taiwan), more than one event per year, "pay for a professional simultaneous translation service, creation of an interactive database platform" (e.g., EUPC 2021), and even "a film documentary, a publication, the website, a participatory online mapping tool" (e.g., Galiza).

3.4. Going Digital

DIGITAL

Marketing mostly via email, website, & social media

Canva, Mailchimp, Survey-monkey

Toolkit limitations: varying digital literacy in the team, integration of functions across multiple tools

Registration via google form, own website, 3rd party

Toolkit strengths: familiarity, remote accessibility, high outreach,

Hosting Online via Crowdcast, Hotmark, YouTube, StreamYard, Zoom, Kumospace

Literacy of core team: 2/3 scored 6-9 (max = 10)

ECONOMICS

Software budget: 0 or $500 to $2000

Hardware budget: 0 or $1000 to $2000 (personal or hired)

Sales via own website and/or third-party plug-in

TEAM

Zoom, email, telephone app, Slack, Skype, SMS

50% consider Permaculture Ethics & Principles when choosing digital tools

Google Drive, Miro, Excel, Word

'Going digital' answers overview

The **digital literacy** varied across the teams with most scoring themselves above 5, most responses were on a range and around a third of the respondents the range was very wide including one from 3 – 10. It was interesting to notice that subsequent answers for the teams with low literacy scores was the need to hire outside technical assistance and that this did not always result in a benefit for the event. Some issues included badly set up websites, issues with the booking forms and content management issues.

Responses are spread almost equally between **remote working** used all the time, mostly and some of the time. This gives a clear view that the convergence

organisers are and have been embracing the remote working set up aided as you will see in the next sections by mainstream digital tools.

None of the teams indicated that they had not worked online at all.

About the tools

As one can see clearly in the figure below: google, zoom and email were the most used tools by teams this is consistent also over time, with Skype being the previous tool used before Zoom.

Around a third of the convergence organisers that we interviewed did not offer any **recorded material outside of the live access**. Another third of the respondents offered free access to the materials and the rest as a mix of drip feed and freemium.

Whilst there was not one predominant **ticketing and marketing tool** which the convergence organisers used it was clear that mainstream tools were the most

popular choices for ease of access in this case paypal and crowdcast. Other adhoc choices such as integrated payments through websites set up through 3rd party tech support did not work well eg. for IPC India. For other in person events such as IPC India there were also payments in cash accepted for local attendees.

What is considered the most basic and widely spread tool for communication: email was in fact the most used for ticketing and marketing, more popular than social media which is what would be expected as the most popular today. Keeping in mind that some events which were included in this study happened some years ago perhaps this was also a contributing factor.

Three respondents indicated Canva as a good tool for designing marketing material.

Other noteworthy contributions

Respondents shared various **creative ways of completing tasks** for example CLAP used a competition with a bursary ticket to invite the community into designing and deciding on a logo for the event.

Post event feedback was an element lacking from most events however IPC India indicated they used Survey Monkey for this purpose whilst EUPC Italy indicated Google forms was used. Most interestingly only one respondent Galizia Permaculture Convergence indicated the use of WhatsApp and Facebook to discuss shared concerns after the event although no official survey was sent out. Mentimeter was used during the EUPC event but not survey was sent out after the event.

In regards to the **use of ethical digital tools** five respondents indicated that this was due to lack of time, funding and digital literacy. All respondents indicated various aspects of what works well with the tool they have chosen which include, widespread mainstream knowhow requires no time investment on how to use the tool, cost free access and already established working patterns. On the other hand they also indicated a variety of issues including difficulties caused by lack of time investment into a communication strategy, difficulty for users to use tools such as Crowdcast, difficulty to connect on a personal level with people using digital tools, data poverty (e.g., in Malawi) along with limited digital literacy and inaccessible payment tools (e.g., PayPal access in Malawi). Other issues involved integration issues between Google forms and the website for bookings (e.g., IPC India). Two respondents

indicated accessibility challenges for Crowdcast including user-experience as a hurdle.

An interesting observation about the use of social media was that it is becoming more and more difficult to reach people without paying for adverts.

Another interesting observation over a number of respondents was that the choice of internal communication was dependent on the individual teams most comfortable method in order for messages not to get missed and to close feedback loops within a short timeframe.

