



# People, potential & the powers of place

What is the transformative potential when people and place are hosted with intention? A journey with the land, relationships and practices of Axladitsa-Avatakia: powers of place as partner to *Living Wholeness*.

By Vanessa Reid

*“Kalimera. This is “good morning” in Greek. Sarah, myself and the land welcome you. We believe that everyone who comes to Axladitsa has been here before. So it is good to see you all again.”*

This was my first introduction to being hosted, in a very conscious way, by both people and the land. I was one of forty new arrivals to this 24-acre olive farm, having travelled from all corners of the globe to Axladitsa to participate in the annual gathering of the Berkana Exchange. Axladitsa was the newest member of this “trans-local” learning network of people and organizations. All I knew was that it was hosted by Maria Scordialos and Sarah Whiteley, that they were co-creators of the Art of Hosting (see

sidebar), a set of practices embraced in this network, and had just recently moved to Axladitsa from their home in the UK.

Very quickly, I began to notice Maria and Sarah’s very poetic language and skillfulness in “hosting” and an almost mythical story of being in relationship with this piece of land. There seemed to be many layers of story, wisdom and intelligence that the forty of us living and working together for 10 days began to access. And

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always, always, our activities, conversations, working sessions and celebrations included the land as a full participant, an active listener, and generous container.

“After all, ” Maria and Sarah would often say, “it is the land that is hosting *us*....”

# Axladitsa Avatakia

Perched on the craggy slopes of an ancient crossroad by the Aegean Sea, Axladitsa-Avatakia translates literally as “little pear tree” and “place where it is difficult to pass.” Walking the land is to meet a wild ecology of herbs, flowers, dense woodlands, fruit and olive trees, the sounds and smells of life. It offers many points of view, from the crevasse of the low-lying riverbed called the “rema” to the physical structures higher up—the house, the outdoor kitchen, the circular meeting place called the Sky Space, and the entrance gate at the top of the land.

Since 2006, Axladitsa has become a home to Maria and Sarah, an active olive farm producing organic olive oil after years of dormancy; a place of renewal and retreat for friends and family, of sabbaticals and internships for learners of all types, a place of sharing and celebration for local and “translocal” friends, farmers, and an intentional gathering space for collective learning with people from around the world.

Axladitsa is inspiring a unique kind of *parea*, the Greek word for company, a sense of belonging, or more precisely, what happens when you are in good company. At a more subtle level, Maria and Sarah together with the land are creating a container for a kind of collective remembering of what it means to be in intimate and integrated relationship with oneself, with others, and our natural environment.

For many people who have not yet been to Axladitsa in person, it is a place that holds the promise of intimacy and depth; it is a symbol of the transformative element in their own lives and places.



# The alchemy of *living wholeness* & the powers of place

What is unique about Axladitsa and the way that Maria and Sarah are living and working is the whole notion of “hosting” as a pattern and practice of how to hold, understand, and release “the powers of place.” Just as *parea* is what happens in good company, the powers of place is what happens when the potential held in physical or natural places meets with the potential of people or groups. In this sense, the “powers of place” is the transformative element that is nurtured and catalysed when land and people meet in a very specific way.

This alchemy is born of great skillfulness and intention, coupled with an immense respect for the unknown and the mysteries, masteries, and artistry that are accessible when we are in a community of learners in communion with the land. It was not until I came back to Axladitsa again and again that I realized how we were part of an evolving set of practices of living wholeness being generated each time people came to host with, and be hosted in, this way.

What is the container that allows these processes, this potential to unfold? How can we translate the experience of people and place witnessing and holding each other’s growth and evolution into words, practices, learning, and then into further wisdom and actions? Is there a practice of “the powers of place?”

This article explores the elements, practices, and processes in this alchemy. We will journey through the lens of Invitation, Participation, Learning, and Transformative Action and put what has emerged through the relationship between people and the land of Axladitsa in the context of what Maria and Sarah call Living Wholeness. “Wholeness is a structure ... lying at such a deep level, that we cannot easily describe it,” writes architect Christopher Alexander, “...the point-by-point description will not capture it.”

Stories, then, will just have to do.

