Curaçao, our nation

An Appreciative Inquiry about the future of Curaçao

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This study examines the working of Appreciative Inquiry in the context of the newly constituted country Curaçao. People on Curaçao were said to have a lack of an own identity, a lack of self-respect and an indifferent attitude towards the future of the island. In this study an Appreciative Inquiry approach rooted in a relational constructionist thought style was put to work, which opens up possibilities for change by locating change agency in ongoing processes that facilitate non subject-object ways of relating. A cooperative project was organized in the field, wherein fifty youngsters from Curaçao entered into conversations with their fellow inhabitants about the strengths and future of Curaçao. This case study shows that AI can be a valuable method for community development. People reacted to the invitation to engage in a positive conversation about Curaçao and became used to hopeful and appreciative ways of talking about their island and themselves.

Keywords: appreciative inquiry; community development; relational constructionism

1. Introduction

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an increasingly popular approach for organizing systemic change. The explicit appreciative and action-oriented focus appeals to a diverse set of people that aspire organizational and societal change. Numerous books and articles have been published on Appreciative Inquiry in the last decade, both for scientists and practitioners. Nevertheless, surprisingly few studies have managed

to combine the theory on Appreciative Inquiry with empirical research. Resulting in an accumulation of literature on either end of the spectrum: from philosophy of science texts to practical 'how to' management books. This study tries to fill this gap by examining the working of Appreciative Inquiry in the context of the newly constituted country of Curaçao.

Previous research identified a call for a mentality change on Curaçao in relation to its new autonomous status within the Kingdom of the Netherlands (Boessenkool et al, 2009). Because of the island's (colonial) history, people were said to lack a sense of identity, to lack self-respect and to have a passive and indifferent attitude towards the future of the island. This mentality supposedly needed to change in order to profit from the chances offered by the new constitutional structure.

How could I, as a scientist, facilitate locally helpful changes in these constructions? I decided to work through AI rooted in a relational constructionist thought style. This approach opens up possibilities for change by locating change agency in ongoing processes that facilitate non subject-object ways of relating (Hosking, 2006) and can help to construct positive futures together (Cooperrider, 1990) and come to new vocabularies of hope (Ludema, Cooperrider and Barrett, 2000).

This paper provides a rich case illustration of AI and how it helped to change ways of talking about the future of Curaçao. I focus on the process of organizing the AI project together with others and, in particular, how AI could be translated into practice. I visited the island for three months in the spring of 2011 and organized an appreciative and, hopefully, transformative intervention together with a local foundation. This case shows that AI can be a valuable approach for community development and can help to construct societal innovations.

Nevertheless, we still have a lot to learn about how to organize AI processes that truly facilitate non subject-object ways of relating. I will therefore end with some lessons learned from the field. How can we use the energy that comes from the focus on appreciation and possibilities without imposing our own idea of positive on others? How can we facilitate non subject-object processes by treating multiple realities as different but equal? How can we radically embrace working with an emergent design and what should be our own role as researcher or practitioner in the whole process?

2. Approaches to Development and Change

In the last decades several streams of thought have emerged in social science that actively seek to distance themselves from the 'received view of science' (Wright, 2006). They are largely referred to as 'postmodern',

though upon closer inspection this label covers different streams of thought such as social constructionism, dialogic studies, feminist studies and narrative approaches (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Chia, 1996; Gergen & Thatchenkerry, 2006; Gergen, 2009). Alvesson and Deetz (2000) offer us a way out of the confusion by introducing a framework with two contrasting dimensions to make sense of differing social science perspectives; elite/a priori versus local/emergent and consensus versus dissensus. The first dimension draws attention to the way research concepts arise during the research process, whilst the second should be understood as the presentation of unity or difference (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000).

A social and relational constructionist perspective

Approaches to development and change rooted in a social and relational constructionist perspective, should be understood as coming from a social science perspective that combines 'local/emergent' with 'dissensus'. This has radical implications for both the aim of scientific research and the role of the researcher:

> 'Where the purpose of modernist theory and practice is to solve problems, cure illness, achieve social, environmental and scientific advancement, the purpose of social construction, as a discursive option, is to explore what sorts of social life become possible when one way of talking and acting is employed versus another.' (Hosking & McNamee, 2006: 30)

Why this project?