Permaculture Ethics & Principles when choosing digital tools

More than half of respondents indicated that there were some thoughts about this topic although there were concerns around the level of digital literacy required of convergence organisers and users. Some indicated that they employed the services of web developers with permaculture experience in order to be able to make those considerations for them. Four respondents indicated that there was no conversation about this topic whilst planning and designing the event. Two respondents indicated that they have made a conscious effort to move closer to more ethical tools e.g. switching from WhatsApp to Signal for instant messaging.

Most agree that not enough attention has been given to digital ethics yet in the design process of the event.

Digital Tools Budget

2000 - 3000
11.1%

500 - 800
22.2%

0
22.2%

Unknown
44.4%
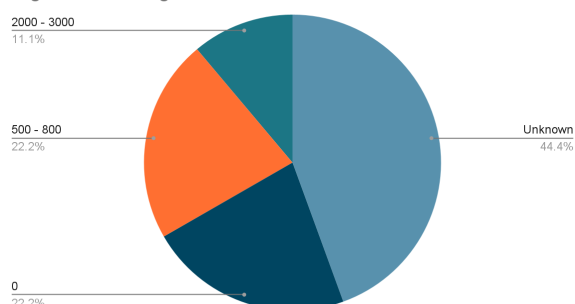
Approximate cost of hardware

1000 - 2000
18.2%

0
36.4%

Unknown
45.5%
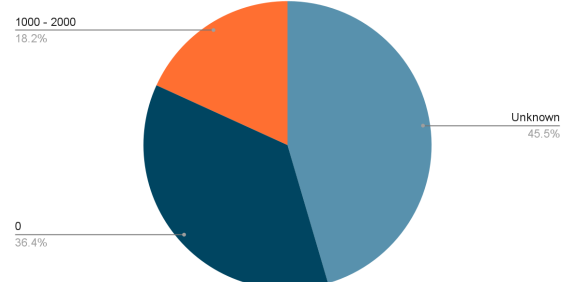
Access to hardware was mostly through private property, either already owned or through rentals. For online convergences there was no budget dedicated to hardware.

Impact measurements of convergences

None of the respondents had measured the event using metrics such as carbon footprint. Impact was gauged in some respects with conversion rates, e.g., how many people bought a ticket for the event after clicking through their emails. Some used non metric methods to assess this for example *"following up the groups formed, through the activities and the interactions made"* (Maria Prieto).

Use of impact data collected

Network / community
27.3%

Unknown
45.5%

Discussions / Reports
18.2%

Not used
9.1%
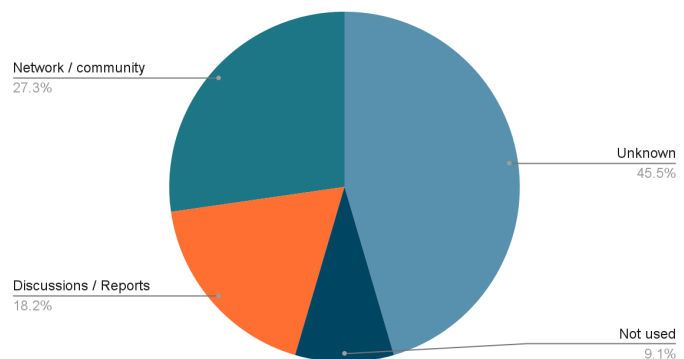
Most in person events had very little to share after events however online events **shared recordings and presentations** through Google drive, Crowdcast and social media to people who attended the event.

Five respondents did not share resources after the event.

4. Implications

The **collaborative team-working implications** of the organization of convergences for the permaculture movement are the following:

1. **Defining what are the experiences and competencies necessary** to organize convergences and support inexperienced team members through **training**

2. **Designing the teamwork** defining roles and collaborative work processes, decision making process

3. Counting and highlighting the amount of **volunteer work** necessary to organize those events and look for opportunities to pay the ones that need it the most

4. **Documenting** the convergence building process to participate in building a **succession plan** to save energy for future organizers

The **networking implications** of the organization of convergences for the permaculture movement are the following:

1. **Reaching more people within and beyond permaculture**, whether rural or urban, privileged or marginalized, mainstream or alternative, can **broaden the outreach and availability of solutions** in current and approaching times of need.

2. The global permaculture network provides for a robust interconnectedness across climate zones and continents, being a **source of inspiration, diverse perspectives, funding opportunities, and expertise**.

3. Weaving together event organisers offers them a pool of solidarity, mutual aid, coaching possibilities and collaborations that have the potential to **reduce challenges with marketing, financing, digital adaptability, and more**.

