



# Curaçao, our nation

*An Appreciative Inquiry on the future of Curaçao*

Joeri Kabalt

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Utrecht School of Governance

Utrecht University

*Author*

Joeri Kabalt

Student number: 3065642

Stroomstraat 35, 3513 VM Utrecht, The Netherlands

joerikabalt@gmail.com

*Supervisors*

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Dian Marie Hosking

Second Reader: Prof. Dr. Arjen Boin

*Cover*

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## **Abstract**

This study examines 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 the new autonomous status. People were said to have a lack of an own identity, a lack of self-respect and a passive and indifferent attitude towards the future of the island. In this study I worked with an Appreciative Inquiry approach 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. A cooperative project was organised in the field, wherein fifty youngsters from Curaçao entered into conversations with their fellow inhabitants about the strengths and future of Curaçao. In this thesis I give an in-depth description of the Appreciative Inquiry process. This case study shows that Appreciative Inquiry can be a valuable method for community development. People reacted to the invitation to engage in a positive conversation about Curaçao and participating in this project has handed people new hopeful and appreciative vocabularies and ways of talking about their island and themselves. A vocabulary wherein deficits, blaming and helplessness have given way to feelings of trust, hope, helpfulness and connectedness.



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## Chapter I: Beginnings of a journey

*Den Kunuku di bo mente:*

*Rosa rabia.*

*Planta pas.*

*No laga duele bieu*

*Sklavisábo di nobo.*

*In the garden of your soul:*

*Weed out rage,*

*So as to sow peace.*

*Let not woes of old*

*Enslave you anew.*

- Nydia Ecury

For my master thesis, I went on a journey, both literally and metaphorically, during which I learned about different aspects of Curaçao together with others. For I have not embarked on this journey alone; I was just one of the many travellers. This journey is ongoing and therefore I ask you, as a reader, to pack your bags, bring your own personality and experience with you and join me and my fellow travellers. Let me start with my motivations for embarking on this journey in the first place.

### 1.1 Travelling to Curaçao

The journey partly started with my warm feelings for the island Curaçao. “*Why Curaçao?*”, people kept asking me, both in the Netherlands and on Curaçao itself. Why indeed? It is hard to explain, but I answered them as best as I could by saying: “*I simply fell in love with the island when I was doing research here two years ago.*” Upon learning that my grandparents have lived on the island for over twenty years and my mother was born there as well, most people on Curaçao began to smile knowingly. Apparently there is some force that binds people to the island. Somehow the spell was upon me too, because of my family’s history with Curaçao. However different our backgrounds, this simple fact made me part of some sort of ‘conspiracy’ and people seemed to acknowledge me in a different way.

Apart from my family history and its effects on my affection for Curaçao, my experiences during a research project on Curaçao in 2009 formed the main motive for going back to the island. 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 island Curaçao, which is the biggest island of the Dutch Caribbean with around 140.000 inhabitants, has been part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for almost 400 years. In 1954 the island gained political autonomy together with the other Dutch Caribbean islands within the country the Netherlands Antilles. The symbolic date of 10 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 as a country 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 has actually brought and will bring for Curaçao. What does the ordinary 'man on the street' on Curaçao notice of these constitutional changes? In 2009 this question was asked by a team of 20 young researchers, including myself, to over 150 people on Curaçao with different backgrounds (Boessenkool et al. (eds.), 2009). We talked to politicians, bureaucrats, teachers, doctors, entrepreneurs, but also with people we met on the street or at a *snèk*<sup>1</sup>. Even though Curaçao was not yet an autonomous country in the Kingdom and it was therefore impossible to 'measure' the effects of the change, we could ask people what they expected of the restructuring.

**A mentality change?** One of the main conclusions was that somehow the word 'mentality change' was mentioned in almost every conversation. The story of the 'mentality change' went something like this: if the island were to profit from the chances offered by the new political structure, it is necessary for the people of Curaçao to change their mentality. They should be active instead of passive and have faith in the future, instead of distrust the past. If this can be achieved, a better future can be realised. This 'passive' mentality was mainly attributed to the history of slavery and oppression on the island. An 88-year old priest mentioned: "*In the slavery period the human being was nothing*"<sup>2</sup> and "*during the colonial era the human being was not capable of anything*."<sup>3</sup> So in other words, "*First you are nothing, then you can do nothing*"<sup>4</sup>. Other people we spoke to had enough of the constant references to the slavery period and criticized their fellow countrymen for "*being stuck in the slavery period*."<sup>5</sup> Either way, most people described the mentality of the people of Curaçao as 'passive', 'submissive' and 'resigned'. Some sort of mentality change was needed through 'realization'<sup>6</sup> of the people.

The opinions differed on whether this process had already started because of the constitutional restructuring. While one person mentioned that: "*People are not interested in something like a restructuring of the Antilles, because they want bread, a house and work first*."<sup>7</sup>, someone else said about the constitutional process and the referendum<sup>8</sup> about the constitutional structure in particular: "*The normal people are finally thinking and deciding for themselves, there is now more important than just bread on the table*."<sup>9</sup> This story about a mentality change seemed to buzz around the whole island. The only thing that seemed to change were the principle characters of this story; depending on the person you were talking to, either the politicians, the rich, the poor, the teachers, the old or the young and so on should change their mentality. For example the people in the *barios*<sup>10</sup> accused the politicians of a lack of interest in them; "*During the election time the politicians come into the barios to win votes and then you do not see them again for the next four years*."<sup>11</sup> Whilst politicians and government officials mainly thought the people in the *barios* showed a lack of initiative and failed to take their lives into their own hands. When we asked people how this mentality change was to be achieved, a lot of people vested their hopes in the younger generation. The youngsters are not yet completely formed and still enthusiastic and could

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<sup>1</sup> Bar or snackbar in Papiamentu.

<sup>2</sup> "In de tijd van de slavernij wás de mens niks."

<sup>3</sup> "Tijdens het koloniale tijdperk kón de mens niks."

<sup>4</sup> "Eerst bèn je niks, daarna kún je niks."

<sup>5</sup> "in de slavenperiode zijn blijven hangen."

<sup>6</sup> In Dutch 'bewustwording'

<sup>7</sup> "Mensen zijn niet geïnteresseerd in zoiets als een herstructurering; ze willen eerst brood, een huis en werk."

<sup>8</sup> In May 2009 a referendum was held on the package of agreements between the Netherlands and Curaçao, which is known as the 'si' and 'no' referendum. This referendum caused an extensive debate on Curaçao. The 'si' camp narrowly won with 52% of the votes.

<sup>9</sup> "... dat het gewone volk eindelijk is gaan nadenken en gaat beslissen voor zichzelf. Er is meer belangrijk dan alleen brood op tafel"

<sup>10</sup> Neighbourhoods in Papiamentu

<sup>11</sup> "Tijdens de verkiezingen komen de politici de wijk in om stemmen te winnen, daarna komen ze vier jaar lang niet in de wijk."

possibly bring the positive energy that is needed. Remarkably, feelings of scepticism and hope about the future of the island were interwoven throughout the entire population. The constitutional restructuring had most of all a 'symbolic' value; it was seen as a 'recognition' and 'liberation'. The artificial and forced structure of the Netherlands Antilles, stemming from the colonial period finally ceased to exist (Kabalt & Martens, 2009; Boessenkool et al. (eds.), 2009: 103-118, 163 -167; Sluis, 2004).

**You are a human!** Even though participating in this research project was an unforgettable experience, something did not feel quite right to me. Was this all? We pointed out to people that there were certain stories in society and pointed vaguely to the new generation of young people as the solution for the future. In the months following the research project, the words of the old priest mentioned earlier, Amado Römer, kept coming back to me. He had tried for over sixty years to encourage people to think for themselves and take their own responsibilities, but most of all remind them that they are 'human beings'. He was convinced that the people of Curaçao had the Dutch people, or in his words "*blond hair and blue eyes*"<sup>12</sup> as example. Because people were constantly reminded that they were 'no good', they tried to copy the Dutch and have therefore no own identity. He was convinced that the complicated history of the island has caused people to have no self-respect. According to him this can be seen in the indifferent and passive attitude people have towards for instance politics, because they think they are not able to do anything to change or influence it. He has tried to let people realise that they are 'human' and therefore should think for themselves and explore their own possibilities and value. He wanted to give people chances and make them aware of their own responsibility to act and take matters into their own hands. He was furthermore convinced that people should be motivated from within and not from some external force and demonstrated this to us with a ballpoint pen on a table while sitting in his garden; "*A force from the outside gives them a push and then they stand still again, people should start rolling from themselves.*" He was struggling with a way to let people see for themselves how valuable they are, without forcing this image on them. His words inspired me to continue with our research project in one way or another; this time with a more action oriented focus. How could I help to come to a changed mentality? Or in other words, what was needed to make people 'roll' from themselves? Was it even possible to help with that without being another 'external force'?

This priest is not the only one who talks about the effects of history on the mentality of Curaçao, nor am I the only person that was inspired by him. Two books are published about his body of thought after his death in 2010 (Boessenkool & Swank, 2010; Marcha, 2011). Several other authors stress the importance of the history of Curaçao in shaping the identity and mentality of the people of Curaçao (Paula, 1967; Marcha & Verweel, 2000; Marcha & Verweel, 2003; Marcha & Verweel, 2009; Boessenkool et al. (eds.), 2009; Sluis, 2009). As Marcha and Verweel put it:

'[T]he effects of the slavery, and the acceptance of it, have become a part of the identity, because the self-image is deeply influenced by the colonial relations and oppression' (Marcha & Verweel, 2000: 109).

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<sup>12</sup> "Blond haar, blauwe ogen".

A number of supposed characteristics of this Curaçaoan mentality are seen as products of history, such as a passive attitude, a lack of an own identity, a lack of self-respect and feelings of shame, fear and uncertainty. However, where the people of Curaçao were literally oppressed a hundred years ago, nowadays they are said to 'oppress' themselves with their own mental barriers and are consequently still 'prisoners' of these earlier societal conditions (Marcha & Verweel, 2003: 122). As Freire (1970) argued, people in post-colonial societies can in this way become their own 'oppressor'. Even though Curaçao is a relatively small island, there is a minimum of shared beliefs or culture among the inhabitants, which is largely due to the island's colonial history and, partly as a result from that history, the diverse population of the island. Curaçao can be seen as an island inhabited by different 'groups' or even a fragmented population altogether. The different 'groups' are constructed through story-telling and enforced by the thinking in stereotypes (Marcha & Verweel, 2000: 100-107).

Marcha and Verweel (2000) use the metaphor of 'a house of glass' in this context; the European Dutchmen (*Makamba*), the *Yu di Kòrsou* and the *Makamba Pretu*<sup>13</sup> all live together in the same house. They can see each other through the glass, but they all go about their own business and it is extremely difficult to break through the glass. However, the authors do stress that the 'boundaries' between groups are constructed and not in any way 'objective'. The boundaries have been internalized by people, but seem open to re-interpretation, since it is possible for someone to change from one group to another. For example 'race' and 'colour' are not fixed, when a *Yu di Kòrsou* becomes rich, he will be 'whiter' in the eyes of others. The well-known Curaçaoan writer Boeli van Leeuwen writes in one of his novels about the racial reality on Curaçao that is quite different from the way in which race is perceived in other parts of the world. An anecdote in which a man from Curaçao wants to be admitted to a hotel for 'whites only' in the US and is refused because he is 'black' in the eyes of the hotel staff, illustrates this nicely (Van Leeuwen, 1959: 142-144). It is furthermore important to note in this context that these three groups: the *Makamba*, *Yu di Kòrsou* and *Makamba Pretu*, are constructed both as an academic and societal 'tool' to make sense of the population of Curaçao and do not correspond to a reality 'out there'. As Marcha and Verweel (2000) note themselves, there are over fifty-five different nationalities living on the island and the 'groups' could therefore be constructed differently or one could even stop thinking in terms of 'groups' altogether and see the population of Curaçao as 'fragmented' in the understanding of Martin (2002).

From my personal experiences and the literature on Curaçao, an image of a beautiful but complicated island emerged. An island where a lot of people are said to have a sense of 'helplessness', and feel unable to influence their future and that of their island. An island that seems to struggle with its (colonial) past and where people seemed sceptic in the least about the future of their island, whether it was an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands or not. How could I, as a scientist, work with this without imposing my own ideas and worldviews upon others?

