

THE FUTURE OF CONFEST

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A discussion and reflection paper emerging from weaving together conversation with alternatives and dropouts over many decades

For those of Down to Earth who have been involved for ten years or less - a question. 'how does ConFest happen?'

Another Easter comes around, the gates open, and people stream in, and once again the magic happens. So, how *does* this happen?

What does happen during ConFest is unique in the world. Travelers from overseas say they have found nothing like it anywhere else in the world. There are thousands of events, gatherings, festivals, and other kinds of happenings around the world, and every time the gates open and people stream in they *do not* create anything like the ConFest type magic.

At ConFest, it is the people who come streaming in that generate the very special experience.

The current 'Down to Earth' energy has *very little* to do with this ConFest magic. Sure, DTE sets the site, some of the roads, and other infrastructure. These are necessary though *in no way sufficient to create the magic*.

Many interconnected and inter-related things have happened in the decades of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s that have contributed to creating a pool of 20,000 to 30,000 or more folk who have been to ConFest multiple times. Collectively this pool of kindred folk have the inclinations, passions, competences, and energy to do it all again. A subset of this pool attends each ConFest. Enough of these people come each ConFest to seed the magic for those who are new or have been to a few ConFests.

During these decades only a very few folk were searching for ConFest sites and knew what to look for. They have searched for, found, and evaluated over 100 potential sites; they were also part of the small group who found DTE's two properties. They are the holders of competence and wisdom of how to do this. For decades ConFest went to a new sit every year. Exploring the new site was a core aspect of the experience. Each year was novel.

Over the decades, ConFests have been held at locations with many non-obvious special and significant characteristics that set the subtle energy to receive the ConFest attendees. On the run out to Moulmein one can hardly imagine that one could ever find a ConFest site in this very flat sparely treed area.

For example, the sunrises and sunsets lighting the Red Gums and reflecting them in the Edwards River and its billabongs creates some of the best scenery in Australia.



2018 The Billabong East of Eagle's Nest

The land topography of ConFest sites have been selected to alter *social topography* – the 'lay of the land' between people. All forms of subtle energy are involved. If one is not attuned to these subtle energies this will make little sense.

And a few older folk who are still around were key people in seeding contexts for enervating this pool of magic-makers in the nineties and before. They are holders of the Way to seed contexts for magic to happen - how to keep everything tentative to maximize the lived experience of freedom upon arrival. The only aspects preplanned were front gate, toilets and the location of the market.

If required, from the outset ambulance and emergency vehicles could access well into the site. Attendees when they arrived made the roads and pathways of ConFest by their foot traffic and within a day, 'made roads' were formed by people walking, and groups could easily walk four abreast on the main ConFest 'roads'.

When the few who searched for sites walked around, we would very easily get lost. We would walk the site till we become thoroughly familiar with every aspect. At first all trees looked the same. On a cloudy day we would walk in the bush in circles. Then slowly we began to notice differences and learn to recognise where we were. We started to embody the site – to have the site within us.

Once, a person very familiar with all of the magic spots of a selected site, walked a Victa motor mower around the site cutting the grass a little lower, and these wandering pathways became the path network of ConFest. People could walk most places in the shade as this was woven into the design. There were no straight line roads in blazing sunlight between Market and Arts to exhaust people on the shortest route. A potential morning sharing place was cut by the Victa Motor Mower in the shape of a heart and the people 'spontaneously' sat in a heart shape – an example of energising contexts for possibilities to emerge.

ConFest sites were like blank canvas ready for spontaneous artistry. Attendees knew of this freedom and would revel in it. 'Here we come and create our own spaces of our own choosing in places of our own choosing. Here and there are hints of possibilities.' 'Attendees, if you want a more quiet area – look over here. If you are pagans, perhaps look over there. You'll find a grove of trees, a clear view of the full moon and a ceremonial place.' 'Wow! Just what we like. We were seeding possibilities for folk to use if they want.