## THE ART OF HOSTING

The Art of Hosting Meaningful Conversations weaves together a set of practices that consciously create, open, and “hold” the space to find and work with the individual and collective potential that is always present.<sup>1</sup> These practices invite a way of speaking, sharing, and exploring from the whole person (all aspects of the individual, the authentic self) into the collective (the dynamic or energetic of the whole group). Hosting is based on the assumption that human systems are living systems and therefore have innate intelligences that can evolve and be accessed in different ways and through collective practices such as Circle, Open Space Technology, World Cafe, and Appreciative Inquiry. The assumption is that a group that consciously learns and evolves together works skillfully with the unknown, with potential, with emergence and self-organizing, and cultivates the ability to have conversations that really matter that, in turn, lead to transformative actions.

### KEY PRINCIPLES

Hosting is a practice of “being human together and meeting in our humanity”; its core elements are invitation, participation, learning, and transformative action that allow us to become conscious learners, in a community of learners. A “hosting team” supports a group to collectively move toward new meaning and wise actions by working with emergence, holding chaos and order. In this sense, hosting is distinct from process facilitation in the way it integrates both a personal practice of hosting oneself as a learner and the shared responsibility of being in service to the whole.

### THE POWER OF SELF-ORGANIZING:

“whoever comes are the right people, it begins when it begins, it ends when it ends, what happens is what was supposed to happen; the law of 2 feet invites us to move when we need to so we are always a learner, a contributor, a full participant”.

Sarah and Maria have been sharing and evolving their hosting practice since 2001, the year they founded their business, Hara, which means joy in Greek and centre in Asian philosophy. They guide and inspire organisations and communities to practice a more human, authentic, life-giving way of working and being together. Sarah and Maria’s hosting builds safe ground for groups to fundamentally shift the way they learn, to trust their own wisdom and capacities to engage with complex issues and move forward in meaningful ways.

# *An.* Invitation

## A Call of the Land

We sit together by candlelight in the outdoor kitchen, eating fasolada (a Greek vegetable and bean soup) and listening to the story of how Maria and Sarah and the land came into each other's care. It seems like the age-old story of destinies meeting... but in retrospect, I begin to understand how their process has been one of holding a strong intention, and consciously evolving and integrating the hosting principles of invitation, participation, learning, and transformative action more and more deeply into every aspect of their lives.

“To take both ourselves and our hosting practice to another level, we felt we needed a deeper relationship with ‘place,’ says Sarah. “What if we put our energy into the same place time after time; what would that yield? What would we learn if we were in the kind of location where we were grounding our hosting practice daily? This was a core inspiration for coming to Axladitsa.”

On a trip to Greece, Maria's homeland, in 2006, a series of conversations and a web of personal relationships led them to Axladitsa. “The land,” they say, “found us.”

“We sensed we had an invitation from the land that came through Vassilis Karavias, the previous owner, who was an old family friend. He was the human connection who spoke the land's invitation. In es-

sence, he was entrusting a lineage to us. We were all part of a lineage of trusted relationships passed down through the generations,” notes Maria.

Listening and responding to this invitation from Axladitsa was part of the larger picture of their life's work, or what they refer to as “the call.” Maria and Sarah believe that having a call and evolving with it is a core life practice of allowing the needs of the world to be felt within the personal experience so that what applies to the individual is reflective of the wider whole. By coming into guardianship of Axladitsa, Sarah and Maria were manifesting a purpose and intention they had held for more than 10 years: to invite nature and humans into a deeper learning relationship, as a collective practice of intentional evolution.

The land responded to their call with a call of its own; it, too, was ready to invite, participate, learn, and act.

## Guardians

From the moment Maria and Sarah committed to the purchase of Axladitsa, they sent an invitation to their circle of friends and colleagues to become a Guardian of the land, to awaken that aspect of themselves that might want to step into being a protector, and to be in a circle where land and humans are awakening each other.

Guardianship and stewardship are ancient relationships and practices of mutual respect and they offer us a profound re-orientation of “land ownership” toward collective response-ability.



In essence, Maria and Sarah were calling in a collective learning field through a process of hosting and meeting which reflected the DNA of Axladitsa's learning principles of invitation, participation, learning, and transformative action. It also includes the weave of the personal, interpersonal, collective, and land.

“Every gathering that has been on the land, as well as the Guardian's calls, have always had some moments, some learnings or key insights that were lighting the next step for Axladitsa,” says Ria Baeck, an Axladitsa Guardian.