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<sup>13</sup> 'Makamba' is used to refer to white Dutchmen on Curaçao. 'Yu di Kòrsou' are seen as the 'true' inhabitants of Curaçao, or the descendants of the slaves. The term 'Black Makamba' or in Papiamentu 'Makamba Pretu' is used to refer to *Yu di Kòrsou* who have mostly studied in the Netherlands and have adopted the ways of the Dutchmen.

## **1.2 Developing an interest in Approaches to Development and Change**

Around this time I started to learn more about approaches to development and change during a course that was offered in the Master programme. I am deliberately referring to these approaches in the plural, since there are a number of related but separate approaches that work with development and change. Most of these approaches are informed by a social constructionist or a relational constructionist thought style. A fragment from Hosking and McNamee (2006) illustrates such a thought style in a nicely:

'For us, social construction is not a theory that proposes particular techniques or methods for practice, but is more of a general orientation or thought style – a way of engaging with the world that centres on dialogue and multiplicity – an orientation that gives new meaning and value to ongoing and open dialogues.' (Hosking & McNamee, 2006: 23).

Social constructionism centres themes as language, dialogue, co-construction processes and multiple realities (Chia, 1996; Chia, 2003; Deetz, 2000; Gergen, 2009; Gergen & Thatchenkerry, 2006; Hosking & McNamee, 2006, Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004), which are major themes in this research project as well. From a social constructionist perspective, science can be thought of as having a different 'purpose' than more traditional or 'modernist' science:

'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).

**Possibilities for change.** A social constructionist thought style opens up new possibilities for change work and especially change work that emphasizes non subject-object ways of relating. Such a way of relating can be constructed in processes where there is space for a 'soft differentiation' (Hosking, 2006: 62) between people and things and '*that treat multiple different local realities as different but equal*' (Hosking, 2006: 62). Hosking (2004, 2006) sketches some exciting new possibilities for change that follow from a focus on relational constructionist processes and mentions seven themes that are characteristic of non subject-object change processes:

1. Knowing and influencing are left joined; all acts influence social construction processes, therefore '*All acts now are seen as the potential to change how processes 'go on' and the change agency is 'located' in ongoing processes and not in 'a change agent'.*' (Hosking, 2006: 64).

2. Multiple, equal voices; the processes search to embrace multiplicity instead of striving for consensus. Change workers try to construct processes of 'power to' instead of 'power over'.

3. Emphasise possibilities and positive values; in many approaches there is an explicit focus on 'the positive' (for example Appreciative Inquiry) or possibilities. This makes it possible to explore 'what could be', instead of stating that the world is full of problems and deficits.

4. 'Inquiry' and 'intervention' are left joined; inquiry and intervention are no longer storied as being separate activities. Rather, they are thought of as being simultaneous processes, in other words a

'both-and' approach is enabled. This also entails a shift in thinking in terms of an 'intervention' to a 'transformation'.

5. Careful questioning & careful listening; since all acts have the potential to change, questions can be thought of as being 'forming' as well. Considerable attention is therefore given to what sorts of questions are asked and how asking these questions can help to come to new possibilities.

6. Constructing in conceptual and non-conceptual performances; relations and realities are constructed in performances that include both conceptual language and other performances. As a result, change workers do not limit their attention to what is said, but also to for example how it was said.

7. A deep ecological approach now is warranted; *'When self and other are seen as co-constructed, care of other is constructed as care of the (moral) self.'* (Hosking, 2006: 66). The focus in change work shifts to the question how self and other can relate in ways that construct different but equal relations.

**An Appreciative Inquiry approach.** Even though different approaches emphasize different aspects of these themes, all the approaches to development and change that claim to be informed by a social constructionist or relational constructionist thought style work in some way or another with them. Examples of these approaches are Participative Action Research (Reason & Torbert, 2001), Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1997), re-storying approaches (Barry, 1997) and narrative approaches (Boje, 2001). Practices that are more loosely connected to scientific practice are for example Imagine Chicago ([www.imaginechicago.org](http://www.imaginechicago.org)) and Future Search ([www.futuresearch.net](http://www.futuresearch.net)). Because these approaches all work with the themes mentioned above, they have a lot in common and it is not always possible to strictly separate one from the other. In this project, I have decided to 'story' my approach as an Appreciative Inquiry project. Throughout the literature on transformative change work, Appreciative Inquiry was mentioned most often as a promising method and was amongst other things said to be *'an excellent means by which people can move toward the generation of new realities'* (Gergen, McNamee & Barrett, 2001: 706), *'being very effective in creating change'* (Gergen & Gergen, 2006: 115) and *'important for the emphasis it gives to dialoguing and for the space it gives to multiple local-cultural realities'* (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004: 14). Besides that, Appreciative Inquiry appealed to me personally, because it offered such a different conception of research; a conception, which would seemingly enable me to work with the themes I was interested in and could help me in my wish 'to make a difference' through scientific research.

Appreciative Inquiry was developed in the late 80's by David Cooperrider and his colleagues as an alternative to more traditionally oriented action research. As the name suggests, Appreciative Inquiry distances itself from traditional problem-solving methodologies by explicitly focusing on 'the positive'. The following summary of Appreciative Inquiry given by Gergen and Gergen (2006) gives an idea as to what Appreciative Inquiry could be:

'The goal of AI is to bring about organisational change through a radical alternative to problem-solving approaches. Rather than solving the organisation's problems, the AI consultant enables the organisation to articulate and activate its positive core values. The discovery of these values relies on personal narratives produced by members of the organisation. Frequently participants pair up to share a story about a time when they participated in an activity that brought success, joy, discovery or

increased coordination to the organisation. These stories are then collected and shared in increasingly larger meetings of the organisation. From these stories, positive themes are extracted, and participants then use these themes to generate designs for future of the organisation. Besides being very effective in creating change, the AI process is one that typically builds enthusiasm and commitment among the participants. With significant support from upper management, participants trust the process and become committed to the new programs and policies to be enacted.' (Gergen & Gergen, 2006: 115)

There is more to Appreciative Inquiry than the positive aspect alone, in fact some authors reproach their peers for reducing Appreciative Inquiry to 'the positive stuff' (Boje, 2010; Bushe, 2007, 2010a, 2010b; Fitzgerald, Oliver & Hoxey, 2010). From a relational constructionist point of view, Appreciative Inquiry can be said to be valuable because it gives space to multiple local-cultural realities. Instead of imposing one view of the world or a 'grand narrative' on others, AI helps to open up possibilities by accepting the existence of multiple local ways of understanding the world (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). Although Appreciative Inquiry was developed in Organisational Theory and the main focus is therefore still on organisations, Appreciative Inquiry has recently been practiced in various and differing contexts.

### **1.3 Trying to put Appreciative Inquiry to work on Curaçao**

I decided to stick with both my interest in Curaçao and approaches to development and change. How could I use these approaches, and Appreciative Inquiry specifically, in the context of Curaçao? The starting point for this research project was offered by the constitutional restructuring of the Netherlands Antilles and the fact that Curaçao has become an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Not so much the restructuring in itself or all the administrative processes that surround the restructuring, as its societal and even symbolic meaning. The new status of Curaçao as a 'fresh start'; a chance to 'start anew' and create a better future for the island. An opportunity to think about the future of the island: on what sort of island do the people of Curaçao want to live? The societal understanding of the new country does not have to be thought of as being separate from other stories in society, such as the story about the need for a mentality change: 'the' mentality of 'the' *Yu di Kòrsou* which is storied as being among other things 'passive' and lacking 'self-respect'. The people on Curaçao are said to act indifferent towards for instance politics and the future of their island, because they feel they do not have the power or means to influence either politics or the future. A first suggestion as to how to work with these stories was given by the old priest, Amado Römer. He stressed the need for people to realise their own possibilities, values and responsibilities and take matters into their own hands. In his opinion this could only happen if people were motivated from 'within' instead of from an external force. Approaches to development and change rooted in a social/relational constructionist thought style offer the possibility of such a process by creating non subject-object ways of relating; non subject-object processes of 'power to', instead of 'power over' can be constructed. These approaches are furthermore said to 'open up possibilities' and help to construct 'a positive future' together. The new *Pais Kòrsou* offers a context and motive for working with these stories.

**Research Question and Research Aims.** In this project I worked with a central research question to guide me through the entire project, which follows from the above:

**How can relational constructionist approaches to development and change help to come to changed ways of talking about the future of Curaçao?**

Since the present way of going on and seeing the future of Curaçao is constructed through story telling and 'talking', the proper 'site of disturbance' (Blanter & Anderson-Wallace, 2006) is in the ways people talk about the island and its future and their own role in contributing to this future (Gergen, McNamee & Barrett, 2001). Appreciative Inquiry can be thought of as being a collective story-telling effort through which new realities are constructed (Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987; Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008; Finegold & Holland, 2002; Gergen, McNamee & Barrett, 2001; Gergen, 2009; McNamee, 2006; Ludema, 2001; Van der Haar & Hosking, 2003; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). I have explicitly used 'relational constructionist approaches to development and change' instead of 'Appreciative Inquiry' in the research question. What distinguishes approaches to development and change embedded in a relational constructionist discourse with other change methodologies is the explicit focus on constructing non subject-object ways of relating. Appreciative Inquiry is a specific approach that offers the possibility of constructing non subject-object processes. However, it is impossible to equate AI with non subject-object ways of relating, since AI can be practised in such a way that it facilitates subject-object ways of relating. Therefore, I will stay close to an understanding of AI from a relational constructionist thought style. From the rather general research question follow some more specific research aims:

Try to construct non subject-object processes by using an Appreciative Inquiry approach and with that;

- 1) Help to open up new possibilities of being for the participants;
- 2) Help to come to changed ways of talking about (the future of) the island;
- 3) Help to come to changed ways of constructing 'self': release potentials and create a sense of agency.
- 4) Try to help people to help themselves and initiate a process that can continue without me.

I have tried to come to these research aims by putting approaches to development and change 'to work' by organizing an Appreciative Inquiry project on Curaçao. Obviously, I had some thoughts about whom to work with and where to start when I arrived on the island, but I did not decide upon a 'form' for the project, because the project was to be cooperative and should therefore emerge in relation with others and furthermore connect to the local-cultural realities on the island. During my first month I talked to a diverse set of people, both to get an understanding of the local cultures as well as try to come to an Appreciative Inquiry project. Together with We Lead, a newly founded local foundation for and from youngsters, I organised an Appreciative Inquiry project with a focus on Appreciative Interviewing. More than forty youngsters from Curaçao joined in the project and attended workshops. Each of them had conversations with five fellow

citizens about Curaçao. Questions such as ‘What are the things that work well on the island?’ and ‘Which changes would you most like to see on the island?’ were asked in these conversations.

**Project Relevance.** Why can this project be considered as a relevant and valuable research project? In my view this research project is both scientifically and socially relevant. First of all, this project aims at studying the working of a theoretical and philosophical stream of thought, Appreciative Inquiry, in a particular case. The results will therefore contribute to the understanding of the way these theories can be put to work in practice and can be seen as an extension of the existing literature on social/relational constructionism and appreciative inquiry. There seems to be a gap between the more theoretical and philosophical work on social/relational constructionism and Appreciative Inquiry, where a call for more experimenting with Appreciative Inquiry in practice is expressed and the (increasingly) widespread use of Appreciative Inquiry in so-called ‘non-scientific’ circles, by for instance consultancy firms. This research project will try to put these theories to work in a field of science where these theories have almost never been used before, namely the field of Public Administration and with that make a first attempt in filling the gap between the theoretical and philosophical stream of thought on the one hand and the use of AI in practice on the other hand. Since Appreciative Inquiry is steadily introduced in the public sector by consultancy firms, it is worth taking a look at this approach from a scientific point of view. By describing the research process in depth, other scholars in this field can assess the value this approach can bring for the field of Public Administration. Due to the complexity of the research themes and the explorative nature of this research project, a single case will be studied. In this way, the processes can be studied in depth. However, this does have implications for the generalization of the results of this study. Because of the focus on a single case, it is not possible to simply generalise the findings. This does not imply that the results of this study will not be interesting for other scholars. By describing a single case in depth, context-dependent knowledge will be produced that enhances the understanding of complex processes, in this case both the complex culture and society of Curaçao as the working of the theories of social constructionism, dialogue and appreciative inquiry in practice (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Furthermore, by using so-called ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) it is possible for the reader to translate the findings to other situations.