We are constantly exploring self-organizing systems. This seeding of possibilities is coming out of a profound understanding of the differing energies that may arrive and what they may be looking for. No one is telling anyone where they must go.

Many of the establishers of this vast pool of ConFest attendees no longer attend ConFest. *They do not like what ConFest is becoming.*

DTE energy is very different to ConFest energy.

Some folk have been using terms like 'dysfunctional' and 'toxic' to say why they no longer associate with Down to Earth. This has been continuing so some time. Some are asking, will DTE energy kill ConFest?

The phenomena of ConFest can be traced back to radical kinds of folk in the 1960s engaging in radical action, processes, and ways of being together. These radical change-agents were sometimes called 'dropouts' - an apt name. They had dropped out of the dominant system. Some focused on opposing the dominant system. Others had no part in this – preferring to use their energy to create new social forms for better futures. In 1963, both of these groups like Bob Dylan sensed that 'the times they were a changin'.

If your time to you
Is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'

The word 'radical' comes from the Latin word meaning 'roots' (hence the word 'radish'). These folk on the margins of society wanted to return to the basics; to be close to nature. Small gathering places emerged in Sydney and Melbourne. Dropouts knew how to find one another. In Melbourne they could be found around parts of Brunswick, St Kilda, and Coburg; later St Andrews, Castlemaine, Daylesford, and Hepburn Springs. In Sydney gathering places were around the Paddington Bondi Junction Area, Glebe point Road in Glebe and King Street Newtown, and further afield in the hills behind Byron Bay, the Nimbin region and in Queensland on the very remote coast above Cooktown.

In the mid 1960s and early 1970s they particularly networked with each other during community markets, festivals, gatherings, and community celebrations.

Many of these dropouts were warrior types who opposed the dominant system. Many of these formed protest groups that after a time disbanded and disappeared from history. Some have become 'hardened professional protestors' and are still around.

Others of these dropouts were what Maturana calls Homo Amans – loving people. They were naturally good at nurturing others – 'natural nurturers'. In the late 1960s there was the sudden emergence of over 200 different self-help groups in the Eastern States of Australia with foci on all manner of themes, with a significant subset of these focusing on rising above dysfunction caused by sick-making aspects of society. In Victoria most of these self-help groups came together as a collective called COSHG - 'The Collective of Self-Help Groups'. People connected to ConFest were key energizers of COSHG operating from a facility in Pit Street, Carlton.

Self-help Groups blossomed in Sydney around Paddington, Glebe, and Newtown. One self-help group Mingles linked with over 30 other self-help Groups.

In Sydney and wider in NSW there were a string of gatherings culminating in the Aquarius Festival in Nimbin in 1973. The folk that helped prepare the Aquarius site tended to gather from 1968 onwards in a loose commune that met in the Church hall in Paddington where the Paddington Saturday Bazaar is held. This commune played a key role in commencing Paddington Bazaar in 1969 as an integral aspect of the Paddington Festival. A few months later this same energy collective evolved the 1969 Centennial Park Festival that filled over 600 hectares of the park with 1,000s of people and was billed as Australia's first hippy festival. These kinds of folk were passionate about making a difference in evolving new social forms. These were the ones at the heart of preparing the first ConFest. Mangold writes of Jim Cairns, Junie Morosi and David Ditchburn teeing up to meet this commune to plan the first ConFest.

Some of lesser vision and insight with perhaps greater hurt by the system were deflected into useless opposing of the system; protesting the Vietnam war and using illegal drugs both engineered by the dominant system as a very successful strategy to deflect, block and stop innovative social action in evolving better worlds.

Today, the remnants of the folk involved in exploring new social forms are a typical example of 'being alternative'. When you find and talk to them they say things like the following which blends many people's comments together:

'With us as 'alternatives' everything and we mean *everything* is continually up for review. We are agents-of-change and we are very aware that we can really scare the powers-that-be. So we never protest against what is; rather we explore what could be. We keep on the margins; we are not found in 'occupy movements' where the dominant forces build perimeter fences so they can identify, intimidate and charge everyone in the city park. We take a very low profile and stay on the margins where we can do small micro model projects to establish what will not work far from interference. We pass on rumours of what does work. Our rumours travel with the tag 'adapt to your local context'.