I organized this project for my master thesis in the master programme Research in Public Administration and Organizational Science at Utrecht University. In the past two years, people have often asked me: "Why Curacao?". I always answer the best I can by saying I simply fell in love with the island during a research project in 2009 (see Boessenkool et al. (eds.), 2009). Unconsciously, I might have developed a bond with the island at a much younger age, since I grew up with stories about Curacao from my mother and grandparents, who have lived on the island for twenty years. For me, our research project on Curacao was not quite 'finished'. It felt somewhat unsatisfactory to me to conclude that there was a call for a 'mentality change' and let that be the end of it. My main motivation was to facilitate a change, however small, in these constructions about the island and its people, without imposing my own idea of the direction of the change on others. Throughout the entire project, I searched for ways to motivate people from 'within' by believing in their strengths, instead of by some external force.

Approaches to development and change rooted in a social and relational constructionist perspective open up new possibilities for change by locating change in ongoing processes that facilitate non subject-object ways of relating (Hosking, 2006). Such a way of relating can be constructed in processes where there is a 'soft differentiation' (Hosking, 2006: 62) between people and things and wherein multiple local realities are treated as 'different but equal' (Hosking, 2006: 62). Appreciative Inquiry is a specific approach that offers the possibility of constructing such processes. However, it is not possible to equate AI with non subject-object ways of relating, since it can be practiced in such a way that it facilitates subject-object ways of relating. Therefore, (following Hosking, 2006) we will work from a social and relational constructionist perspective on development and change rather than fixing any particular approach as either subject-object or non subject-object.

Based on a review of the literature, four generic themes that inform change work from a social and relational constructionist perspective were identified: constructing non subject-object processes, opening up to multiple local constructions and realities, centering possibilities and appreciation and both inquiry and intervention.

Appreciative Inquiry

In the last decade, the popularity of AI has rapidly increased and AI is used in an increasingly diverse set of contexts. However, it should be stressed that these practices are not simply variants of more or less the same tune. AI can mean many different things (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). Moreover, the capability of an AI process to manifest itself in different forms depending upon the local-cultural context, is largely where AI derives its value from. As van der Haar and Hosking (2004) argue:

> '[T]he question of what AI 'is' must necessarily be answered in relation to each case and its local particularities' (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004: 10).

AI puts the four generic themes of approaches to development and change identified earlier 'to work'. AI is therefore not a 'method', although some practitioners use AI's 4-D Cycle as such. Rather AI can be seen as an approach and the 4-D Cycle as a way to story the process. To make sense of AI, several authors work with a set of 'AI principles'. The first four date as far back as the first article on AI by Cooperrider and Srivasta (1987):

1. Research should begin with appreciation
2. Research should be applicable
3. Research should be provocative
4. Research should be collaborative (free to Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987).

Research Design

A case study design was used in this study, since the main interest was to understand how an Appreciative Inquiry approach could be put to work in a specific context, namely the context of the new country of Curaçao. This requires a detailed and in-depth study. The level of complexity of both the theory and the context of the case and the explorative nature of the study provide more arguments for studying a single case (Boeije, 2010; Flyvbjerg, 2001). Ethnographic methods were used to come to a detailed and in-depth description. While ethnography is traditionally a method that aims at representing other cultures in a written account (Van Maanen, 1988), it is a method that is used in social constructionist research as well (Gergen & Gergen, 2002; Gergen, 2009; Holstein & Hubrium, 2008). According to Holstein and Gubrium (2008) bringing constructionist ideas to ethnographic fieldwork asks for some procedural adaptations, but it is not necessary to abandon traditional techniques such as working with field notes. Four major research techniques were used: informal ethnographic interviews, appreciative interviews, group interviews and observations (Agar, 1996; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995; Holstein & Gubrium, 2008; Sanjek, 1990; Walsh, 2004; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The data was prepared and analyzed by using Boeije's (2010) approach of coding, where the researcher starts out with an emergent approach of coding, 'Open coding', and moves on to 'Axial coding' and 'Selective coding' to look for patterns in the data.

In more recent works, the original set of principles has often been complemented or altered (see for example Cooperrider and Whitney, 2001; Ludema, 2001; Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

In AI literature, a number of transformational outcomes are promised (Bushe & Kassam, 2005). AI is said to help human systems to generate new realities and create positive futures together (Cooperrider, 1990). Cooperrider initially spoke of human systems as 'heliotropic'; just as a plant grows towards the sunlight, so do human systems move to positive images of the future (Cooperrider, 1990). In his later work (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001), he switched to the metaphor of the movie projector to stress the power of positive imagery:

> 'Much like a movie projector on a screen, human systems are forever projecting ahead of themselves a horizon of expectation (in their talk in the hallways, in the metaphors and language they use) that brings the future powerfully into the present as a mobilizing agent. To inquire in ways that serves to refashion anticipatory reality—especially the artful creation of positive imagery on a collective basis may be the most prolific thing any inquiry can do.' (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001: 21).

