

Learning Societies unConference 2016: The Desert Gathering

Co-hosted by: Shikshantar Andolan · Gandhi Vidhya Mandir · Swashikshan Association of Indian Homeschoolers · Vikalp Sangam · Multiversity Network · Swaraj University · Abhivyakti Media · CoEvolve · Banyan Tree · Moved by Love · Startup Oasis · Digital Empowerment Foundation

An Invitation to the Desert Gathering

With immense joy and enthusiasm, we invite you to participate in the 9th Learning Societies unConference 2016. The next unConference will take place from December 14 - 19, 2016 at Gandhi Vidya Mandir, Sardarshahr, Churu (Near Bikaner), Rajasthan. It will be hosted in Hindi, English and regional languages. Participants are requested to **join for the entire duration** of the unConference so as to explore, express and nourish our creative energies together. However, those who can come for only one day are encouraged to attend the open house on December 17th. This intergenerational gathering will bring together leading "thinker-doers" from around South Asia who are active in challenging the monopoly of factory-schooling and monoculture, and nurturing diverse learning communities, vernacular traditions, intercultural dialogues, deep consciousness and swaraj.

In an unConference, the participants co-create the agenda together around what matters deeply to them. We believe each participant is a resource person, even children. We believe in sharing our stories, talents and gifts from our hearts. There will be a lot of open space for participants to self-organize in groups around questions, experiences, experiments, workshops, play, music, dance, sports, cooking food, treks, art, etc., in the spirit of deep dialogue and friendship. *The gathering seeks to engage the heart, hands, head and home, all of our senses and sensibilities, in a process of re-imagining our lifestyles and systems.*

There will be alternative educators, organic farmers, artists, artisans, activists, designers, ecologists and nature lovers, filmmakers, healers, social entrepreneurs, homeschoolers, unschoolers, barefoot innovators, grandparents, youth, spiritual seekers, and more. As with all learning societies events, the unConference welcomes families, youth and children.

We hope to build upon the reflection, dialogue and co-motion that have been initiated in the Learning Societies network already. There will be a lot of space in the unConference to explore radical ideas, proposals and projects. This is a fantastic opportunity to really think (and DO!) outside the box. Most importantly, the central purpose of this gathering is to build strong friendships and critical connections across

the country. Previous unConferences have been held in Pune, Himachal Pradesh, Udaipur, Mumbai, Brazil, Jordan, Pakistan and Iran.



Visions of LSuC

The LSuC is a self-organizing gathering of diverse minds and hearts working in various sectors, so there isn't one single vision statement though there are many common threads. Here are some voices from past participants expressing their vision of what LSuC is:

"A place where intersecting communities meet and experience each other; where the 'other' is more like myself than the people I meet elsewhere, so I have a glimmering of what 'oneness' is all about, and an opening towards infinite possibilities." -- Urmila Samson

"The gathering is to challenge and walk out from the grips of modernity." -- Jinan

"A confluence of people who want to bring a change in their lives and around them to create a new world. In other words, a group committed to making space for human evolution." -- Shammi Nanda

"An incredible gathering of creative and soulful families and friends who are reclaiming control over their own learning processes and lives. Many of these are exploring homeschooling, unschooling and other forms of self-designed learning." -- Vidhi Jain

"I see the Learning Societies gathering as a group of people who are taking bold decisions and concrete steps to create a future that is more beautiful, alive for themselves, their families, for mother earth : one with healthier livelihoods and vibrant communities enjoying diversity. We are discovering the truth of who we are beyond all our identities, stories and emotions... what are healthy relationships and what is Love. This is a space to co-create this future in the present." -- Kiran Gulrajani

"To allow unbound self expression for co-creating possibilities and breakthroughs... a space for people to connect to their inner strength and potential; namely by self reflection, abundance of friendship and Love as a dynamic cohesive learning community"
-- Kishor Jagirdar

"A space for people to share and explore radical ideas and visions of education, with people who are not official "education experts", and to meet more people looking for how to move from a schooling society to a learning society, where diverse communities and learning ecosystems can be supported and nurtured"
-- Manish Jain

Some of Our Past (and Continuing) Explorations

Some exciting inquiries and explorations have emerged over the past 14 years, such as:

- What kinds of unlearning and uplearning experiments are significant and necessary for the times we live in? How can we decolonize ourselves?
- What new models and processes around community living and community learning are we exploring? What are challenges with it?
- How do we bring more contemplation, compassion, creativity and courage into our life and work?
- How do we regenerate learning ecosystems and a sense of the commons of each of our diverse communities?
- How do we connect learning with healthy food, community media, zero waste, local economy, cultural creativity, and other essential aspects of harmonious living?
- How do we engage with traditional knowledge systems?
- What harm has factory schooling done to us? How do we heal ourselves from this harm, individually and collectively?
- What can we do in our own lives and work to challenge the Education and Development systems which are violent, exploitative and dehumanizing?
- How can we recognize diverse forms of power, resistance, regeneration, and engage and strengthen them?
- What are the ways to deepen and expand intercultural dialogue, trust and gift culture?
- What kinds of support structures can we create for ourselves and one another to live and learn in more healthy and happy ways?'

You are invited to bring your burning (and not so burning) questions from your life and work to the gathering to explore with the community.