The **socio-economic implications** of the organization of convergences for the permaculture movement are the following:

1. The socio-economic implications of both **using local alternative currencies and circular economies** may help empower the sustainability of the permaculture lifestyles of the locality and the region at large.

2. The socio-economic implications of **learning by doing through selling** tickets, contacting for donations, and asking for funding may set the conditions for building up a culture around selling tickets, contacting for donations, and asking for funding can help develop sophisticated resource platforms for future convergences across the board.

3. The socio-economic implications of learning **to design and manage a budget that breaks even may** facilitate a framework to build up a culture around breaking even and getting to be paid for working hours, which may help develop more resilient continuity in the organisation of these events across many scales and with more frequency along the year.

4. The socio-economic implications of learning **to plan convergences with a budget that cover expenses and remuneration** may make events more cohesive and sustainable, and a kind of resource for regular temporary employment.

5. The socio-economic implications of **finding ways to pay and to get paid** for organising convergences may help establish a solid basis for the movement, with the possibility of using this process as a training for young permaculturists, and for maturing organisational skills for everybody as an intensive training school at varying scales and times of the year.

6. The socio-economic implications of **reducing costs and expenses** in the organisation of the convergence may help enhance resilience among the organisers and consolidate the frequency of convergences locally and regionally and beyond.

7. The socio-economic implications of making **extra funding** and something extra out of it may help develop very interesting initiatives that are deep and transversal in the growth of the movement across many scales and bioregions.

The **digital implications** of the organisation of convergences for the permaculture movement are the following:

1. There is much work to be done on **applying permaculture principles to the choice of digital tools** used to plan and deliver permaculture events. From the variety of responses this is due to numerous factors including:

   - inadequate **research** done by organisers into available ethical tools

   - inadequate **technical expertise** to be able to work with these tools

   - events organised in haste and with little budget - **time & labour cost** to learn how to use these sometimes non mainstream but more ethical options not regarded as important

   Increasingly in a post COVID reality most events are now being held online or as a hybrid **making the digital tools chosen a critical component of the design**. How do we **bring ethical tools forwards into the consciousness of the permaculture movement**?

2. The situation may be improved with **more training and research into ethical tools that meet organisers needs** and limited budget and with the will to prepare for the events much earlier to allow for permaculture principles to permeate into the digital tools decision making as part of the permaculture design of the event.

3. Most teams are already adept at **working asynchronously online** which is in itself a positive step to maintain the permaculture movement at a global scale, enhancing diversity of perspectives and remote working practices.

4. In terms of **open knowledge and sharing** the movement would benefit from embracing a more sharing attitude and taking an approach to share the recordings and presentations, learnings with the permaculture community at large.

Some of these implications were already highlighted in the **'Next Big Step' report**:

- "Relatively few people felt skilled in, or passionate about, leading a permaculture group or organisation and this is another area where many people would like support to improve" (p. 27).

- "Being able to teach the Diploma and organise national convergence are the most frequently selected area (sic) where organisations would like to improve, suggesting that the lack of offering is a question of capacity rather than demand" (p. 39).

- Most important actions to improve permaculture practice: "Developing a structure and tools to help organisations collaborate and share information was prioritised by most people, closely followed by helping existing organisations to be more effective in supporting their networks" (p. 43).

The CoLab was developed since then and is offering solutions or have the structure to work on new solutions that could support the permaculture convergences regarding some of the highlighted implications above.

Conclusion : Possible Next Steps

Based on the present analysis, our team imagined what could be possible next steps including:

Continued research, we would like this type of research to be done on a larger scale to include more events and be representative of the true diversity of different convergences worldwide (for example, in the Next Big Step report, 16 of the 52 strategic organisations in 34 countries who completed the survey had organised a national convergence).

Mutual Support between organisers, the International Permaculture CoLab offers a space for collaboration which could be used to bring people together and discuss the findings of this report and talk about possible solutions to the issues presented.

Financial support, the Funding Circle is available to provide assistance with funding convergences design elements or as a whole.

Ethical tools and digital literacy, the Digital Circle is available for assistance with digital tools, web design, web development and consultation.

Multi-lingual accessibility, the Translation Circle offers translation services to the permaculture community and allied networks and can support with text translations and live event translations.

These ideas are an open conclusion to be discussed in the existing and appropriate permaculture community spaces.

There is a project brewing to bring in learnings from convergences on a website inorder to serve as a resource for convergence organizers and provide a space for conveners to meet others who they can collaborate with. If you are interested in this work please get in touch here.

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