AI is furthermore said to hand people new vocabularies; a vocabulary of hope and possibilities, instead of deficits and problems (Ludema, 2001). Since language is constitutive of creating realities (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Gergen, 2009; Hosking, 2006), changing our vocabulary may well be one of the most powerful tools for bringing about (social) change (Ludema, 2001). Relatedly, the stories people tell about themselves can be empowering or dis-empowering (Hosking, 2004). AI can help people to move from feelings of 'learned helplessness' to 'learned optimism' (Boyd & Bright, 2007; Cooperrider, 1990; Thatchenkerry, 2005). From a relational constructionist perspective, AI is especially valuable because it gives space to multiple local realities and ways of going on, without imposing one grand narrative on others (Gergen, McNamee & Barrett, 2001; Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004).

3. Curaçao, our nation

In the next section of this paper, a case illustration is shared in which AI is used to come to new ways of talking about the future of the newly constituted country of Curaçao. Because of the understanding of AI as an ongoing process, it is not useful in this context to think in terms of an intervention with a pre- and post-measurement (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). Rather, this study can be thought of as being part of an ongoing process, in which inquiry and intervention are simultaneous (Hosking, 2006). The case illustration will therefore be a detailed description of the *process* instead of the outcomes of the project as such.

A mentality change on Curaçao

For decades there has been a discussion about the constitutional structure of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, which until recently consisted of the Netherlands, Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles (Kummeling & Saleh, 2007). The symbolic date of the 10th of October 2010 (10-10-10) has been chosen to start anew with a new constitutional structure in which the country the Netherlands Antilles has ceased to exist and Curaçao and Sint Maarten have become autonomous countries within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The smaller islands Bonaire, St. Eustasius and Saba have become Dutch municipalities with a special status.

The question is what sort of changes this constitutional restructuring will bring for Curaçao. What does the ordinary 'man on the street' on Curaçao notice of these constitutional changes? In 2009 a team of 20 young Dutch researchers, including myself, asked this question to over 150 people on Curaçao with different backgrounds (Boessenkool et al. (eds.), 2009). This study as well as other studies and books by (local) researchers and journalists (Kabalt & Martens, 2009; Marcha & Verweel, 2000, 2003; Marcha, 2009; Sluis, 2004,

2009) provide a somewhat sombre image of Curaçao and its inhabitants. Most of these authors stress the importance of the island's colonial history in shaping the identity and mentality of the people on Curaçao. A number of supposed characteristics of this identity and mentality are amongst others a passive attitude, a lack of an own identity, a lack of self-respect and feelings of shame, fear and uncertainty.

It is therefore not surprising that Boessenkool et al (2009) found that the people of Curaçao voiced a desire for a mentality change. If the island were to profit from the advantages and chances offered by the new constitutional structure, its inhabitants should be active instead of passive and have faith in the future instead of distrust the past. It was always the other that needed changing; depending on the person you were talking to, either the politicians, the rich, the poor, the old or the young should change their mentality.

Getting started: moving from theory to practice

How could I, as a scientist, facilitate locally helpful changes in these constructions? I chose to work with Appreciative Inquiry and study how AI could help to come to changed ways of talking about (the future of) the island. By doing this, I had to translate the theory on AI to the context at hand, which was a constant puzzle. The relational constructionist perspective used, called for the construction of non subject-object ways of relating (Hosking, 2006). A difficult task in a context where Dutch people are often storied as experts, and are known for claiming to 'know better' than the locals. This was also the reason I explicitly worked with an emergent design; I wanted to organize a project from within the local context instead of designing it beforehand.

Upon my arrival on the island, I found it difficult to decide where to start. Freire (1970) suggests a shift from talking 'about' to talking 'with', so that was how I started. In these early conversations, it struck me that people appeared to be disappointed or even indifferent towards politics, politicians and their newly gained autonomy and kept on referring to the Netherlands as the place where 'everything was better'. While others mainly saw '10-10-10' as a way station for independency from the Netherlands. I sensed that people felt strongly attached to their island, but it was difficult to get to these feelings of love and connectedness in these early conversations.