The Venue

Gandhi Vidya Mandir (GVM) is nestled like an oasis in the Thar desert, near the town of Sardarshahr in India's north-western state of Rajasthan. It is about 300 km west of Delhi, 125 km east of Bikaner and 230 km north of Jaipur (well connected by rail and road).

GVM was founded in 1950, inspired by Vinoba Bhave, on one of the harshest terrains in India. The sprawling 1200 acres university campus is now a verdant oasis in the lap of an intense desert. It is dotted by large parks, gardens, playgrounds, auditoria, cultural and spiritual centres. The rich cultural and spiritual heritage of India and propagation of Gandhian ideals of Ahimsa, Sarvodaya and Universal Humanity are given due importance in its curricular programmes. GVM is host to Jeevan Vidhya and many other important social experiments.

Food and Accommodation

There are well-planned hostel rooms for 1000 co-creators to live together for 5 days in the spirit of community living. There will be local hotels also available for those who require them (at your own additional personal cost). We are negotiating for a group discount with them and will send you details as soon as you register.

There will be simple vegetarian food available, with vegan options. We are trying our best to source as much organic food as possible. There will also be some common kitchen facilities for those interested in group cooking.

Registration Details

Please register online before November 30, 2016.

The unconference runs on the principle of gift culture. We want to ensure that everyone who is interested in participating can join us for this event. The suggested contribution is Rs.4000 per person for the event which covers set-up accommodation and meals. You can pay what you feel is appropriate for your situation. If possible, you are invited to sponsor someone else's participation. **No one will be turned away due to lack of funds.**

This is a family-friendly event. We would like to create a safe environment for co-creators of all ages. For this reason, we would like to keep this gathering drug-free and alcohol-free. Those who are not able to adhere to this request will be asked to leave.

While making travel and stay bookings, please note that we will be starting at 11:00am on 14th December and concluding by 4.00pm on 19th December. There is an exciting learning journey (optional) planned on 20th December which will involve visiting inspiring people and projects in Bikaner city.

After you register online, you will receive a mail inviting you to join our Facebook Group on this link.



Frequently Asked Questions

1. Do I have to be present throughout the event?

The unConference process is very different from a normal conference. It takes time to really get into these deeper relationships to emerge with the connections we form here. We strongly request you to come for all the 6 days, to receive and give real value to it. If you can come only for a day or two, we suggest the 17th December.

2. I don't have money to travel to / participate in LSuC. Is there any support available?

The LSuC does not take funding from corporations, international donor agencies or foundations. It is an event that is self-financed by the people attending it. At the same time, it is very critical for us that this does not become an elitist event. So we have a gift culture model wherein the participants pay what they can, and those who can, are invited to help cover the costs for those who can't. If you need financial support, please write to us on lsunconference@gmail.com, share what is your situation, why is it important for you to come here, what amount of financial support are you looking for. We will consider the requests on a case by case basis and will get back to you.

3. What is unique about an unConference?

An unConference is based on processes like Open Space Technology, in which individuals and groups self organize through following their hearts and sharing their passions, offering conversations and participating in sessions that matter to them. An unConference is co-created by the participants. If people come with the intention of being fully present, self organization and co-creation happens naturally, organically, seamlessly.

4. What is gift culture?

Gift culture is an invitation to discover the beauty of giving and receiving spontaneously and without conditions, unlike transacting with money. Gift culture encourages us to experiment in creative ways of relating, offering and receiving the natural gifts that we have, which are immeasurable. An authentic gifting experience dissolves the separation between the giver and the receiver, because in giving, we are simultaneously receiving as well. An example of gift culture could be a random act of kindness, bringing food to share, paying it forward, and sponsoring someone's participation in the LSuC ;)

5. Can I offer something that I am passionate about at the LSuC?

Yes. That is the whole idea. You can offer your gifts (like healing techniques), share your skills (music, art, storytelling, web design) or experiences (your projects), host a conversation on something you're passionate about, feel free, the space is yours.

6. Where can I read more about earlier LSuCs?

You can visit Shikshantar's website to review the previous learning societies books which contain over 60 essays from around the world. You can also see films and photographs on our facebook page or the website.

7. How can I offer something at the LSuC?

All sessions are offered in the spirit of invitation to participate. The scenario is like that of a mela, offering exciting opportunities for learning/sharing. You may even announce your offering online, in the pre-conference dialog once you register. Each morning, special time is allocated to announce the offerings for the day, so that people can create their own learning experience. You can excite people about your session at that time. You can even make charts or something creative to tell people about your offering.

8. Can I contribute to this event in ways other than money?

Sure! You can share resources, like a vehicle to transport people between Delhi, Jaipur, Bikaner and the venue, your time at the registration or information desk, help organize meal times more smoothly. Share the idea of gift culture to encourage people to contribute. Spread word about this unConference, on social networks and to friends and family you think would be interested. Please contact us and let's make things happen!

9. What should I bring with me?

Woolens, sleeping bag or blanket, towel, toiletries, water bottle, bedsheet, walking shoes, slippers, mosquito repellent, torch, musical instruments and sports equipment, stationary, and books, films and other resources you would like to share with others.

Contact Us

If you have any questions, please write to us at lsunconference@gmail.com or call Shikshantar (Udaipur): Harsh: +919958311401, Vidhi: +919829724189.

We look forward to welcoming you at the 9th Learning Societies unConference 2016!