The Guardians Circle is like a river's flow, and embodies self-organizing principles. Guardians come in and out of the circle, and so are part of some moments of transformation and not part of others, they rejoin or disengage depending on the level of connection between their purpose and that of Axladitsa's. Different hosting styles, working groups, finance models, and ways of making decisions are similarly in a flow of evolution and discernment through the evolution that takes place through meeting as Guardians.

This concept and practice holds meaning on many levels. The Guardians Circle allows people from all over the world to have different levels and ranges of connection to a specific area of the earth and to each other. The style of hosting in Guardianship accepts many levels of care, presence, belongingness, and levels of engagement. It includes people visiting and living on the land for periods of time, as well as those who have never been. Guardianship includes financial and emotional support as well as physical participation on the land.

Through these different ranges of contact with and care for the land itself, Guardians are evolving and applying a skillset and consciousness for Axladitsa that ignites something very personal: a new relationship to and the potential of guardianship with their own home places. Practicing Guardianship also connects them to a larger field of consciously held places: “My role as a Guardian is to create a meaningful place with the same intention as Axladitsa and bring that into the world,” says Guardian Rowan Simonsen.

## I AM GUARDIANING . . .

~quotes from Guardians calls

- ☞ a guardianing of the deeper relationship with the planet;
- ☞ a place of inquiry into how we re-source our relationship with the Earth for the greater whole;
- ☞ a dojo to practice the new before it goes out into the world;
- ☞ an intention about a way of living in the world; it is guardianship of the patterns of wholeness;
- ☞ of a different sense of time, the kairos place, where wisdom lies;
- ☞ at a more international level; my future guardianship will be global.

## LIVING THE LIVING SYSTEM

“The way you (Maria and Sarah) are living is an example of what could be for more people. There is something about the way you are that opens people up so that they go beyond their difference and instead of competing, they learn to live together. You are a seedling—and you also tend the quality of the soil.”

Panayotis Gaitanas,  
neighbour, friend, local farmer.

“It was like time stood still and I dropped into a far more profound relationship with the natural world than I’ve ever experienced. I stopped and listened and looked in a way that I have never done before ...”

Carla Kimball,  
Guardian, after her sabbatical on the land.

“It’s such an interesting piece of land because it asks people to do a certain kind of depth of work ... it requires people to listen both to themselves and the land. ...The way they hold the relationship with the land, and their intentions for holding their relationship with the local community and the local work .... It’s part of a translocal community; it’s a place that’s both local but it’s connected very much into the global web.”

Teresa Posokony,  
Guardian.



# Participation

## The Land as Host

Anita and her daughter Sakhi offer a small statue of Durga, a Hindu Goddess, to Axladitsa as a sacred gift of the divine feminine from their homeland, India. They suggest an Open Space session during the Berkana gathering: whoever would like to come with them to walk the land and find the right place to put her is welcome. For four days, they offer the walk and a small group forms around this intention. The land has not yet revealed Durga's new home. Slowly, slowly, the land opens to receive our gifts ...

It is spring 2007 and the Berkana Exchange is the first large-scale gathering hosted at Axladitsa. The diversity of people opened the space for a very translocal sharing of gifts and hosting traditions from different cultures, as well as a beautiful mutuality between land and people. It enlarged and deepened the hosting field at Axladitsa by cultivating the tending and listening qualities between people and land.

Berkana was the first of many "groups" or networks such as the Pioneers of Change, the Butterfly Connection, and the Art of Hosting Stewards who have come to learn on and with the land. As a network of people connected meaningfully to their own local places and whose everyday practices sustain people and the planet, coming together here opened nascent pathways between people and place in a much larger