We have a sustained focus on *coming up with alternatives to the dominant (dominating) system*. We are getting close to nature – embracing simply living well with mother earth. We were called ‘dropouts’ and ‘long haired hippies’ and included with the ‘radical University Students’. For example La Trobe University administration was ‘taken over’ and students ended up in jail.

We’re constantly engaging in spontaneity and play. And we recognise that the directive ‘play to rules’ is **not** play. While games are played, games with rules are not play. Play is spontaneous – without rules (Huizinga, 195, Homo Ludens).

We are among the world’s greatest lovers - and lovers play. We love to play and our work is playful. We know how to *enjoy ourselves very safely* and enjoy each other. Time flies as we have fun together. We fully surrender to the moment and catch the vibe that follows; we embrace life with both hands and hold it in all of its magic close to our heart. We have immense verve and passion - and from this emerges boundless energy for good works. We feel good inside – and know how to increase that feeling. And we have a very healthy attitude to risk and have a highly evolved sense of safety and danger and can engage in dangerous things very safely or otherwise stay *well* away from them. As youngster some of us well knew how it feels to very safely climb very high in swaying trees when the winds blow and how to move and hold on in those conditions; and explore how far we could travel through trees without touching the ground; and how to let go and free-fall through Cyprus boughs from 30 feet in the air and land in the banana passion vine below - and we knew those cypresses so well we had many routes to fall.

We know that together we have *astronomical potential*. Dr Jim Cairns book ‘Growth and Human Potential’ is about just this. We are using this pooled potential to evolve alternative ways of living together to make better worlds. That’s a core thing that *we are continuing to do*. Without going into useless cataloguing of disaster, the dominant system is in decline in so many ways. And we were the early *dropouts* in this decline. We were using our astronomical potential to evolve far better realities, better social forms, better ways of cooperating; better ways of organizing ourselves so we are never placed in departmentalized silos like government bureaucrats.

We’re exploring ways of evolving significant places, spaces, and localities and ways of creating connection to place and ‘cultural locality’ and during those first 40 or so ConFests we discovered ways to have ‘people connected together connected to place’.

We notice how the reality of everyday life is set up by millions of acts by common folk under massive influence of all forms of media. Reality is socially put together. We are all ‘socialized’ by society. We notice how people are predisposed to behave in ways that are contrary to their own interests. Powerful interests have determined how they can control us at the level of predisposition. We just feel that these are ‘proper’ ways to act. And to quote one of these power people, ‘If I can control the masses at the level of behavioural predisposition then they are my slaves though they sense they are free.’ So we are exploring ways to alter people’s predispositions. And we are exploring ways to modify this socializing and make these socializing processes profoundly better.

We are exploring habitat - better ways of housing ourselves, better ways of living, far better alternatives to current economies and current financial systems and means of exchange, altogether better ways of thriving. We are all for enriching the wisdom of life experience within common folk – the psycho-emotional commons that is been whittled away by experts of all kinds. We're exploring working together collaboratively without people being *over* other people and some telling others what they can and can't do. We're exploring better ways of relating; better ways of cooperatively conversing; better ways of evolving communities; better ways of local, regional, and global governance; better ways of celebrating in gatherings and altogether better ways of being.

We are also revisiting the very best of the past and living close to Mother Earth like Indigenous people. We are also exploring intentional communities and communes both up the East Coast and overseas.

While some we know have been hooked and diverted by mind altered drugs and realities we are fully aware that we live in a world of multiple realities; and that the paramount reality *of everyday life* is a very controlled reality forming people to be wage-slaves or dole-bludgers with mental disorders largely derived from dominant society pressures. So we are interested in co-creating *new realities* where people realise their potential and co-create better futures – were folk sense that they have potential and act and use their potential. And our actions and speech acts are about co-creating the seeds and reality of better futures now.