Organizing an Appreciative Inquiry together with others

In these first weeks, I also met Gwendell, the chairman of the local foundation 'We Lead Curaçao'. We had several conversations about a possible project together, before I was introduced to the rest of the board to discuss my ideas with them. I was so careful not to impose my ideas on the

people I wanted to work with, that I did not dare take the lead and speed the process. When I finally realized I needed to come up with a plan as a basis for further dialogue, things started moving.

During the first meeting with the We Lead board, the project rapidly took shape. I introduced my idea to work with Appreciative Inquiry and organize conversations between different people about the future of the island. Since We Lead explicitly focuses on the role of the youth in constructing an ideal nation, it was quickly decided that the interviewers were to be local youngsters. Once this was decided, we easily moved to the practical arrangements such as dates and locations. From then on, we had contact through mail, phone on an almost daily basis and held several meetings as well.

Together with the board members of We Lead Foundation, an Appreciative Inquiry was organized in which nearly fifty local youngsters received training in Appreciative Inquiry and Appreciative Interviewing specifically. The youngsters each interviewed five fellow inhabitants about their island.

A positive conversation about Curaçao

Together we entered into conversations with over two hundred people on Curaçao. The conversations took place during a three-week period in a wide variety of settings and on different parts of the island. People learned about their family history from their grandfather, got to know a neighbor, made an appointment with a former prime-minister or got up the courage to start a conversation with a perfect stranger and learn about his or her dreams. Conversations were held with all sorts of different people, with different national backgrounds and ages ranging from eight to eighty years old.

The tone of the conversations seemed to change as more people entered into the conversation. When I first asked people what was good about the island, people said that 'everything was better in the Netherlands'. In the context of the AI project 'Curacao, our nation', answering positively oriented questions was seen as difficult as well and some people even refrained from answering. Others used the chance to complain about the politicians, the high cost of living on the island or the holes in the road. But despite these difficulties, the majority of interviewees did share positive stories about the island. Some people simply expressed their happiness with their life on the island:

> "For me living on Curacao is like gold "oro" as we say in Papiamentu."

Or mentioned positive aspects of the island, such as for example the local food, the relationship between people, tourism, traditions, the climate and the relaxed atmosphere ('no hurries'). Notably, people seemed hopeful about the future of the island.

Interview questions

1. How long have you lived in Curaçao? a. What first brought your family here? b. What is it like for you to live in this community?

2. When you think about the whole island of Curaçao, which particular places, people or images represent the island to you?

3. Thinking back about your memories here in Curaçao, what have been real high points for you as a citizen of this island? Why did these experiences mean so much to you?

4. Why have you decided to live here and stay in Curaçao?

5. What are in your opinion the things that work well in Curaçao?

6. Who do you see as a role model or leader in our community or in general? a. Who do you think of as young leaders that give hope to the community? b. What do you expect from the youth from Curaçao in constructing a better nation?

7. What sort of leadership do you expect for our country? a. What do you think about politics now and what should politics be like in your opinion?

8. How would you describe the quality of life in Pais Kòrsou today?

9. What changes on the island would you most like to see? a. What do you imagine your own role might be in helping to make this happen? b. Who could work with you?

10. Close your eyes and imagine Curaçao as you most want it to be in a generation from now. What is it like? What do you see and hear?

When asked, people had beautiful dreams for their island.

People hoped to 'see a change' as well. All sorts of changes were mentioned as being vital for the continuing well-being of the island, from lowering crime levels to shutting down the oil refinery on the island. Even though people's first reaction was to point to the government, a lot of people were searching for ways to 'start with themselves' as well:

> "Changes should be taken every time and everywhere and Curacao is not an exception. My role in making these changes I think should start at me and myself. By doing my job, I can be a good person, and by being a good person and employee I can make my colleagues happy. As we say that badness is contagious, good things can also be contagious."

Becoming used to appreciative and hopeful ways of talking

The participating youngsters, who can be thought of as co-researchers rather than respondents, voice how much they have learned from participating

in this project in the group sessions and in reflection reports. They indicate that they have improved their organizing, social and cooperative skills, but most of all that the conversations with their fellow countrymen inspired them and made them see Curacao 'through the eyes of others'. Especially the conversations with people that are not originally from Curacao enabled them to see Curacao from a different angle and made them proud on their island:

> "I have learned that we should be proud of what we have as a country and on our island itself. We have what a lot of people want in their country for example the beached, the beautiful buildings in the city and the weather. I have also learned to view things from a different and positive angle, instead of always criticizing what is bad. Give credit to our people and give them a chance, trust and believe that the *Yu di Korsou* can do it."