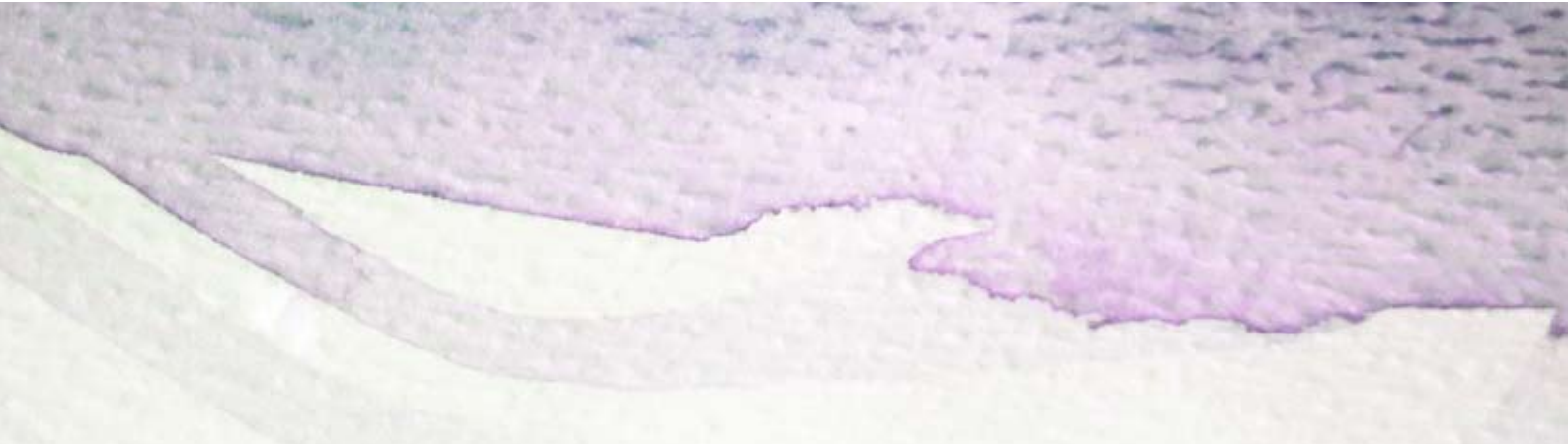
scale. Significantly, two of Berkana's learning centers, Kufunda Village in Zimbabwe and The Shire in Nova Scotia, also live the pattern of Art of Hosting as an operating model in their everyday lives—holding similar intentions for cultivating daily practices of collectively sustaining and listening to life.

Furthermore, the collective acknowledgment that the land was hosting us deepened the collective learning field. There was very tangible relationship between the evolution in our group and how the land held, hosted, and helped us. It "held its ground" during great moments of tension, uncertainty, chaos, and misunderstandings as we moved through difficult questions around power and inclusion both in our group and in those systems in which we live and work. It helped us shift our energy into breakthroughs, into a space of collective evolution.

The land, it seemed, accepted and stepped into a role as host, to create a container with and for us to hold the emergence of new insights, relationships, and next steps.

### **The evolution of hosting & preparing the ground for the next level**

At this first large gathering, the land showed it was ready to receive and host many people. The large number of people catalysed the need for new infrastructure: finishing the outdoor kitchen, a foundation for the Sky Space; preparing the camping area for more accom-



modations. Using local materials and hiring local workmen like Panayotis, who was to become a great friend and Guardian, ignited new relationships with the local community. They were literally preparing the ground for the next level of learning and hosting. The “Gathering after the Gathering” emerged, a time to slow down and continue learning and digesting with those who have stayed on ... harvesting the learning, planting the learning into the soil for the next stage ...

Maria and Sarah’s questions about the land and the trees, their determination to revive the olive grove to produce organic oil, to learn the ways and the language of the land, that invites Panayotis to share knowledge passed down through the generations. It seems so natural to him, and it is a lifeline for them.

# Learning

## The Olive Harvest

Panayotis has a special presence this November as we gather for the “Art of Hosting Harvest Gathering and the Conscious Kitchen” during the olive harvest. His English has improved since the Berkana gathering; he is ebullient and welcoming and seems part of the family. Panayotis is our teacher. He knows every tree, reads the bark, the weather, the movement of insects, our faces. At 30 years old, he is wise - of this land. But it is

The question we gather around this time is an emerging element of the Art of Hosting itself: What are we starting to notice about the practice of hosting with the land? There is a special quality to the invitation and hosting of this gathering: the olive trees invited us and Panayotis is one of our hosts. His observations about the nature of things bring an honesty and authenticity that leave no room for getting lost in words. And the land has opened itself, responding to the care it is being shown. Its capacity to provide has been reawakened.

“As we ground and deepen our hosting practice here on the land, we can speak from experience about living in living systems; it’s very different when you are in location and in place. As we come into deeper relationship with place, the field of possibility and what can be accessed becomes more available,” says Sarah.