Besides a scientific relevancy, this research project is socially relevant in a number of ways. By trying to organise an Appreciative Inquiry project on Curaçao, I hope to contribute to the future of the island and the young country. The young interviewers will develop important personal skills by participating in the project, such as interview skills by attending a training session and conducting interviews with fellow countrymen and organising and cooperative skills by becoming co-researchers in this project and organise this project together with others. The young interviewers will furthermore learn about the dreams and stories of the people they will interview. Through these conversations special relationships will be established between the interviewers and the interviewees, across generations and cultures. By participating in this project, the young interviewers will become accustomed to more hopeful and appreciative ways of talking and thinking. The interviewees will be invited to share their personal stories and dreams for the island in the interviews and with that reflect upon their own experiences and dream up new possibilities of being for themselves and their island. This project will hopefully inspire people and serve as a first step towards a positive future for *Pais Kòrsou*. By teaming up with a

local organisation, I hope to organise a project that can continue without me and hope to contribute to a local initiative in this way.

#### **I.4 Where this journey might take us..**

I have given you some idea as to where we are headed. As for the rest of the journey, I will give you some indication of things we might encounter.

In **Chapter 2** you will find a theoretical exploration of the main theoretical themes used in this research project. We will first have a look at a social constructionist thought style. How is this thought style different from other social science perspectives? I prefer not to see social constructionism as something that 'is' in an absolute sense, but we will look at some assumptions that help to get an understanding of a social constructionist thought style. We will then turn to approaches of development and change, how can 'change' be understood and which analytical themes are important in this context? Lastly, we will explore Appreciative Inquiry more in depth as a specific approach to development and change.

In **Chapter 3** I will pay attention to the practicalities of the research project. The choices I made beforehand and along the road. This chapter can be compared to a more traditional 'methods' or 'design' chapter. In this chapter I will describe the choices I made regarding the interview techniques used in this research project, the case selection, the selection of respondents, the analysis of the data and the quality standards. These choices follow from the theory as described in Chapter 2 and this chapter can therefore be seen as a practical interpretation of the theories used in this research project.

In **Chapter 4** we will travel to Curaçao and follow me on my early weeks on the island where I tried to adjust to the local culture and rhythm. I will tell this story in an ethnographic way and revisit the conversations I had with people about the new *Pais Kòrsou* and the culture of the island. I noticed several recurring stories were told. In these early weeks I got involved in multiple initiatives. I explicitly tried to give myself some time to get used to the local ways of going on and meet people and from there on try to organise something like an Appreciative Inquiry project. These weeks were at the same time really interesting as well as full of doubts about my research project. Partly due to conversations with others, I got myself together again and moved along into a more focused direction and an actual Appreciative Inquiry project.

**Chapter 5** brings us to the more focused story of the Appreciative Inquiry project that eventually emerged: 'Curaçao, our nation' or 'Kòrsou, nos nashon'. From here on, the journey is a collective one. In collaboration with We Lead foundation, I organised an Appreciative Inquiry project with a focus on Appreciative Interviewing. A group of 44 youngsters from Curaçao interviewed five persons each about the future of the island and collectively identified patterns and stories. We will have a look at how such a project can be organised together with others, what happened during the actual interviews and what the interviewees thought of participating in this project.

In **Chapter 6** I will get back to my research question and research aims and try to get an understanding of what happened in the process. Which lessons can be drawn from the project? I will reflect upon what happened in the field with the literature on social constructionism, approaches to development and change and Appreciative Inquiry. Do my experiences correspond with the literature or do they differ on certain aspects? What did I learn from doing this sort of research and what can others learn from this project?



## Chapter 2: Theoretical Explorations

In this chapter you will find a theoretical exploration of the main theoretical themes used in this research project. Before I went to Curaçao, I journeyed through the literature and read about social and relational constructionism, approaches to development and change rooted in such a thought style and Appreciative Inquiry as a specific approach to development and change. In paragraph 2.1 I will first pay some attention to social constructionism as a thought style, from which I will move to approaches to development and change in paragraph 2.2. In paragraph 2.3 I will describe Appreciative Inquiry. I will end this chapter with some concluding thoughts on how the theories from this chapter fit in the rest of the research project in paragraph 2.4. In this chapter I will mainly stick to a discussion of the relevant literature in the field and provide you with an overview of the theory, without necessarily taking my own stand. In Chapter 3 I will subsequently translate the theory to my own research project.

### 2.1 Social Constructionism

A social science perspective can be seen as a 'thought style', a general orientation and way of engaging with the world. This perspective forms the basis of any research project and is therefore of the utmost importance, although one's perspective is not always explicitly acknowledged. A social science perspective is however not something that 'is', there is no complete theory with prefixed methods attached to it. Still, the social science perspective, in this case social constructionism, informs the activities of the researcher. I will devote considerable attention to my social science perspective here, firstly because it has a major influence on the rest of the research project and secondly because the perspective used here can be considered 'different' than mainstream perspectives. To describe some of the central premises of social constructionism, it is necessary to reflect upon the more 'traditional' views of science as well, since social constructionism partly emerged as a critique or alternative to these views. Before I turn to a social constructionist thought style, I will therefore look at different social science perspectives, using Alvesson and Deetz (2000).

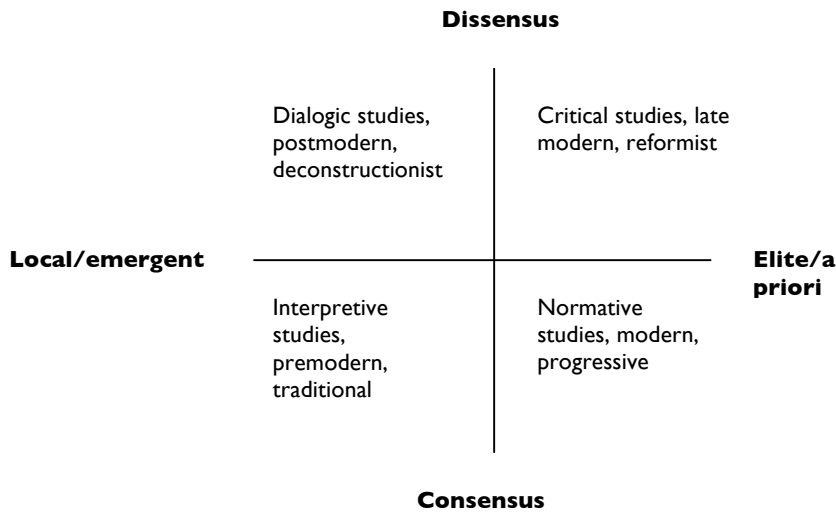
**Different social science perspectives.** In the last decades several streams of thought have emerged that take a different stance towards science and actively seek to distance them selves from the 'received view of science' (Wright, 2006). They are largely referred to as 'postmodern', even though this label is used for a number of streams, which have some central assumptions in common, but differ quite substantially on other aspects (Chia, 1996a; Gergen & Thatchenkerry, 2006; Gergen, 2009). Alvesson and Deetz (2000) introduce a framework to make sense of differing social science perspectives. To distinguish between these differing perspectives they use two contrasting dimensions: elite/a priori versus local/emergent and consensus versus dissensus. The first dimension draws attention to the way concepts arise during the research process. At the one extreme, elite/ a-priori, research concepts are formulated by the researcher and kept constant throughout the research project. In an often non-intentional way, the conceptual system of the researcher is considered 'better' than that of the everyday people involved in the research. Furthermore, researchers try to come to general understandings by seeking general knowledge. On the other extreme of the dimension, the local/emergent pole, researchers work with an open language system and are mainly interested in particular

and situated knowledge. The theoretical concepts gain their meaning in an interaction between the researcher and the researched in a specific context. This results in less lofty claims for 'understanding' a specific context instead of claiming to know the 'truth'.

The second dimension, consensus versus dissensus, should not be understood as 'agreement' and 'disagreement' but rather as '*presentation of unity or difference, the continuation or disruption of any prevailing discourse*' (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000: 25). Consensus can best be illustrated with the metaphor of the 'mirror': research descriptions hope to 'mirror' the external world in its relatively 'fixed' state and language is therefore treated as a system of representation. The focus is mainly on the 'normal' and the 'average'; deviance and random events are considered to be irrelevant for the bigger picture. Conflict and fragmentation are usually seen as 'problems' to be solved. The dissensus pole draws attention to research with radically different assumptions, where conflict, fragmentation and tensions are considered to be the natural state. In this case the metaphor is that of the 'lens': language is treated as constitutive of creating realities instead of merely describing them. The researcher is seen as positioned and active, instead of 'neutral'. As a consequence, the purpose of research shifts:

'For dissensus-style research, the generative capacity (the ability to challenge guiding assumptions, values and social practices and routines) of an observation is more important than representational validity' (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000: 27).

Together, these two poles form a grid that helps to understand differing research practices and points to the particular lines of assumptions and understanding of these practices (see figure 1). However, the authors stress that these four 'boxes' should not be considered as 'paradigms', but rather as discourses. Deetz (2000) gives three arguments to clarify this position: 1) Each of the discourses is filled with internal conflict and strife, 2) The edges of the discourses are not clearly demarcated, 3) The discourses are not sealed off from each other (Deetz, 2000: 136-137). To see the differing research practices as paradigms, would not do justice to these points and make the grid with the four research practices into something absolute, instead of a tool to help us understand differences in research practices. In this research project, a social constructionist thought style is practised, which can be placed in the 'box' where local/emergent and dissensus come together (see figure 1). Throughout this piece of research I mention both social and relational constructionism and a social and relational constructionist thought style. The term social constructionism has come to mean many different things. Relational constructionism is based upon a social constructionist thought style, but focuses explicitly on relational processes that co-construct multiple realities. In this research project, I draw on the ideas of both related streams of thought and use social constructionist theories that are closely related to relational constructionist ideas. Throughout the rest of the text, both *relational* and *social* constructionist ideas will be used alongside each other.



**Figure 1:** Differing Social Science Perspectives (taken from Alvesson & Deetz, 2000)

**Five assumptions of social constructionism.** As was mentioned earlier, I prefer to see social constructionism as a ‘thought style’ or a way of engaging with the world. I will therefore not simply state what social constructionism ‘is’; rather we will have a look at some assumptions that inform scientists that practice a social constructionist thought style, in order to get an understanding of what such a thought style could be. Gergen (2009) names five assumptions of social constructionism in his influential book ‘An invitation to social construction’. First of all, he states that ‘*The way in which we understand the world is not required by “what there is”*’ (Gergen, 2009: 5). With this assumption he suggests that there is not ‘one way’ things are, but that there is an endless number of possible descriptions and explanations. Unlike the more traditional scientific discourses, the social constructionist discourse does not ascribe to the notion of ‘reality’ as it is used in other discourses. There is not one fixed reality ‘out there’, since we are all engaged in ongoing processes of co-constructing local realities by interacting with others. Consequently, the notion of reality is replaced with that of multiple local realities. This has implications for what we regard as ‘true’ in a particular society. The possibility of a different construction of what is ‘good’ or ‘true’ is always present (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). However, it does not necessarily follow that we should abandon all our traditions, but it does imply that we see them as ‘optional’ instead of fixed (Gergen, 2009: 5).

Secondly, ‘*The ways in which we describe and explain the world are the outcomes of relationship*’ (Gergen, 2009: 6). In a social constructionist thought style the metaphor of language as a ‘mirror’ is replaced by that of language as a ‘lens’; language creates realities instead of merely describing them (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). This is what Heidegger called ‘the prisonhouse of language’. Since we cannot position ourselves outside language, it is impossible to merely describe reality (Chia, 1996a). In this context Gergen (2009) refers to Wittgenstein’s ‘language game’, wherein words gain their meaning through the requirements of the game. Wittgenstein has used the metaphor of the game to illustrate that words gain their meaning in a specific context with explicit or implicit rules; when they are taken out of this context they no longer make sense. From this it follows that the words we use to describe our world are dependent upon the rules we have made together in relationship with

each other. An example is the way we greet each other in the Western world by saying 'Hi, how are you?' The correct response would be to answer 'I'm fine, how are you?' people do not expect you to provide them with an honest answer about your problems or with a response that is altogether different such as 'my favourite colour is blue'. Scholars that practice a social constructionist thought style explicitly distance themselves from a constructivist position that focuses on individual sense making processes (Chia, 1996a; Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). Instead it centres relational processes of co-construction and co-ordination of activities among people (Hosking & McNamee, 2006).