Several youngsters mention that they have learned that Curaçao and its people are more united than they thought beforehand. It seems that by having an Appreciative Interview with someone with a different background, the young interviewers not only developed a connection with the person they interviewed, but also developed a different view on immigrants on their island. One girl mentioned that before participating in this project she thought 'you were

Poster from the workshops

either that side or the other side', whilst now she thought there were a lot of similarities between different groups on the island. They were surprised to find that immigrants had the same dreams for Curaçao, but also that people they considered as *Yu di Korsou* had a different background:

> "What I learned is that Yu di Korsou [people from Curaçao] come in all shapes and sizes and with all types of backgrounds. I would never have guessed that this girl's ancestors were born somewhere other than here. And I think it is something we should all think about. There is no such thing as a 100% Yu di Korsou. We all have different backgrounds and instead of letting it divide us, we should let it unite us."

5. Lessons learned from the field

Even though, this case shows that AI can be a valuable approach for community development and can help to come to new ways of talking, we still have a lot to learn about how to organize AI processes that truly facilitate non subject-object ways of relating. I will therefore pay considerable attention to some of the lessons learned from the field.

What is positive?

Appreciative Inquiry is often equated with 'the positive' (Bushe, 2010). A mistake easily made when one merely looks at the term *Appreciative* Inquiry itself. In the field I had to deal with expectations about the positive focus of AI and decide how I would encourage the participants to have a positive conversation. Most of the literature on AI fails to address the issue of negativity. There is hardly any mention of how an AI practitioner can decide what is positive and more importantly, whether it is necessary or even desirable for him or her to do so.

Dreams for Curaçao

"I see youngsters and the youth in nice clothes. Not with the low pants that is fashion now. I see they talk nice to each other. I see they treat each other with respect. I see they have great opportunities for studying here, like in other countries. And I see they are proud of themselves, without thinking they are worth less because they are black."

"I hear blue water slapping against the mega pier, a lot of tourists, nice fresh and clean air. Our infrastructure, streets, full of tourists, but they walk safe and tranquil because the people tend to them without swindling. A Curaçao that is cleaner and beautiful and where everyone is working."

"The Youth in Curaçao taking the lead in transforming this island into a service orientated industry, making Curaçao an environmentally friendly place. Curaçao being the world's first ecological green country."

Recently, there have been several authors who have taken issue with the increased tendency to equate AI with 'the positive' (Boje, 2010; Bushe, 2007, 2010; Fitzgerald, Oliver & Hoxey, 2010). They rightfully point out that the majority of AI practitioners somehow values the positive principle above the other principles of AI (see Cooperrider & Shrivasta, 1987).

Van der Haar and Hosking (2004) stress that what is considered 'positive' is locally constructed. Consequently, there can be no general understanding of the positive. As I found on Curaçao, the locality of positive constructions differs; there were significant differences in the constructions of the positive on Curaçao itself as well. Cooperrider's notion of 'heliotropic' human systems proves helpful in this context; just as plants move in the direction of sunlight, human systems grow in the direction of positive images of the future. However, he does not provide us with a definition of the positive, besides stressing the contextual nature of human systems. Complemented with the work of Van der Haar and Hosking (2004) one can argue that you cannot know beforehand what a certain community will construct as positive, as an AI practitioner you should therefore be careful not to intervene or impose your own ideas of the positive on others if you wish to avoid constructing subject-object ways of relating. However, focusing on appreciation and possibilities, whatever they are, does give people energy and helps them to move to these same constructions. In the field we solved this by stressing that there was 'no wrong answer', a slogan that was repeated throughout the project.

An emergent design

As was mentioned in paragraph 2, a local/emergent design in the understanding of Alvesson and Deetz (2000), wherein research concepts gain their meaning in an interaction between researcher and the researched was used in this study. In this project the distinction between researcher and researched was less pronounced; rather, the participating youngsters and perhaps even the interviewees can be thought of as co-researchers (Gergen, 2009). Working with an emergent design is perhaps one of the most important aspects of successfully working with this type of change work. Working without a pre-set design enables the researcher to work together with the community and promotes the construction of non subject-object ways of relating (Hosking, 2006). The conceptual system of the researcher is not thought of as 'better' than that of the researched (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). However, working with such a design not only requires a shift in thinking on the part of the researcher and the researched, it also asks a lot of the researcher personally. In my experience it is difficult to switch to a radically emergent design. As a researcher or practitioner you are no

longer able to 'control' the process and need to work with what you have at a particular moment. In my view, it is helpful to accept that it is inherent to this type of change to only know what has worked afterwards. Working with an emergent design is furthermore thwarted by the requirements of third parties, such as sponsors or the university in this case. This does not necessarily have to be problem; it can be quite a helpful tool to structure your thoughts, as long as you are able to deviate from the proposal and leave space for the emerging process.