As our conversations weave through our physical work harvesting olives, we begin to notice the emergence of a new organizing pattern around hosting with land and ‘place.’

## When Land Becomes *Place*

- ✧ **Living the practice of hosting in everyday life attunes skills such as listening to land and hosting oneself.** “Everything becomes a moment of consciousness: Where do you build, cultivate, what tree needs to come down? By asking the land, ‘Can we cut around the trees here?’ you hear the land speaking to you. The land responds,” says Maria.
- ✧ **Bringing the local traditions into the hosting field re-activates the guardianship between places held with intention.** Creating a hosting field that invites and integrates local people, culture, and wisdom links local places to themselves in a profound way, by being witnessed by others. It also opens the circulation pathways between places that are consciously held: Axladitsa (Greece), the King’s Mill (Belgium), the Shire (Nova Scotia), Kufunda Village (Zimbabwe), and Hazelwood (UK).
- ✧ **Living the pattern of living systems is a practice of Living Wholeness.** “... Living wholeness is not just tending to the land and being aware of the consequences of your actions. There’s also this point of being aware that life is evolving, that evolution is happening. This continuous learning on every area of life is important ... [And] this continuous collective learning is also an awareness that evolution is going on and that we are not just a part of it, but whatever we do is shaping where it’s going,” offers Ria Baeck, a Guardian.
- ✧ **Land becomes “place” when we create new meaning with and from the land.** This transformation happens when land becomes infused with a new sense of meaning from those being hosted by it and when the modality of hosting includes being in community as a living system. In this way, we connect to the land in such a way that we can hear its call, sense its wisdom, or relate to ourselves as part of it. When our response to its call transforms or deepens our initial intentions or understandings, we become aware that land has offered itself as a teacher, a conscious entity with whom we are in relationship. When this shift in awareness occurs, we relate to the land as place.

This comes from hosting as a living system; it is a next level of hosting conversations that matter in place. **It is the Art of Hosting Meaning in Place.**



## New practices

we walk down to the Rema,  
to the lowest point on the land,  
shaded by Poplar who whispers wind,  
a language rooted in water.

we gather by the Well  
for a meditation  
to the still point of our deeper source  
traveling the wisdom stories of this soil,  
with the ancients of Greece  
archetypes, metaphor, divine feminine, source

dissolving, losing form  
we meet again at the river below the river  
mystery clarity  
oneness

that night under the milklight of the moon,  
there is food, and laughter and the telling of jokes.  
universal, this communion of souls  
the Star, the Devil and High Priestess join in.

The invisible world is very present at Axladitsa. Accessing or sourcing intelligence from this realm is an essential element to the practices of Living Wholeness that have emerged as people and place meeting with intention. Living Wholeness practices include the Art of Protection, Collective Sourcing,

the Subtle Arts, the Conscious Kitchen, Immersion Learning, and Application in the World. They have been born from living as a living system, and from asking:

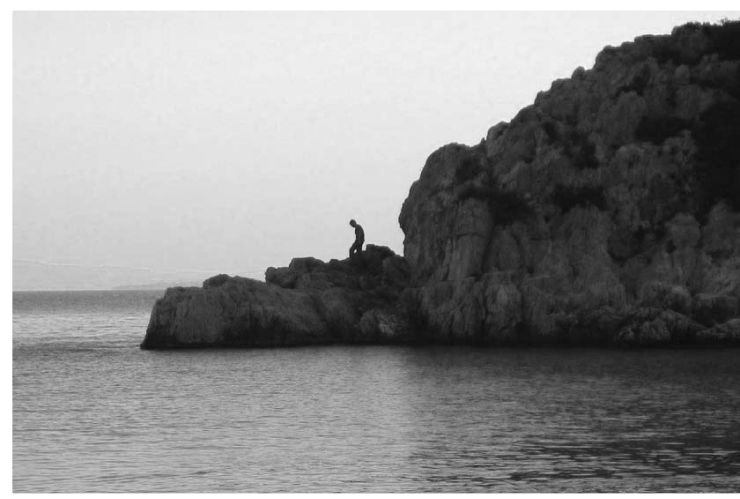
“How do we access the intelligence within and underneath the land and ourselves to source deeper wisdom, make it visible, and take wise actions toward our collective evolution?”