Thirdly, there is the assumption that '*Constructions gain their significance from their social utility*' (Gergen, 2009: 9). Social constructions become valuable or 'true' because of their usefulness in a specific context. From the first assumption it follows that a particular statement is not necessarily more 'true' in an absolute sense than any other statement, because it does not correspond with reality 'out there'. However, certain statements are more 'true' than others in a particular context, because they have come to be considered as 'truth' in a particular setting according to conventions of groups. 'Truth' is therefore both a useful concept for ordering our lives and getting on with each other, as well as a dangerous concept when it is taken out of a particular context and taken to be 'universally true'. By doing that, we narrow down other possibilities of being and understandings of the world and with that marginalise these other understandings (Gergen, 2009). For example by claiming that one religion is 'better' than another or stating that there is one superior way of parenting to which all parents should subscribe (Frissen, 2009). A modernist discourse of science risks narrowing down possibilities of understanding the world as well, by claiming a monopoly on the 'truth' and claiming to produce superior knowledge (Chia, 1996a).

Fourthly, '*As we describe and explain, so do we fashion our future*' (Gergen, 2009: 11). The interactions in the here and now create our future. Consequently, a social constructionist thought style embraces the idea that the future can be changed if people are willing to let go of their traditional way of constructing the world and develop a new language to make sense of the world in a different way. Here Gergen points to the need for 'generative discourses' that both challenge existing assumptions, values and social practices and offer new possibilities for relating with each other (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Gergen, 2009). This has implications for thinking about science and research practices; scientific accounts can no longer be seen as a mere 'description'. While we are engaged in a research process, we also 'intervene' and contribute to the future. As Hosking and McNamee note:

'When all processes are viewed as ongoing, multiple and simultaneous joining of texts (actants) it becomes possible to view all relational processes as both inquiry and intervention, to view both 'inquiry' and 'intervention' as relational processes and reflexively to study them that way.' (Hosking & McNamee, 2007: 14).

Lastly, Gergen states that '*Reflection on our taken-for-granted worlds is vital to our future well-being*' (Gergen, 2009: 12). If we do want to fashion a different future, we need to critically assess the world we have constructed and take for granted. Only if we are willing to doubt these constructions that we have considered to be 'true' or

inevitable, we can come up with alternative ways of understanding the world. Gergen stresses the importance of questioning the obvious and allowing for alternative frames of reality and multiple perspectives. Social constructionism is therefore often concerned with 'collapsing boundaries' that we take for granted but can be constructed in different ways. For example the boundary between past, present and future and the boundary of an 'individual'. Where does one person stop and where does the other begin? Identity is a common theme in social constructionist accounts. A person is not thought to have 'one identity', but could be seen as having different 'selves', constructed in different relations (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004).

## **2.2 Approaches to Development and Change: some analytical themes**

As was mentioned in Chapter 1 (paragraph 1.2), there are a number of different approaches that work with change that are grounded in a social constructionist or relational constructionist thought style. In this paragraph we will explore some analytical themes that these approaches have in common and make use of the seven generic themes Hosking (2004, 2006) mentions (again see Chapter 1). Following Hosking (2006), we will have a look at these themes rather than talk about specific approaches and not 'fix' any particular approach 'as either this (e.g., S-O) or that (not S-O)' (Hosking, 2006: 64). However, before we turn to these themes, I will pay some attention to the concept of 'change'. From a relational constructionist perspective, change can be understood in a radically different way than from more traditional perspectives. Hosking (2006) names some of the possibilities that can arise when change is re-constructed from a relational constructionist point of view.

1. Both change and stability are ongoing. Traditionally, organisations and people are seen as being stable and singular entities. Change is the exception and is achieved through an 'intervention' of some sort. Or as Hosking notes:

'In this view, processes are reduced to input-outcome relations, within and between entities. In contrast, a relational narrative locates stability and change in relational processes and sees both in ongoing (re)production' (Hosking, 2006: 61).

2. Change as a construction process constructing multiple realities. From the above follows a shift from singular entities to processes and the way in which processes construct, reproduce and change realities; *'Patterned co-ordinations become both the 'unit of analysis' and 'the unit' of transformation.'* (Hosking, 2006: 61).

3. Change as power over and power to. More conventional approaches to change or to science in general construct, often unwittingly, subject-object relations. A 'knowing' researcher or consultant 'investigates' the 'unknowing' objects. The subject is positioned as the one who can 'bring change' or 'knows better', in other words as an expert. This is what is referred to as 'power over'. According to Hosking (2006) this is only one possible way of relating. Another possibility is to construct processes that give 'power to'. There is no longer one dominant voice or community; different local realities are treated as 'different but equal'.

4. There is no resistance without force. In traditional approaches to change, increasing attention is paid to the how of 'overcoming resistance'. Processes that attempt change and work with a subject-object way of relating, will often meet resistance from the people they treat or see as 'objects'. Change

workers continuously come up with a new content, but there is not a shift in the way of relating towards each other. Hosking argues that this is why change efforts seem to be variations on the same tune. A shift towards non subject-object processes and less 'force' could well minimise resistance.

This understanding of change already gives some hints as to the themes that are important in change work. In the introduction I introduced the seven 'generic themes' Hosking (2004, 2006) mentions: 1) Knowing and influencing are left joined, 2) Multiple, equal voices, 3) Emphasise possibilities and positive values, 4) 'Inquiry' and 'intervention' are left joined, 5) Careful questioning & careful listening, 6) Constructing in conceptual and non-conceptual performances and 7) A deep ecological approach now is warranted. Here I use a slightly different set of themes, based upon a review of the relevant literature: constructing non subject-object processes, opening up to multiple local constructions and realities, centring possibilities and appreciation and both inquiry and intervention.

**Constructing non subject-object processes.** The terms 'subject-object' and 'non subject-object' ways of relating have already been mentioned several times in this text. More conventional or traditional change processes are said to construct 'subject-object' ways of relating, while Hosking (2004, 2006) advocates the construction of 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/relational constructionist thought style from these more traditional change theories. In a more modernist or traditional scientific discourse, there is often talk of the scientist as an 'expert', distanced from the 'objects' he or she wants to 'investigate' (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004; Hosking & McNamee, 2007). The researcher is positioned as the one who 'knows' and the people he or she 'investigates' are the ones that are 'unknowing'. In a social constructionist way of thinking, the distinction between 'subject' and 'object' collapses. Instead, people become co-researchers who each bring their own background knowledge, experiences and qualities with them to the group. Working and thinking in terms of strict distinctions can be seen as central to a subject-object discourse. As Hosking (2006) notes:

'When people are treated as 'things' and assumed to be separate from other things there are implications for how relations are understood. The construction of sharply separated and bounded entities goes together with what some have called a 'subject-object' (S-O) discourse of relations [.]' (Hosking, 2006: 55).

An other characteristic is the construction of relations of an '*acting Subject and an acted upon Object*' (Hosking, 2006: 55). The Subject is thought of as the one who can 'influence' and 'make' social realities. The relationship is explained by referring to the assumed characteristics of both Subject and Object. Thinking of relations in terms of a subject-object relation is according to Hosking only one of the possible constructions. An alternative is the construction of non subject-object ways of relating:

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

In this context Hosking introduces the term 'soft differentiation', distinctions are no longer thought of as binary oppositions or as having fixed boundaries. Power relations become important in this line of thinking. A shift from subject-object ways of relating to non subject-object ways of relating can be seen as a shift from 'power over' to 'power to'.

'However, the present "critical" discourses indicate that attempts to overcome resistance through more "power over" Others will reproduce subject-object relations i.e., will reproduce the status quo rather than change it. Perhaps this is why change efforts are so often felt to be more of the same, even when the 'reality content' seems so different. I might add that, when one reality attempts to impose itself on another, resistance might well be the locally rational response. However, rather than emphasise knowledge (of how things really are) and rationality, the present (non main-stream) view directs attention to power relations, to subject-object relations as relations of 'power over', and to the possibility of non subject-object relations and 'power to'.' (Hosking, 2004: 13).

The discussion about subject-object and non subject-object ways of relating can be placed in a broader debate about the 'development' of communities. Should local communities with certain 'problems' be helped? And if so, by whom and in what way can this be done? In this debate the concept of 'self-help' is frequently used. This concept is based on the age-old Chinese saying: *'Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man how to fish and you feed him for a life time.'* Recently, non-governmental organisations all over the world are using the notion of self-help and see it as something worth striving for. However, Ellerman (2007) convincingly argues that there is necessarily a paradox when you strive to help people to achieve self-help, or in Ellerman's words *'the paradox of supplying help to self-help'* (Ellerman, 2007: 560). Moreover, this concept is used in different contexts and different meanings are given to it (Villadsen, 2007). One of these contexts is in the discourse of development aid, where communities are invited to develop themselves and organise themselves for a better future. In this context, words like 'participation' and 'empowerment' are frequently used. The aspiration for participation and empowerment is argued for a number of differing reasons. Some see it as an 'end' in itself, where people have the freedom to choose about their own lives and future, whereas others mainly see it as an instrument to increase the efficiency of development projects by using local funds and creating a sense of 'ownership' in the community (Berner & Phillips, 2005). The reasons for aspiring self-help are numerous and resonate within the discourse of development aid; more traditional forms of aid have not lived up to the expectations, governments have not been able to solve the problems in local communities and self-help furthermore stimulates the creativity and resourcefulness of 'the poor' themselves.

Saha (2009) distinguishes between two different discourses on self-help: a subject-object discourse and a relational constructionist discourse (based on Hosking's work). The first discourse is largely dominant, but is nevertheless the object of critique. Development workers mainly position themselves as 'experts' that are 'knowing'. This implies a hierarchical relationship between development worker and the community members, where the expertise of the development worker dominates the local knowledge of the community members. Freire (1970) also stresses the need to dissolve the distinction between the development worker as a 'teacher' on the one hand and the community members as 'students' on the other hand. Instead, both should be seen as teachers and students at the same time. In a subject-object discourse, the community is often seen as a static and homogeneous entity, without acknowledging the diversity in the community and the constructed nature of the community in the first place (Berner & Phillips, 2005). Botes and van Rensburg (2000) name a number of

factors that diminish the success of promoting self-help; the paternalistic attitude of development workers, the prescriptive role of the state, the focus on reporting successes in development aid, selective participation, the focus on 'hard' aspects of community development, gate-keeping of local elites, the pressure of direct results and a lack of interest to participate in the project. They suggest that development workers should change their attitude and way of working to one of humility and respect for local knowledge. Ellerman (2007) warns us for the risk of dependency between a community and a development organisation. If you actually want to achieve self-help, you should not only let people participate, but put them in the 'driver's seat' and see the world through the eyes of the community members. The relational constructionist discourse that Saha (2009) suggested offers an alternative way of working with the notion of self-help. This discourse stresses the need to move beyond a subject-object relationship and shift from thinking in individual capacities to what we can achieve together. Community members genuinely participate in the activities and a learning culture is established where the development worker or researcher and the community members can learn together. The ideas of Freire (1967) are part of this discourse as well. He continually stresses the need to shift from 'power over' and talking 'about' the community members to 'power to' and 'power with' and talking 'with' the community members.

**Opening up to multiple local constructions and realities.** It has already been mentioned several times that the focus on social construction processes is central to a social constructionist thought style. A more relationally oriented focus stresses how these constructions are 'relational realities' (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004: 4). Construction or more specific relational processes can be thought of as 'inter-action' that involves texts, actions, objects and artefacts (Hosking, 2006: 58). These relational processes are what 'make' different local realities. Important to note is that construction processes are in this view thought of as 'co-construction' (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004: 5) and not as individual sense-making processes (such as for example in a more constructivist orientation). These relational processes can be thought of as 'ongoing':

'The co-ordinations of which we have spoken make and remake social constructions as multiple local realities. An act/text may/may not get supplemented; an act may receive many different supplements and so may contribute to *multiple, simultaneous, ongoing* construction processes. In this way of thinking we presume multiple, ongoing construction processes rather than a singular, fixed, state of things that can be more or less well known' (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004: 7, emphasis in original).