De-centring self?

Before leaving for Curaçao, I wondered whether I was the right person to initiate a change process on the island as an outsider. My supervisor dismissed my concerns by saying it was not about me, I would have to team up with local people and with that 'de-centre' myself. However, even though the researcher is 'de-centred' by working with co-researchers, the person of the researcher and his or her acts and decisions have an important influence on the process. Precisely because the researcher should no longer be the 'centre' of the research project in order to create non subject-object ways of relating, the researcher should act in a way that facilitates such a process. This is hard work indeed and it is helpful to reflect upon your own role during the process, where possible with the help of others.

I can not help but wonder whether my efforts to 'become like a local' by living in a guest family, learning the language and trying to adapt to the local way of going on and my own love for the island and trust in its inhabitants significantly affected the process. In my view, it can only be helpful to learn the language (literally or metaphorically) and learn about the people you want to work with by living among them and listening to them. I do not think the key lies in 'becoming a local', but being open-minded and truly listening to the people you work with in order to put yourself in their place, are in my view prerequisites for a project to become 'successful'.

Constructing non subject-object processes

All three of the previously described lessons had to do with constructing processes that facilitate non subject-object ways of relating. The construction of such ways of relating is perhaps what 'distances' approaches to development and change rooted in a social and relational constructionist thought style from more traditional change theories. A shift in thinking from 'power over' to 'power to' (Hosking, 2006), may well be a decisive factor in facilitating change. For as Hosking notes: 'there is no resistance without force' (Hosking, 2006: 61).

But how can you help to facilitate non subject-object ways of relating as a researcher or AI

practitioner? From the literature I learned that:

> 'Non subject-object ways of relating can be constructed in processes that treat multiple realities as different but equal.' (Hosking, 2006: 62).

How to translate this to day-to-day activities in the field? From the quote above, I deduced the need for the project to be cooperative. However, this has seemed to bring me to a standstill at first; I was so concerned with not imposing my own ideas or reality on others, that I did not dare to initiate anything myself. By trial and error, I found that it worked best if we each contributed in our own, different way: I knew about Appreciative Inquiry, whereas the people I worked with knew about their own island and brought other qualities with them. In retrospect, this led me to be overly eager to concede to suggestions of others, which resulted for example in a (too) lengthy set of questions. I also had to deal with the expectations of others of the role of a researcher. For moving to non subject-object ways of relating not only entails a shift in thinking on the part of the researcher, but on the part of the researched as well.

The difficulty with 'non subject-object ways of relating' lies in the fact that is at the same time a rather big and abstract notion as something that takes shape in even the smallest of acts in the field. To construct change processes that facilitate non subject-object ways of relating, you almost have to 'live' it. This is difficult indeed and we still have a lot to learn about how this can be done. Here, we can cautiously conclude that trying to integrate this view in every act or decision in the field, for instance when we told the young interviewers that 'there is no wrong answer' or by leaving space to design the project together, helps to diminish resistance and invites people to be actively involved.

6. Conclusion

Overall, it seems the Appreciative Inquiry process opened up new vocabularies and ways of talking about Curaçao and the future of the island. This quote from a young interviewer illustrates this nicely:

> "Especially with role models, we are used to hear Churandy Martina [a famous sprinter from Curaçao], but now there were people who had people from their environment as role models, for instance friends or people from the Scouting. I thought that really beautiful. It means we are doing well in certain areas, that we do not have to look far from home, but that we can appreciate indoors. That is not something you normally hear. Normally nobody is good and nobody can do anything is the mentality. And that it was now nevertheless good, I thought that was really special."

The 'nobody is good and nobody can do anything' mentality this girl

describes resembles the mentality that was sketched in the literature about the island. Somehow this mentality was set aside, at least for the duration of the conversations, and people did appreciate and value the people around them. Even though we still have a lot to learn about how to organize such change processes, relational constructionism and Appreciative Inquiry prove to be valuable approaches to development and change in the context of Curaçao and are promising for other contexts as well.

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