Now most of us no longer go to ConFest. It is no longer our scene. Many attendees are into just being entertained and having a good time. The place is slowly been turned into a permanent giant mainstream holiday camp with preplanned camp sites in straight rows Everything is becoming so like the dominant system that it is already feels in parts like Torquay municipal camping ground or a national park camping ground with rangers. Soon bollards will be popping up everywhere.

Among our number are people exploring both the past experience of utopian and dystopian (opposite of utopia) societies and beginning to explore the evolving of multiple simultaneous utopias – using the term heterotopias (hetero-utopias) and exploring ways of avoiding the failings of these kinds of action.

Some with the aptitude and inclination are exploring our ways of knowing – especially, how our ways of knowing are limiting our knowing. We are exploring new ways of doing qualitative research; ways of using indigenous research methodologies like re-membering and listening to and recording story and narrative. We're calling for an archaic renaissance – the bringing back the best of the past – the practical innovating of the bush mechanic tradition; adapting what's around us for other uses and repurposing; and the passing on of wisdom to the young by the wise older folk. And woven through all of this is spontaneity and playfulness – celebrating and nurturing our inner child.

We alternatives are Futurists. There are futurists who are intentional, willing, or inadvertent slaves of the dominant system ensuring as best they can that the future is an extension of the current system of dominant systems. We 'alternative folk' continue to form covert networks of networks of futurists on the margins weaving all of the above alternative forms of actions for replacing the dominant system of systems in decline.

And in times of increasing threat of natural disasters, we alternatives are at the forefront of world-best-practice in evolving processes for having large collectives of people traveling to remote places and being able to have quality time together with rudimentary infrastructure.

And for decades now we alternatives have been exploring these ways outside of ConFest – up the East Coast of Australia; in cities, rural, and remote areas of Tasmania, in Western Australia; in the Kimberley region, Alice Springs, Katherine, Darwin, Rapid Creek and Top End Region; with lots happening in the Atherton Tablelands in Queensland. Our linked Action has extended through the counties to the North of Australia through Asia and Oceania with people from these Regions quietly attending ConFest and taking learning and ideas back to adapt in their local cultures. Links extend through Asia, Europe, and the UK.

We're exploring the social sciences and subjecting them to radical critique. We are not being restricted to looking at things as they are; we are exploring people and things as they *could* be. We invite you to join us. Perhaps after all, ConFest is still a place to meet.

You are invited to think about your experience of DTE and how we all may play a part rather than drifting apart. How can DTE support ConFest and not lead to its slow destruction.

SITE SETUP MODEL

<p style="text-align: center;">Imposing the Dominant System Model</p> <p>Eagerly Comply with Direction of Authorities in using Expert Service Delivery for Preparation of Event-Site Model</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Social Welfare & Community Development Model</p> <p>Social Welfare & Community Development of Event-Site Using Development Application Model</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Co-Creating Community while Evolving an Organic Holistic Self-organizing Gathering Space and Wellbeing Energy Model</p> <p>Informing Authorities that they do not have a category for ConFest</p> <p>ConFest is not a preplanned Event</p> <p>Site Preparing is Co-Creating Community while Evolving an Organic Holistic Self-organizing Gathering Space and Wellbeing Energy Model; so assisting Authorities to find ways that meet their needs whereby we continue to hold and demonstrate world-best Practice in this kind of Model</p> <p>For example, this is a model that may be used wherever large numbers of people require temporary quality self-organised mutual-help communal living following large scale disasters and breakdown of governance; this was the Model used for the first Thirty five or more ConFests during a time when non-appropriate categories were being used to regulated other Festivals</p>
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OUTCOME