In this view, the construction of realities can be thought of as multiple, ongoing and simultaneous reality construction processes that (re)produce local-cultural and local-historical realities. Local can be understood in this context in contrast to 'generalizable knowledge' and points to reality constructions in the context of particular historical processes (Hosking, 2004: 8). Or in other words, as construction processes in the 'here and now' (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004: 6). Local can also be understood as a relational construction process in a particular local context, including relations between particular people (McNamee & Hosking, 2006: 29). This line of thinking opens up possibilities for change; since the local-cultural-historical realities that are constantly (re)constructed can be thought of as not being 'fixed'.

'These ways of 'going on' in relation may seem fixed and may be (locally) taken-for-granted as 'how the world really is'. However, we should not forget either the essential artfulness - artificial rather than natural - of these "stabilized effects" or the relational processes in which they are constantly made and re-made' (Hosking, 2004: 9).

However, this does not mean that 'anything goes' in a specific local context. Every act, even an act as simple as a handshake, '*relies upon reference to a great many local cultural practices*' (Hosking, 2004: 7). Many of these practices are tacit, which makes it difficult to understand these practices and even more difficult to 'become a local'. When you don't know about these cultural practices, you are easily identified as an 'outsider' or 'alien' (Hosking, 2005, 7-8).

In mainstream discourses it is often assumed that there is 'one way' things are and as a consequence there is often one 'grand narrative' that is thought of as 'true'. An important consequence from relational constructionist premises is that one can now think of opening up to multiple local constructions. Opening up to multiple local realities is therefore one of the central themes in approaches to development and change.

'This seems to be an argument for opening up to multiple cultures – as multiple realities – rather than imposing one local-cultural-historical reality over others' (Hosking, 2006: 63).

Consequently, the world is no longer thought of as being 'one way' and multiple ways of going on together can be imagined; as Hosking and McNamee note (2006) note:

'We thereby avoid speaking with a sense of certainty that the world is or should be one way. And in so doing we open possibilities for the coordination of multiple ways of being human and of as Wittgenstein (1953) says, 'going on together'" (Hosking & McNamee, 2006: 31).

Opening up to multiple local constructions and realities fits with the orientation in a social/relational constructionist thought style towards 'opening up possibilities' instead of narrowing them down.

**Centring possibilities and appreciation.** Change work explicitly embraces possibilities and positive values. Both the opening up of possibilities and an appreciative way of relating are centred. Change work is positioned as an alternative to change programmes that tend to close down possibilities:

'Change work of this sort seems to require opening up possibilities rather than closing down through problem identification, solutions and generalized change programmes' (Hosking, 2006: 63).

Appreciative ways of relating are amongst other things valued for their potential to connect people with each other:

'From a social constructionist perspective, appreciative ways of relating are valued inasmuch as they give participants resources for connecting with each other. The mutual exploration of values, commitments, moralities – as well as the relational communities that give them sustenance – can allow participants to collaborate even when they differ over these values, commitments and moralities' (McNamee & Hosking, 2006: 25).

A central theme in change work is the appreciation of differences, that follows from opening up to multiple local-cultural realities and different ways of understanding the world. Gergen, McNamee and Barrett (2001) talk about the function of language in creating differences and stereotypes. These authors see language as an essentially differentiating medium; every word has its own meaning, but implies at the same time that which 'is not' by not referring to the word's adversary. Furthermore, there is a tendency to avoid conversations with those people that are conceived of as 'other', whereupon the accounts about the 'other' become simplified and tend to move toward extremity. In this view, tendencies towards division and conflict are seen as normal outcomes of social interaction. The challenge is therefore not to create societies 'free of conflict', since this would be impossible, but to think of a way to appreciate the differences (Gergen, McNamee & Barrett, 2001; Frissen, 2009). Since it is through 'talk' and dialogue that these divisions are created, Gergen, McNamee and Barrett suggest that dialogue may be the best option for treating contentious realities. More specific, they talk about 'transformative dialogue', which can be seen as a form of interchange that succeeds in transforming a relationship between people with contesting realities to one in which common realities are under construction. How can we come to a transformative dialogue and appreciate differences? The authors name five 'components' that are relevant for a transformative dialogue.

- 1) From blame to relational responsibility. The tendency to blame 'the other' and conversely deny any guilt is especially destructive for transformative dialogue. This is even intensified in the case of opposing groups in society:

'The problem is intensified in the case of antagonistic groups, for each may hold the other responsible - the poor will blame the wealthy for exploitation, while the wealthy will hold the poor responsible for their indolence; the conservative will blame the homosexual for corrupting the society, while the homosexual will blame the conservative for intolerance, and so on. Thus, each finds the guilty other not only denying guilt but, without any justification whatsoever, attempting to reverse the blame. Antagonisms are further polarized, and the tradition of individual blame thus sabotages the process of transformative dialogue' (Gergen, McNamee & Barrett, 2001: 701).

The authors come up with a number of strategies to stress the relational responsibility and move away from the mutual blaming of individuals and groups.

- 2) The Significance of Self-Expression. The importance of sharing personal stories is explicitly stressed; personal stories are easily comprehensible, can invite fuller audience engagement and generate acceptance with the speaker.
- 3) Affirming the Other. An attitude of openness and affirmation of the other helps to create a transformative dialogue as well; '*To affirm is to locate something within the other's expression to which we can lend our agreement and support*' (Gergen, McNamee & Barrett, 2001: 704). Affirmation may become difficult if people live in oppositional realities, but a genuine posture and an attitude of openness may be of help.
- 4) Self-reflexivity: The promise of Polyvocality. We tend to see ourselves as a 'singular' and 'coherent' self. The authors argue for a different understanding of self, as consisting of multiple selves:

'Thus in self questioning, we relinquish the "stand fast and firm" posture of conflict, and open possibilities for other conversations to take place.' (Gergen, McNamee & Barrett, 2001: 709).

5) The co-creation of new worlds. Transformative dialogue is concerned with the construction of new realities:

'Needed in the dialogue are what might be called imaginary moments in which participants join in developing new visions of a reality. These imaginary moments not only sew the seeds for co-construction, but also shift the position of the participants from combative to cooperative. As participants move toward common purpose, so do they redefine the other, and lay the groundwork for a conception of "us"' (Gergen, McNamee & Barrett, 2001: 709).

In this context the authors refer to Appreciative Inquiry as one of the most impressive forms of practice that puts the notions of transformative dialogue to work.

Dialogue can be seen as a way to come to appreciation and the opening up of possibilities. Dialogue does not merely refer to 'talk'; when social constructionists refer to dialogue, they use it to describe a special way of relating or a kind of social process. Dialogue can be contrasted with debate. Where debate focuses on certainties, resolutions, dilemmas, individual intelligence and consensus as outcome, dialogue is about curiosity, coordination, stories, reflection and reflexive inquiry (Hosking & McNamee, 2006: 279-281). Hosking and McNamee (2006) name the most important qualities of dialogue. The first quality is curiosity about the other's standpoint and story. A related quality is that of reflexive inquiry; there should be a willingness to suspend one's own certainty and be open to other ways of seeing and understanding the world. Furthermore, the focus is on the process of coordination with others, instead of promoting one's own position. Dialogue works mainly with the participants' stories, based on tacit knowledge of different local-cultural stories. Active reflection on these stories and tacit assumptions can open up possibilities of being for the participants. Lastly, dialogue can be seen as an emergent process; coherence in stories emerges through dialogue instead of being planned beforehand. The process of 'dialoguing' can be seen as a collective learning process how to have this kind of 'conversation'. A similar notion of dialogue as a meeting of people, was already put forward by Freire (1970) several decades ago. He even called dialogue an 'existential necessity' and a prerequisite of being 'fully human'. Dialogue is in his view furthermore an 'act of creation', through language and dialogue realities are constructed. Dialogue can only exist where there is a deep love for the world and for human beings in particular. A world where people believe in other humans, have hope and have a sense of humility towards each other. When these conditions are met, dialogue can create trust between people. Freire suggests a dialogic method of doing research, where the researchers cooperatively explore the worldviews and stories of people and reflect upon the development of these stories during the research process.

**Both Inquiry and Intervention.** We already touched upon the collapsing of the boundary between 'inquiry' on the one hand and 'intervention' on the other, while describing Gergen's (2009) assumptions of social constructionism. It is no longer strictly necessary to see a process as either inquiry or intervention; rather a 'both-and' approach is enabled:

'Since relational processes construct realities there is no requirement (although of course one could) to narrate activities as either inquiry or intervention; a 'both-and' approach is enabled and the 'received view of science' is de-centred' (Hosking, 2006: 65).

If all acts can be considered as having the potential to influence construction processes, this has consequences for the role and purpose of research. Ethics become important, since a researcher can no longer claim to merely 'describe' the world without potentially influencing and changing it. Which questions are asked is now of the utmost importance, since questions are considered to be 'forming'. One may seek methods of research that open up new possibilities and open up new alternatives for action:

'Finally, in the broadened concept of research, methods may be sought to generate new realities, to engender perspectives or practices as yet unrealized' (Gergen & Thatchenkerry, 2006: 44).

We have already encountered the notion of 'generative capacity' in the work of both Gergen (2009) and Alvesson and Deetz (2000). Gergen (1978, 1982) came up with the concept in his earlier work and originally defined 'generativity' as the

'...capacity to challenge the guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise fundamental questions regarding contemporary social life, to foster reconsideration of that which is 'taken for granted' and thereby furnish new alternatives for social actions' (Gergen, 1978: 1346).

In change work and in Appreciative Inquiry specifically, practitioners work with the notion of 'generative capacity'. Bushe (2007) argues that generative capacity is essential to the success of AI and its capability to be transformational; he even suggests re-naming Appreciative Inquiry to 'Generative Inquiry':

'One thing that concerns me about the current excitement and interest in appreciative inquiry (AI) is that many of the consultants and managers I talk to who claim to be doing AI don't seem to understand the importance of generativity, as an input and an outcome, of AI. Many people seem to get blinded by the "positive stuff" (Bushe, 2007: 1).

The author thinks Appreciative Inquiry has 'lost touch' with its initial purpose; AI was in his view originally thought of as a response to Gergen's call for more generative theorizing in social science. However, van der Haar and Hosking (2004) warn that generative processes, despite being effective in creating change, can facilitate subject-object relations if it is not carefully practised.

'So generative processes may open-up multiple social realities and 'power to'. In this way, both AI and relational constructionist processes can facilitate potentially "critical" processes – where 'critical' means being sensitive to multiple constructions of identities and relations (including power) and acting to open up possibilities ('power to'). This said, the question of *how* to challenge conventions is a controversial issue where change methodologies are concerned. Being generative is certainly one effective way to elicit changed ways of 'going on' but this must be carefully done if subject-object relations are to be avoided' (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004: 16, emphasis in original).

### 2.3 Appreciative Inquiry

The practice of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) works with the themes discussed in the previous paragraph and can be seen as one particular approach to development and change that tries to set these themes to work in practice. In the last two decades, the ideas of AI have spread rapidly and AI is now increasingly used in all sorts 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: 1). Moreover, the capability of an AI process to manifest itself in different forms, depending upon the local-cultural context, is at the heart of AI and is largely where it 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). One of these local particularities is the social science perspective that is used by the researchers or practitioners in the AI process. As argued earlier, I will try to make sense of AI from within a social/relational constructionist thought style.

Appreciative Inquiry is based on a number of other streams of thought. The first and probably most influential of these streams of thought is social constructionism. The whole theory of AI is based on the assumption that the organisational universe is symbolic and relationally constructed (Cooperrider, Barrett & Srivasta, 1995). Hosking and McNamee even argue that a social constructionist philosophy is an essential basis for Appreciative Inquiry; within other scientific discourses the practice of AI will appear unscientific (Hosking & McNamee, 2007). Other influential thought streams are Image theory and Grounded Theory. The first suggests that the images we have of the future influence the actions we make in the here and now. Therefore, a central part of AI is concerned with collective images and story-telling. The latter stream of thought is concerned with the understanding of culture and advocates participant observation as the best means of gathering data. Grounded theory further acknowledges that all inquiry is intervention, which is central to the theory of Appreciative Inquiry as well (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010: 49). As discussed earlier, a 'both-and' approach wherein inquiry and intervention are no longer storied as being separate processes is also central to a social and relational constructionist thought style. In AI theory this is also explicitly acknowledged, as can be seen in the following excerpt from an article of Ludema, Cooperrider and Barrett (2000):

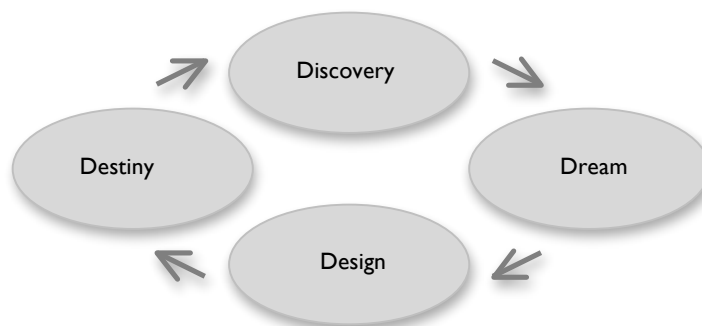
'Appreciative inquiry recognizes that inquiry and change are not truly separate moments, but are simultaneous. Inquiry is intervention, and the seeds of change – that is, the things people think and talk about, the things people discover and learn, and the things that inform dialogue and inspire action – are implicit in the very first questions we ask' (Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett, 2000: 15).