This question invites us to practice being in relationship with the invisible, and to learn to make this wisdom visible. As Sufi mystic Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee asks: “How can we speak about sustainability without speaking of the Sustainer?”<sup>1</sup> In other words, there are many different forms of existence, beings, knowledge, and consciousness available to us, as well as what some refer to as the unifying force or collective field from which we all come from and go back to. They are waiting to be invited to share their best, in service to collective evolution.

Living Wholeness, then, is a way of being systemic. It is living, collaborating and learning with the wisdom of the whole.

“We become more intelligent when the living-systems perspective becomes an embodied practice,” says Maria. “When you release the power of place, you immediately understand resilience and resourcefulness; you acclimatize and adapt yourself to what is needed and how you need to respond to any given condition.”

<sup>1</sup> Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, *Spiritual Ecology*.



What emerges from sourcing intelligence from the “river below the river,” this deeper flow of wisdom, is a set of five qualities that underlie the practices. Becoming intelligent is connected to becoming more **resourceful** with what we have. **Remembering** an integrated relationship between people and place leads to a deeper sense of **belonging**, and a stronger sense of accountability and **responsibility**. **Resilience** is our ability to respond (response-ability), which is an essential skill for navigating an increasingly complex and uncertain world.

A second crucial aspect of becoming more intelligent is mastering intuition to work with different levels of chaos, not-knowing and unmanifested potential. This includes hosting not only conversations but *the quality of the conversations*, ones that are capable of making visible and tangible what is not yet seen, and creating transformative actions. Different qualities of chaos produce new order of actions; how this chaos is held and then transformed into tangible knowledge and concrete actions is the alchemy of the powers of place.

*“Most of the time  
the rema is dry and there  
is a channel that runs beneath it.  
There is a river below the river; the rema  
captures it and is the concrete reality of that.  
There is a river underneath it. What is on  
the surface is an expression of what is below  
it. We have a far more expansive ability to  
be with each other and ourselves  
and the planet when we  
tap into this.”*

Carla Kimball, Guardian.

## LIVING WHOLENESS PRACTICES

### COLLECTIVE SOURCING:

Collective sourcing was initiated by Maria and Sarah right from the beginning when they invited in a circle of Guardians to sense together the natural way forward. One particular Guardian, Ria Baeck, was in a similar practice and together with Judy Marshall, Maria, and Sarah, they became a collective inquiry team inviting others to explore with them. Essentially, sourcing is the practice of connecting three core aspects: 1) the deepest levels of unmanifest potential, the space of not knowing; 2) the manifest level of daily life; and 3) highest possible intention, often framed as a question. Collective sourcing is best applied in situations where complexity is present and where innovation is needed as it is a practice that allows us to collectively encounter not knowing as an ally to accessing new levels of information that create new realities.

### ART OF PROTECTION

The Art of Protection is a co-creation born in response to the cry of the trees two years earlier, in 2007, when fires set intentionally in Greece devastated and terrorized one-third of its forests and habitats. Maria and Sarah called out for protection. A Guardian, Bob Ziegler, responded by saying he, too, has been inquiring into protection through the Shambhala Buddhist tradition. A small group of five Guardians formed (Yitzhak Mendelsohn, Anita Paalvast, Bob, Maria, and Sarah) and began to inquire into the symbiosis of their respective disciplines blending together aikido, living systems, clinical psychology, Sun Tzu's Art of War, and the art of hosting to look at how to work with disturbance and conflict generatively.

### THE CONSCIOUS KITCHEN:

The conscious kitchen is an experiment and inquiry into wholesome and sustainable living through the window of our kitchens. This was inspired by Vanessa Reid, who brought the inquiry to Axalditsa in 2007 and was co-evolved by Filiz Telek, another Guardian, Maria, and Sarah. This practice includes how we grow, purchase, prepare, compost, and serve our food with consciousness, passion, and alignment with natural cycles. This invites us to explore "what is good for our bodies is good for the Earth" and serves as an act of reclaiming the kitchen as a space of community, co-creation, and innovation.