<p>To Ensure Continuity Of ConFest as a Dominant System Compliant Preplanned Regulated and Controlled Event that is a Distorted Caricature of what ConFest Once was</p>	<p>To Ensure Continuity of ConFest as a Dominant System Compliant Distorted Caricature of what ConFest Once was in Ways that are hardly noticed by current DTE people</p>	<p>To Ensure Continuity Of ConFest as a World-Best-Practice Model of a Spontaneous Self-Organising Community evolved Gathering Site on our own land for Gatherings Exploring Alternative Global Regional and Local Futures Co-Creating Community Mutual-Help Models</p>
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SITE SETUP PROCESSES

<p>Medical Model In Disguise Use Delegated Authority as Experts to Diagnose and Prescribe What is to be Done and <i>Impose Plan on Site</i></p> <p><i>Use outside Event Management Experts to direct and control DTE volunteers; or preferably use outside contractors</i></p>	<p>Use Experts to <i>Develop</i> Site For Participants and Take Required Steps to Ensure Their Safety</p> <p><i>Use outside Event Management Experts to direct and control DTE volunteers</i></p>	<p>Being Guided by Familiarity with the Site and Embodied Appreciating of <i>Both</i> the Site and the Varied Interests and Passions of Invited Attendees Along with the Subtle Nuances of the Site; Evolving all Aspects of the Site for a Community Gathering on our Own Land while Evolving Our Selves Through Enabling Self-Help & Mutual-Help Community Networking</p>
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APPROACH

<p>Expert Service Delivery (Medical Model)</p> <p>Focus on External Physical</p> <p>Disconnected</p> <p>Hierarchical</p> <p>Bureaucratic</p> <p>Categorized Sectors and Departments (32 +)</p> <p>Disintegrate and Diagnose, Prescribe and Impose within Categories regulated by Bureaucrats in bureaucracy and supervised by 'coordinators' (bosses)</p> <p>Attend to what's 'not working' in dominant system terms</p>	<p>Social work & Community Development</p> <p>Physical & social</p> <p>Disconnected</p> <p>Hierarchical</p> <p>Bureaucratic</p> <p>Categorized Sectors and Departments (32 +)</p> <p>Disintegrate and Diagnose, Prescribe and Impose within Categories regulated by Bureaucrats in bureaucracy and supervised by 'coordinators' (bosses)</p> <p>Help whole</p>	<p>Living System Wellness Model</p> <p>Interconnecting</p> <p>Holistic</p> <p>Networked Psycho-social emotional community physical</p> <p>Networking networks in constant exchange</p> <p>Living well with families and community preparing site for our extended ConFest community enabling whole system to help our selves</p> <p>Sensing the multi-causal whole-of-it and being guided by context on how to use or adapt integrating ways that have worked in other contexts</p>
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META-ACTION

Intervening	Intervening	Enabling
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PERSPECTIVES

<p>'Doctor's' perspective</p>	<p>Social Workers & Community Developer's Perspective</p>	<p>Sensing through Local Perspectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Children's ○ Adolescents' ○ People's ○ Older People's ○ Elders' ○ Living System ○ Wellness & Rights
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INTENTION

<p>Inherent risk and hazard Curative – danger of physical or mental injury or disease causing damage needing cure and/or repair</p>	<p>Curative & Preventative</p>	<p>Local people-focused enabling of whole community wellness and wellbeing towards thriving together</p>
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VIEW OF THE CHILD ADOLESCENTS AND OLDER PEOPLE

<p>As vulnerable The problem to be cured or excluded</p>	<p>As vulnerable The problem needing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Relief ○ Protection ○ Rehabilitation ○ exclusion 	<p>As the source of unlimited potential As personally and communally having:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rights ○ Competencies ○ Capacities ○ Resources ○ Resilience <p>who may use our enabling support if <i>they want it</i></p>
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BENEFITS

<p>Disease and physical injuries attended and minimised</p>	<p>Immediately addresses needs for relief and rehabilitation</p>	<p>Ensures a thriving environment recognising harm minimisation and organic eliminating and minimizing of risk factors; Immediately supports and helps strengthen local folk's' resilience, close attending, and recognizing and utilizing of psychosocial resources and the wellness of the children and their families and community</p>
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