Appreciative Inquiry can furthermore be seen as a reaction on more traditional problem oriented change methodologies (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). Appreciative Inquiry was put forward for the first time in an article of Cooperrider and Srivasta in 1987. They conclude their article with the following words:

'In sum, the position we have been developing here is that for action-research to reach its potential as a vehicle for social innovation, it needs to begin advancing theoretical knowledge of consequence; that good theory may be one of the most powerful means human beings have for producing change in a post-industrial world; that the discipline's steadfast commitment to a problem-solving view of the world is a primary restraint on its imagination, passion, and positive contribution; that appreciative

inquiry represents a viable complement to conventional forms of action-research, one uniquely suited for social innovation instead of problem-solving; and that through our assumptions and choice of method we largely create the world we later discover' (Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987: 166).

**The 4-D cycle of Appreciative Inquiry.** When one browses through the literature on Appreciative Inquiry, there seem to be some recurring themes such as the 4-D cycle and a set of 'principles' of AI. The recursive 4-D cycle is said to form the heart of Appreciative Inquiry; in the least it serves as a framework for thinking of and describing the AI process. The first 'D' stands for 'discovery', the focus is on discovering the 'best that is' in an organisation or other system. Central to this phase are Appreciative Interviews conducted by members of the organisation or community. This phase is followed by that of 'dreaming'; here people are invited to imagine a more inspiring future for the organisation or community or in other words 'what could be'. In the third phase, 'design', the task is to envision an organisation or process that supports the 'ideal' organisation as imagined in the dream phase. Finally, the 'destiny' phase is meant to weave the ideas of AI into the organisational fabric, in order to ensure the continuous nature of the cycle and start up new rounds of the cycle (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008; Finegold & Holland, 2002; Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett, 2000; McNamee, 2006; Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). In some accounts, the 4-D cycle is storied as a particular type of 'intervention' with a beginning and an end, which contradicts the notion of the recursive 4-D cycle itself. Seen from a social constructionist point of view, the ongoing character of the AI process is what distinguishes it from other, more traditional, theories of change. Instead of seeing AI and the 4-D cycle as a 'method' with a beginning and an end that can be 'applied', AI can be seen as an ongoing relational process (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). The 4-D cycle can be thought of as a way of thinking about and storied an AI process, rather than as a 'blueprint'; therefore the cycle can be adjusted to the particularities of the local-cultural context. In some AI projects the focus is for example mainly on discovery, whereas in others the whole cycle is used (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).



**Figure 2** The 4-D Cycle of Appreciative Inquiry

So if Appreciative Inquiry is more than a 'method' in which the 4-D cycle can be 'applied', what are assumptions of AI that distinguish it from other theories of change? Several authors have tried to come up with a set of 'AI principles' (Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987; Ludema, 2001; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). These seem to be understood by these authors as a set of assumptions that inform the efforts of the AI practitioner. Cooperrider and Srivasta (1987) originally spoke of four principles:

*Principle 1: Research into the social (innovation) potential of organisational life should begin with appreciation.*

*Principle 2: Research into the social potential of organisational life should be applicable.*

*Principle 3: Research into the social potential of organisational life should be provocative.*

*Principle 4: Research into the social potential of organisational life should be collaborative (Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987: 162).*

Over time, these principles were copied, altered and complemented by other authors in the field, resulting in diverse sets of principles ranging from four to eight principles. I will briefly mention some of these principles here, to get an understanding of how these principles have developed over time and how they are understood in some of the current AI literature. The first five principles are used often and are often ascribed to Cooperrider and Srivasta, although they are in fact somewhat different and there are five instead of the original four mentioned above. The first is the constructionist principle, which acknowledges the central role of language as a vehicle by which communities of people create knowledge and meaning. The second is the principle of simultaneity; inquiry and intervention are not seen as separate activities, but are simultaneous (Ludema, 2001). This is why some scholars speak about a 'both-and' approach, where both inquiry and intervention are practiced simultaneously (Hosking & McNamee, 2007). Inquiry creates change; by asking questions, by writing a report or simply by being there, we potentially influence local realities (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The third principle is that of the positive, where it is argued that people move towards the direction of what they study. When positive questions are asked, positive theories will follow, which enables 'vocabularies of hope' (Ludema, 2001). The fourth principle is the poetic principle, which is best explained by the metaphor of the 'open book'. Organisations are seen as an open book with endless sources of learning and therefore an endless number of topics can be studied. The fifth principle is the anticipatory principle. This principle focuses on the power of images, often in the form of collective stories, in establishing action. It even suggests that because images of the future are fashioned through discourse and stories, these images are open to human influence.

Ludema (2001) adds three more principles. The collaborative principle, which suggests that all organisational life should be collaborative, the provocative principle, which focuses on the use of provocative images that challenge the status quo as a tool for facilitating change and the pragmatic principle, which stresses that organisational inquiry should create knowledge that is useful in a specific context. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) also add three principles, the wholeness principle, the enactment principle and the free choice principle. The first is somewhat similar to the collaborative principle of Ludema, where it is explicitly stressed that the whole organisation or system should collaborate in the inquiry. The second is hardly new in the context of the other principles, but it explicitly points out that acting 'as if' is self-fulfilling. The third additional principle is however relatively new and promotes the free choice of people in the organisation or community to contribute to the Appreciative Inquiry or not and choose the form of their contribution as well.

**Does Appreciative Inquiry ‘work’?** Since the development of the ideas of Appreciative Inquiry by Cooperrider and Srivasta (1987) in the late 80’s, AI has been used all over the world in differing contexts and has become increasingly popular. It is, among other things, used for organisational change processes, community transformation and conflict solving. Besides all the positive stories about Appreciative Inquiry as a successful or at least promising method for change, there is also a lot of criticism on AI. It is for example often argued that AI is ‘unscientific’. This critique can partly be understood in the context of the debate in science about different social science perspectives and their scientific value. As mentioned earlier, AI will necessarily be seen as ‘unscientific’ if it is judged from a more traditional or ‘modernist’ science discourse, where values as objectivity and truth are centred. However, a lot of practices are labelled as ‘Appreciative Inquiry’ that are not necessarily scientific or that do not make their assumptions explicit. Therefore, I will explicitly try to stick to the scientific use of Appreciative Inquiry, positioned in a social/relational constructionist discourse and with that try to concede to this point of critique. Furthermore, it is questioned whether Appreciative Inquiry actually ‘works’. In order to learn whether it ‘works’, we will first have a look at which qualities AI processes are said to have in the literature.

- 1) Constructing positive futures. First of all, AI is said to be a means through which human systems can generate new realities and create positive futures together (Gergen, McNamee & Barrett, 2001). In his early work, Cooperrider (1990) explores the workings of positive imagery by looking into the findings of other disciplines such as psychology. On the basis of these findings he portrays human systems as ‘heliotropic’; just as a plant moves to the sunlight, so do human systems and organisations move towards a positive image of the future. This implicates that organisations create their own realities:

‘Organizations are heliotropic in character in the sense that organizational actions have an observable and largely automatic tendency to evolve in the direction of positive imagery. Positive imagery and hence heliotropic movement is endemic to organizational life, which means that organizations create their own realities to a far greater extent than is normally assumed’ (Cooperrider, 1990: 23).

Focusing on positive aspects will contribute more to heliotropic movement than focusing on negative or even neutral aspects.

- 2) Handing people a vocabulary of hope as opposed to a vocabulary of deficits. AI is furthermore said to hand people new vocabularies. Talking in terms of deficits and problems can be changed into talking in terms of appreciation and possibilities (Ludema, 2001). Ludema (2001) argues that vocabularies of hope is are a powerful tool for change and help to open up new possibilities of being:

‘If the premise that hope is a primary source of positive knowledge and action in organizational life is accepted, and the tenets of social constructionism--that knowledge is a social artifact, that language is the means by which knowledge is developed, that there is an inextricable link between language, knowledge, and action--are embraced, then it can be concluded that the creation of textured vocabularies of hope may well be the most powerful tool available to us if our aim is to generate constructive organizational understandings that open new possibilities for human organizing and action’ (Ludema, 2001: page number unknown).

- 3) Giving space to multiple local realities. From a relational constructionist perspective, AI is said to be valuable because it gives space to multiple local realities and ways of going on, without imposing one grand narrative on others. AI facilitates opening up to multiple local realities and possibilities and appreciating these differences (Gergen, McNamee & Barrett, 2001; Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). As Van der Haar and Hosking (2004) note, an AI process is seen as a process that works with multiple local knowledges. In order to facilitate such a process the AI practitioner or researcher should become 'part of' the AI process:

'Relatedly, an AI process would warrant not one expertise, but multiple local knowledges (as praxis). Given this way of thinking, the AI practitioner is *part of* (not apart from) the appreciative process and contributes one expertise amongst many. And again, the warranting of some reality construction *stays as local as is possible* so as to enact "power to" rather than "power over"' (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004: 15, italics in original).

- 4) Moving from 'learned helplessness' to 'learned helpfulness'. People may unconsciously develop feelings of 'learned helplessness' (Boyd & Bright, 2007: 1033; Cooperrider, 1990: 14), a sense of powerlessness. Hosking (2004) notes that '*[P]eople's lives are heavily influenced by the stories they tell about themselves; stories are empowering or dis-empowering, helpful or unhelpful, clients may be trapped in stories of "problems" & "helplessness", past failures...*' (Hosking, 2004: 20). Thatchenkery (2005) argues that Appreciative Inquiry (prospective knowledge sharing) facilitates 'learned optimism' whereas more traditional approaches to development that focus on problem solving (retrospective knowledge sharing) facilitate 'learned helplessness'. AI is said to open up possibilities for people and thereby motivates people. Contrasting to the more traditional, subject-object ways of relating, which strengthens peoples feeling of 'inability' and 'powerlessness'.

Do AI projects actually meet these claims? Van der Haar and Hosking (2004) put forward that AI has hardly been evaluated and that the question *how* Appreciative Inquiry should be evaluated has received even less attention. Bushe and Kassam (2005) attempted a more conventional evaluation of AI by doing a Meta-Case analysis to establish whether Appreciative Inquiry is in fact transformational and if so, under what conditions. They found that not all case studies that used and claimed to have been successful Appreciative Inquiry projects were in fact transformational. Half of them did meet the standards and the authors looked for conditions that could explain these differences. Their main conclusion was that the more radical the theory of Appreciative Inquiry is embraced, the more transformational the outcomes are. When AI is used in more conventional Organisational Development research, the outcomes tend to be more conventional as well. The focus on the ideas and stories of people, instead of solely focusing on their behaviour, and the radical prescription of letting go 'planned change' seemed to be the most important conditions for actually living up to the expectations formulated in AI literature. Van der Haar and Hosking (2004) argue that Appreciative Inquiry projects should be evaluated in a way that is in line with the assumptions of AI and relational constructionism. From this point of view Appreciative Inquiry and Evaluation are 'interwoven'. In their words:

'AI and evaluation are no longer thought of as two independent and separate methodologies. Rather, AI and its evaluation are interwoven in co-constructive and reflexive relation and perhaps it is for this reason that so few evaluation studies of AI have been reported' (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004: 22).