### THE SUBTLE ARTS:

Sarah and Maria have long held a knowing that besides the clear "top-side-world" view of life that works with the tangible and visible, there is another more subtle level running in parallel. This subtle level asks for subtle ways of engagement, not the usual way of defined language and intellect. Instead the subtle arts of dreamtime, listening to nature, body wisdom, metaphor, story, holding space and silence give access to this level where so much more information can be obtained and applied. Using these practices in a variety of ways is how Axalditsa's unfoldment has been held by Maria and Sarah.

### IMMERSION LEARNING:

The Axalditsa Immersion is a form of learning that cultivates new collective capacities that strengthen the possibility of shifting the system as a whole. This was initiated by Maria and Sarah in 2009, inspired by an increased awareness that new patterns of learning is needed to respond to the increased complexity in our world. Systemic learning calls us to be curious together, to bring our gifts to contribute, to sit in the not-knowing until collective clarity rises. It is a learning that awakens our wisdom to discover and act from our next level of humanity. Immersion learning links the powers of place, the work of living wholeness, the art of meaningful conversation, and the practice of collective inquiry to inspire a new form of learning that includes the individual and collective levels as well as the visible and invisible realms.

### APPLICATION IN THE WORLD

What is learned and practiced at Axalditsa has strengthened Sarah and Maria's ability to respond and it is being applied to the increasingly complex work of shifting human systems and consciousness in organizations, systemic-level projects, and communities in different parts of the world. Transporting what works at Axalditsa locally, regionally, and translocally is an act of scaling up both in terms of moving from micro to macro levels as well as entering into more complexity so that we create new systems of influence. With this, we will spread *parea* across all communities and infuse all places and beings with a sense of collective community and being.



# Transformative action

## Releasing the Powers of Place: an evolutionary path

Once people comes into intentional relationship with place and place comes into relationship with people through the container of hosting with the visible and the invisible, evolution takes place on different levels. It shows up in tangible form through a collective learning stream that includes the practices we've explored here:

Hosting life as a living system; inviting in the local; collectively inquiring and learning; co-creating new practices in response to the land; connecting to the translocal through Guardianship and applying what has been learned to other contexts; practicing as a community of practitioners; creating meaning with land such that it becomes place; harvesting learning and bringing it forward to host a next level of inquiry; living with and tending to people and place and the potential that is waiting to manifest ...

The elements of invitation, participation, and learning create a navigation or map that cultivates the conditions to move collectively toward transformative action. Here is when the powers of place become tangible. It is when our deepened relationship with source or place catalyzes its application in the world. The resulting actions have an inherent intelligence that comes from deep learning. They are in service to evolution, to the collective, and they are aligned with the natural. In this sense, they are transformative.

**A practice of the powers of place, then, is one in which the alchemy between people, place, and potential produced through the container of hosting makes tangible the transformative element that produces a new quality of action.**

From this, we can see an emerging pattern or curriculum for a practice of releasing the powers of place. This includes:

### **Conscious relationship with Land**

The first stage is a conscious and intentional relationship between a physical or natural place and the people who are stewarding the place. This is a **mutual** stewarding or Guardianship where people are in service to the land, and the land is in service to them. One protects the other and calls out an authentic relationship through cultivating a deep level of trust and presence.

### **Working with and sourcing potential**

The second stage is the ability to source and release the potential inherent in place and people. When the potential held in places meets with the potential of people or groups, the land becomes a teacher and a guide that can lead us to access deeper levels of information and knowledge, aligned with the natural flow of life. The land helps us to source or access levels of unmanifested potential and it offers us a physical place in which to ground this and bring it into the visible, into form or structure.

### **Transforming the invisible into form, structure and action**

The third stage is to transform what has been sourced from the invisible into the visible and then to apply it in the world. Hosting practice is a “container” that helps the potential or the intelligence that is sourced to come into tangible form, to manifest and to move, in its own timing, to wise and transformative actions. Our actions, then, come from a humanity that is in harmony with—and not disconnected from—the natural.

## Applying Collectively, Working Systemically

There is a sense of home and belonging that I find hard to describe when I am at Axladitsa, and it remains deep inside me when I leave. The land is rough, lush, determined, and abundant; the olive trees speak of having been abused and neglected, and now we see they are being tended back to life. They speak a truth on our behalf and help me remember parts of myself, my lineage, my calling, and certainly my own damaged connection with the wild. We, too, need to be tended and witnessed back to life. If my own journey is a fractal, an essential piece of the whole, how do we journey together?