Since AI cannot be seen as a traditional 'intervention' with a clear beginning and ending, traditional evaluation methods that measure 'pre' and 'post' intervention may not be helpful for evaluating AI projects. This evaluation method is known as 'product evaluation'; there is a distant and objective evaluator that seeks to provide objective knowledge about the intervention by judging it according to a 'neutral' standard. Product evaluation fits more comfortably in a modernist account of science and is therefore not suited for evaluating AI projects. It assumes that there is 'one way' things are and therefore does not leave space for multiple local realities and understandings. AI projects manifest themselves differently according to the local cultural context, which makes it difficult to judge them according to some set of pre-fixed standards. However, it is important to look for ways to evaluate AI projects because otherwise indeed 'anything goes'. Especially since most of the studies that report AI projects are solely positive about their project and AI in general.

**Appreciative Inquiry as inquiry into the positive?** Perhaps the most heard point of critique is that the focus on 'the positive' inherent to the AI philosophy, excludes voices that want to address 'problems'. The question arises what 'positive' is; can there be an agreement on the definition of positive? Van der Haar and Hosking (2004) argue that what is positive is a variable local construction:

'However, given our relational constructionist premises it will be important to appreciate that what is "positive" is also a variable local construction, and for someone to rule out critical reflection may be experienced as negative and – by one person seeking to impose his/her reality on others – inconsistent with other aspects of AI' (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004: 23).

If one person imposes his or her view of the positive on others, this can construct subject-object or dominance relations.

Recently, a number of other authors question the exclusive focus on the positive and criticise AI scholars and practitioners to have reduced Appreciative Inquiry to its positive aspect only and consequently forget about its other assumptions (Boje, 2010; Bushe, 2007, 2010a, 2010b; Fitzgerald, Oliver & Hoxsey, 2010). Bushe (2007, 2010a, 2010b) has become an advocate of questioning the positive aspect of Appreciative Inquiry and argues a reorientation towards the generative aspect of AI (see earlier). Fitzgerald, Oliver and Hoxsey (2010) criticise the existing AI literature for the lack of advice as to how to deal with 'negatives' and the equation of AI with the positive:

'Thus we have "everything coming up po-si-tive." Within these volumes, a few pages are devoted to dealing with problems and "negatives," yet without guidance as to how to discern that which is positive from that which is negative, who should make that determination, and how. Furthermore, the "generative" and "that which gives life" are often presumed as and equated with "positive," which remains undefined. We do not observe any similar trumpeting or highly visible promotion of any of the other foundational principles of AI. Has the overarching positive really become the generative heart of AI?' (Fitzgerald, Oliver & Hoxsey, 2010: 223).

It is indeed striking to see that most descriptions of Appreciative Inquiry stick to the positive dimension of AI. This is an example from an article by Ludema, Cooperrider and Barrettt (2000) in which the authors

summarise Appreciative Inquiry by stressing the power of the ‘unconditional positive question’. Note how they pay attention to the positive principle of AI in this summary, without paying attention to other principles;

‘Appreciative inquiry distinguishes itself from critical modes of action research by its deliberately affirmative assumptions about people, organisations, and relationships. It focuses on asking the *unconditional positive question* to ignite transformative dialogue and action within human systems. More than a technique, appreciative inquiry is a way of organisational life – an intentional posture of continuous discovery, search, and inquiry into conceptions of life, joy, beauty, excellence, innovation, and freedom.’ (Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett, 2000: 1, emphasis in original).

Fitzgerald, Oliver and Hoxsey (2010) agree with Van der Haar and Hosking (2004) that there is a risk of ‘dominance relations’ when everything that is not construed as ‘positive’ is treated as ‘negative’ or ‘deficit’. Problems and ‘negatives’ are according to the authors too often storied as ‘bad’ in the context of an Appreciative Inquiry, whereas in their opinion focusing on the ‘shadow side’ of people and organisations can be valuable as well. Therefore they argue Appreciative Inquiry processes should ‘*welcome the whole person—not only the parts that we may see as “positive”*’ (Fitzgerald, Oliver & Hoxsey, 2010: 230). Van der Haar and Hosking (2004) also put forward that ‘negative stuff’ could have ‘very positive implications for how relating continues’ (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004: 13).

**Some examples of Appreciative Inquiry in practice.** So far, Appreciative Inquiry was mainly positioned in an organisational context. Since the theory was developed in Organisational Theory, this is not surprising. However, recently there is a growing attention for the use of AI in other contexts. Here, the use of Appreciative Inquiry in community development is of special interest (Akdere, 2005; Boyd & Bright, 2007; Finegold & Holland, 2002; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Finegold and Holland (2001) explore the possibilities of an Appreciative Inquiry approach in community development:

‘If we are to unleash the capacity of communities to create their desired future, we need to invite vibrant discourse among multiple stakeholders, while supporting and enhancing the network of relationships strengthening the fabric of the community and its ability to get things done’ (Finegold & Holland, 2002: 236).

The authors review a number of community projects that used a form of Appreciative Inquiry and conclude that AI can create a dialogic environment and opens pathways to new possibilities:

‘The appreciative conversations that take place one to one, in small groups, and in ever larger circles, serve to build trust and strengthen relationships allowing for the disruption of old patterns of thinking’ (Finegold & Holland, 2001: 251).

In this context I will take a brief look at three Appreciative Inquiry projects, to get a feeling of what an Appreciative Inquiry project could look like. I have chosen these three cases for a number of reasons. All three cases are relevant for my research project because they work in a similar context and/or work with similar

themes. The projects work with AI in the context of community development, with the exception of the project of Ludema, Cooperrider and Barrett (2000) who work with a global NGO and work with themes such as deficit vocabularies (Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett), working with positive and negative aspects (Saha) and creating a positive future (all three projects). These case studies give a rich insight in the working of AI in practice, which is especially true for Saha (2009), who provides us with an exhaustive and lengthy account of his experiences with AI. These three projects have furthermore inspired and helped me throughout the research process in designing my own AI project.

One of the most successful and most cited examples of the application of AI in a community context is the Imagine Chicago project. This project was initiated by Bliss Browne, by doing a citywide 'Imagine Chicago' project in 1992. About 50 young people interviewed around 140 community members. Because of the success of the project, her approach and ideas have spread over the world and new projects are created in cooperation with the foundation 'Imagine Chicago'. Furthermore, there is a strong orientation on the future. Participants are invited to imagine a future for their city, neighbourhood or community in ten or twenty years and thereby inspiring action among the participants. Intergenerational Appreciative Interviews form the heart of these projects. In these interviews young people have interviewed people from older generations about their positive experiences in the past and their dreams and hopes for the future. By conducting these interviews relationships are established across generations and cultures. It is also a method to hear other people's stories and to learn from and about each other. Furthermore, the young people learn valuable skills during the process such as interviewing. Both the interviewers as the interviewees described the interviews as an especially inspiring and powerful learning experience (Browne, 2000; Browne, 2008; Browne & Jain, 2002; Browne, Chien & Cawthorn, 2002). Three valuable 'outcomes' of the process were mentioned in this context: a shared identity, intergenerational Partnership and Accountability and the creation of new possibilities and methods of civic conversation (Browne, 2000).

The second project is an Appreciative Inquiry project described by Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett (2000), wherein the authors describe their experiences in working with a global NGO based in the United States with over 120 partner organisations over the world. They noted that in the beginning of the process, the NGO and its partners '*were entrapped in many embedded layers of deficit vocabularies*' (Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett, 2000: 4). During the second year of the project, the language of the organisations began to shift from a discourse of paternalism to talking about partnerships. According to the authors this case shows us that Appreciative Inquiry can help us to release new vocabularies through which social and organisational innovation can be constructed:

'This case illustration demonstrates how appreciative inquiry can be used as a positive mode of action research to dislodge reified vocabularies of human deficit and liberate the socially constructive potential of organisations and human communities. By unlocking existing deficit constructions, creating spaces for new voices and languages to emerge, and expanding circles of dialogue to build a supportive relational context, appreciative inquiry allows for the positive construction of social reality' (Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett, 2000: 11).

Ludema, Cooperrider and Barrett continue by sharing four ways in which this is possible; Appreciative Inquiry is said to release new vocabularies because it:

1. *Releases Positive Conversation within the Organisation;*
2. *Builds an Ever-Expanding Web of Inclusion and Positive Relationships;*
3. *Creates Self-Reinforcing Learning Communities;*
4. *Bolsters Democracy and Self-Organizing Throughout the System.*

A third example is the research of Saha (2009) into the possibilities of Appreciative Inquiry in the promotion of self-help by constructing non subject-object processes. Saha initiated change processes in two neighbourhoods in the Philippines; in the first he worked with problem-solving methodologies and in the second with Appreciative Inquiry. In this way he could compare the two methods. The author noted that in his opinion an important shift from individualistic constructions to interaction processes was facilitated by AI:

'The realization of collective strengths over individual capacity nurtured collective hopes, inspirations and desire for collective wellbeing' (Saha, 2009: 108).

The AI process grew vocabularies of hope, which in turn generated 'learned optimism'. In contrast with problem-solving methods, Appreciative Inquiry did enable the construction of 'equal relationships' between the development workers and the community members. Saha furthermore states that what is positive and what is negative is a local construction. Sharing 'negative' experiences can also help to come to a desired future:

'The story Multiple meanings of 'positive' & 'negative': stories in the local-social context of Napo shows that in meetings, discussions and reflections people talked about a better future, hopes, imagination but the mode of life and struggles of meeting daily livelihoods unavoidably created a dialectical relationship between imagination-hope based dialogue and the struggle of life. The AI process encompassed both the negative realities of life and the hopes of creating a life.' (Saha, 2009: 110).

The author ends his report with an invitation to other change workers to facilitate AI with non subject-object relations. He suggests that the only way of constructing such relations is by doing research without a 'pre-set design' and allowing the methodology to evolve during the process by learning and doing together with the community.

## **2.4 Some concluding thoughts on this chapter**

In this chapter we started out with different discourses of social science, which differ quite substantially on the aim of social science, the position of the researcher and the design of the research process. A social or relational constructionist thought style offers possibilities for change because it recognises that realities are constructed in ongoing, local and simultaneous interaction processes. The 'change agency' is not situated in a 'change agent' but in ongoing processes. As a result, *'patterned co-ordinations become both the 'unit of analysis' and 'the unit' of transformation'* (Hosking, 2006: 61). Approaches to development and change rooted in a social or relational constructionist thought style try to facilitate processes or patterned co-ordinations that facilitate non

subject-object ways of relating, open up multiple local constructions and realities, centre possibilities and appreciation and story inquiry as intervention. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is one approach to development and change that tries to put these ideas to work by organising such processes of change. AI is said to help to construct positive futures, hand people a vocabulary of hope, give space to multiple local realities and helps people to come to 'learned optimism' and 'learned helpfulness' instead of 'learned helplessness'. From the review of the literature, it seems to me that approaches to development and change rooted in a relational constructionist thought style and Appreciative Inquiry specifically, offer promising possibilities for working with the stories on Curaçao. The people of Curaçao who are said to have a lack of an own identity, a lack of self-respect, a passive and indifferent attitude, no trust or hope in the future and experience a lack of agency. By promoting the construction of non subject-object ways of relating, Appreciative Inquiry can construct processes of 'power to'. These processes can create change without imposing the direction of the change on others and are intended to hand people new vocabularies and possibilities and ways of going on to construct positive futures together on Curaçao and a positive future for the new *Pais Kòrsou*. In the following chapters I will describe how I tried to put these theories to work and how I tried to come to such processes and with that explore how working with these approaches to development and change can help to come to changed ways of talking about the future of Curaçao, which is my central research question.

The literature from this chapter guided me throughout the process and as a consequence, themes from the literature can be recognised in all the following chapters. The theory informed my choices in the design of my research (Chapter 3) and my choices 'in the field' (Chapter 4 and 5). In all of these chapters I will sometimes mention theories that were described in this chapter. However, I will try to save something for Chapter 6, in which I will explicitly reflect upon my experiences 'in the field' with the help of the literature described in this chapter.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design**

In this chapter, I will describe how I tried to translate the theory from Chapter 2 to my own research project and which choices I made in the research process. Since I worked with an emergent design, I had to make important choices during my stay in the field and I had to deviate from my original research proposal. This is why I will pay sufficient attention to the choices I made, in order for others to get an idea of what the research process looked like. In paragraph 3.1 I will argue why I used a case study design and chose to use ethnographic methods. In paragraph 3.2 I will describe which research techniques I used and what sort of data these research techniques produced. In paragraph 3.3 I will continue with the selection of respondents and participants, followed by the analysis of the data in paragraph 3.4. I will end this chapter with the quality standards of this piece of research in paragraph 3.5.