Living Wholeness offers a framework for integrating living systems beyond theory and concept and into living practice. It is a framework for being systemic at every level: with ourselves, in our work and communities, and especially in relationship to all of life.

In the last two years, Axladitsa’s Immersion Learning programmes have been creating a container for a kind of collective remembering of what it means to be in intimate and integrated relationship with oneself, with others, and our natural environment. This

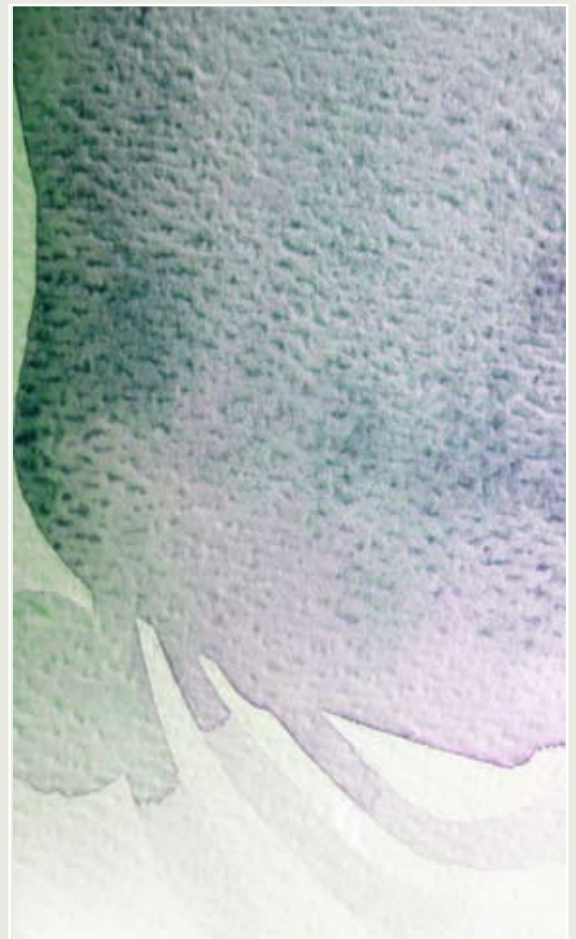
relationship allows us to live life with what we can see as well as with what we sense is there but is not yet visible.

This particular kind of learning cultivates new collective capacities that can shift systems as a whole—that reframes “capacity development” as skillfulness to work systemically— with ourselves as one of the systems. More and more, we are seeing through networks like the Berkana Exchange and larger, more institutional systems like the WWF-UK<sup>2</sup> that there is a strong pull to do systemic work, to shift small and large systems, and create more alignment with life.

Living Wholeness is now making its way out from its place of inspiration, Axladitsa, into the world to work with systemic social innovation and creating social fields. These fields are spaces that invite and weave the visible and invisible, individual and collective to access collective intelligence, create learning ecologies for systemic innovation, and move us toward collective, transformative action. There is a kind of collective numinosity in this kind of relationship between people, places, and things seen and unseen. It is the alchemy of the powers of place, in new places that include our institutions and cities.

How can what is practiced at Axladitsa be a catalyst for newness in our world - wherever we are? 🐦

<sup>2</sup> The World Wildlife Fund-UK and the Hara Practice Collaborative are partnering on systemic transformation work.




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Vanessa Reid wrote his article over the span of a year as part of Axladitsa-Avatakia’s ongoing action research into the practices, qualities and pathways of Living Wholeness. Maria Scordialos and Sarah Whiteley imagined and catalyzed this project, opening their lives and home to inquire with others, in partnership with the land. The team of intrepid action researchers includes Sharon Moreham, Richard Moreham, Vanessa Reid and Yitzhak Mendelsohn ~ and all those visible and invisible creatures who are participating in this inquiry with us.

[WWW.AXLADITSA.ORG](http://WWW.AXLADITSA.ORG)

Axladitsa-Avatakia is a steward of the Powers of Place Initiative, funded by the Fetzer Institute to gather, organize and make visible knowledge, people, organizations and places already working in ways that demonstrate the power of such partnerships and to share what they know with others.

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Even after all this time  
The sun never says to the earth,  
“You owe me.”  
Look what happens  
with a little love like that.  
It lights up the whole sky.

Hafiz