### **3.1 Case study design**

As was mentioned earlier in the introduction, a case study design is used in this research project. This has a number of reasons. First of all, the main interest of this research project is to understand how an Appreciative Inquiry approach can be put to work in a specific context, namely the context of Curaçao. Secondly, the high level of complexity of both the culture and society in Curaçao and the theoretical concepts used in this research, ask for a detailed and in-depth case study (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Thirdly, this research project is highly explorative in nature. Similar research has scarcely been done, especially in the field of Public Administration, which is another reason to choose for a case study design (Boeije, 2010). Fourthly, the used approach is highly labour-intensive in nature and asks a lot of time and effort of both the researcher and the participants. It was therefore practically impossible to study more than one case in the available time. More philosophically, a case study design fits best with the social science perspective that is practiced in this research project. The focus is on a local/emergent approach, which asks for a local context where there is enough space to let topics emerge during the research process. Besides that, there is the argument that all knowledge is context-dependent and that case studies which explicitly acknowledge the contextual nature of knowledge produce especially valuable in-depth and context-dependent knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

**An Ethnography.** An ethnography is traditionally a method that aims at representing other cultures in a written account, often complemented with visual aids. Classic ethnographies entail researchers living among the group of study; the researcher participates in the daily affairs of the group under study and takes careful notes of everything that happens (Gergen, 2009). Upon returning home, the ethnographer has a pile of data that needs to be typed out and analysed. Over the years a lot of critique has been given to this traditional way of conducting an ethnography. The impracticalities and problems of strictly separating the data collection and the analysing of the data were stressed on the one hand (Boeije, 2010), while the ethical objections of 'studying the other' without giving space to the 'native's point of view' grew on the other hand (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). As Van Maanen notes, writing about the other brings serious moral responsibilities on the part of the ethnographer:

'An ethnography is written representation of culture (or selected aspects of culture). It carries quite serious intellectual and moral responsibilities, for the images of other inscribed in writing are most assuredly not neutral' (Van Maanen, 1988: 1).

Nevertheless, a lot of scholars still see an ethnography as a valuable method, albeit anthropologists have searched for ways to include multiple perspectives in their story and have become increasingly aware of their own bias in describing 'the other'. Recently the practice of a 'collaborative ethnography' has become increasingly popular, where not only the voices of the other are heard, but the people involved actually help to write the ethnography as well (Gergen & Gergen, 2002; Gergen, 2009).

In this research project, some aspects of a traditional ethnography are present, such as the practice of taking careful field notes and living among the group of study. I have literally been 'in the field' for three months. I decided to stay with a 'guest family' in a neighbourhood inhabited with local people, *Muizenberg*, instead of living in a student house with other Dutch students or interns. This enabled me to participate in the daily life of the community and learn about the culture. Especially in the first month, I went along with my 'guest mother' (Dula) on a regular basis, which enabled me to get to know a totally different Curaçao than I knew from my previous visit and made me 'part of the family' as well. More about my guest mother and the way in which I participated in her daily chores can be found in paragraph 4.1 'Adjusting to the local rhythm'. I furthermore subscribed to a ten-week language course in Papiamentu, the local language of Curaçao, offered by *Fundashon Prikichi*<sup>14</sup> in The Hague in the Netherlands.

As Holstein and Gubrium (2008) note, bringing constructionist ideas to ethnographic fieldwork asks for 'procedural adaptations'. It is not necessary to 'reinvent the wheel', but the traditional techniques of taking field notes and analysing the data should be slightly attuned to pay fuller attention to social construction processes. I will come back to their ideas when describing the research techniques separately (see paragraph 3.2 'Research Techniques'). Even though this project encompasses several aspects of a traditional ethnography, I have also departed from a more traditional ethnography in a number of ways. I especially tried to work with the two main points of critique: the separation of data collection and analysis and the lack of the native's point of view. Concerning the first point of critique, I followed Boeije (2010) by alternating data collection with data analysis (see 3.4 'Analysing the data' for a more detailed description of the analysing process). As to the latter point of critique, I have constantly searched for ways to include other perspectives and voices. I have explicitly tried to include other perspectives in my final report by introducing myself as a major character in the story instead of an all-knowing researcher and by leaving space for the reader to draw his or her own conclusions. I have furthermore asked one group of participants to write a short reflection on the project and the other to fill in a questionnaire and with that give them the opportunity to voice their opinions. I have used and quoted the reflections intensively in Chapter 5. Rhodes and Brown urge the researcher to 'write responsibly' by recognising it is impossible to capture the Other:

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<sup>14</sup> For more information on the language course or Fundashon Prikichi, visit [www.papiamentopagina.nl](http://www.papiamentopagina.nl).

'[T]o decide to write is not to close off or finalize the 'truth' about the Other, but rather to engage in an ongoing relation with the Other, a relation that is ethical' (Rhodes & Brown, 2005: 482).

I have also paid attention to my own personal biases by using aspects of an auto ethnographic research, which makes the researcher his or herself the object of research (Gergen, 2009). It is also important to keep in mind that I am not an anthropologist by training and have therefore deviated from what anthropologists would think of as a traditional ethnography. Ethnographies usually entail a considerable longer period of field work than three months as is illustrated by the following fragment of Van Maanen (1988):

'Fieldwork usually means living with and living like those who are studied. In its broadest, most conventional sense, fieldwork demands the full-time involvement of a researcher over a lengthy period of time (typically unspecified) and consists mostly of ongoing interaction with the human targets of study on their home ground' (Van Maanen, 1988: 2).

Obviously, the demarcated three month period of my stay in the field contrasts the conventional notion of the ethnographer who stays in the field for an unspecified length of time, normally a number of years. However, in the context of my master programme, it was not possible to lengthen my stay much longer.

**Case selection.** Even though the focus of the research project is on the whole island of Curaçao, it was practically impossible to involve all the approximately 150.000 inhabitants of the island in the project. I therefore decided to start working with a local community. Before my departure to Curaçao, I decided to work with the initiative 'Jongeren van het Koninkrijk'. I was already involved in the Dutch counterpart of this initiative and the ideas of this initiative seemed to fit really well with my overall research question and aims. I would, together with a Dutch colleague, help to set up a section on Curaçao and somehow use the ideas of Appreciative Inquiry in this context. However, during my first weeks on Curaçao it turned out working with Jongeren van het Koninkrijk was more difficult than I initially thought. First of all, the group of young professionals who were allegedly interested in helping with the initiative were at least at the time not ready or able to be involved after all. Secondly, my Dutch colleague and I had quite a different perspective on what the initiative should be like, which is not necessarily a problem, but after a while I felt uncomfortable with the initiative and especially with my research project in combination with the initiative. I was keen on introducing some sort of Appreciative Inquiry project, which did not seem to be understood by my colleagues. This was partly my own 'fault', because in retrospect, I did not explicitly ask my colleagues for 'permission' to do my research project and work with AI and failed to make clear to my colleague what an AI project would entail. After a few weeks, I began to think that *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk* did not prove to be the right context for my AI project on the island; the initiative seemed to shut out certain voices that I wanted to include (related to independence), the initiative started working with a limited target group on Curaçao (mainly jurists) and the initiative somehow evoked feelings of irritation in some people (for example 'too Dutch').

After two weeks on Curaçao, I learned about another small organisation or initiative through Facebook with the name 'We Lead Curaçao'. When I read about this initiative, I immediately felt that this was the group of people I should work with. In my opinion, their mission fitted really well with my research ideas and with the

ideas of Appreciative Inquiry. The first sentence in the We Lead mission statement that immediately struck me as fitting with my research ideas is: 'The WE LEAD Foundation was created to emphasize the role of the youth in constructing their ideal nation.' When I browsed the internet for information about We Lead I became enthusiastic and a few things stood out to me: We Lead saw 10-10-10 as a symbolic new start as well, was trying to make Curaçao a better place by involving people and appeared to be an organisation formed and headed by local youngsters. I started up a conversation with the chairman, Gwendell Mercelina Jr., about the possibility of doing an AI project together. The timing proved to be right, since We Lead turned out to be just starting and wanted to launch a first project that would help them to get in touch with society and function as a basis for the movements they want to create in the future. We Lead momentarily exists of six youngsters, most of them in the beginning of their twenties, who formed the 'We Lead Board'. They were interested in becoming 'participants' of the project as well as in helping with organising the project. One of the board members even had previous experience with an AI project through his voluntary work with the Scouting. I eventually decided to work with We Lead and together we organised the Appreciative Inquiry project titled 'Curaçao, our nation'. More about my involvement with both *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk* and We Lead and my decision to switch from working with the first to the latter can be found in Chapter 4.

**A multilingual project.** In this context I explicitly want to pay some attention to the multilingual nature of this research project. The three languages used in the field and in this research report are English, Papiamentu and Dutch, which are also the three official languages of the new *Pais Kòrsou*. Before my departure I have followed a language course in Papiamentu, the local language of Curaçao. Marcha and Verweel (2000) mention how the refusal to learn Papiamentu of most Dutch people is seen as offensive and as a lack of interest in the *Yu di Kòrsou*, which is why I wanted to master at least the basics of the language. This turned out to be a wise decision; people really valued my effort and interest to learn their language and it enabled me to attend meetings in Papiamentu. In the project 'Curaçao, our nation' we worked and communicated in the three languages. The interviewees were urged to conduct the interviews in their preferred language and that of the interviewee. Due to the character of the interviews, wherein the sharing of personal stories and dreams was centred, I deemed it important people were able to hold the conversations in their native tongue. Marcha and Verweel (2000) note that it is difficult for people from Curaçao to express their emotions in Dutch. Throughout this research report, quotes in all three the languages are used. Some interviews and reports were already written in English, the quotes that were originally in Dutch or Papiamentu are translated into English. The original quotations can be found through a reference. I translated all the fragments myself, but have asked a native speaker to check my translations of Papiamentu, since I have only recently mastered the language and did not want to lose or change the meaning of the original fragments with the translation. I will stick to the language used by both the interviewees and the interviewees and for example not correct spelling mistakes.

### **3.2 Research techniques**

Four main research techniques were used during this research project: Informal Ethnographic Interviews, Appreciative Interviews, Observations and Group sessions. These techniques follow both from the Appreciative Inquiry approach as from the ethnography as a chosen method. We will now have a look at each

of these techniques separately and thereby also pay attention to the data that emerged from these research techniques.

**Informal Ethnographic Interviews.** Throughout the project I have conducted what Agar (1996) calls 'informal ethnographic interviews'. These interviews are called 'informal' for a number of reasons. First of all, because the questions are not fixed, as a researcher you merely have a number of question strategies. Secondly, because the researcher is not taking a 'formal role' as interviewer and with that position his or herself 'above' the informant. Thirdly, because the interviews can take place in a number of different settings, such as in the supermarket, in a bar, on the street et cetera. Depending on the local context, the interviews can either be recorded, answers can be written down during the interview or immediately after the interview. For each strategy a number of advantages and disadvantages exist. Whilst recording the interviews is the best strategy to stay closest to the data, people can feel threatened by a voice recorder and refrain from answering genuinely; especially in such informal situations as mentioned above. However, when the answers are written down later on by the researcher, the memory of the researcher becomes important and cannot always be trusted (Agar, 1996). Holstein and Gubrium (2008) prefer the recording of conversations, since they allow for a more detailed reconstruction of what has discursively transpired:

'Although selectivity is imposed in choosing what to record or inscribe, the constructionist fieldworker typically strives to capture as much in situ verbatim detail as possible, preserving the opportunity to later "unpack" talk-in-interaction for the constructive work entailed' (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008: 386).

However, they do acknowledge that there are numerous situations where it is not possible or it is even undesirable to record the conversation. In these situations it is important to stick as much as possible to the respondent's own words. The authors mention that from a constructionist perspective on ethnographic fieldwork, the practice of the informal ethnographic interview is not necessarily different than in a more traditional ethnography. One of the differences is that the researcher no longer sees the Other as a 'vessel of information'; the conversation is more active and regarded as an interaction. However, as the authors note, the interview process may well be indistinguishable from a more traditional interview process:

'[T]he interview process itself might be indistinguishable from conventional, informal interviewing, there would be analytic justification for more active exchanges between all participants, if desired' (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008: 388).

In this research project, I have especially conducted a large number of informal ethnographic interviews during the first part of my stay. In line with the informal ethnographic interview as described by Agar (1996), I did not use specific questions, but a number of interview strategies. In this early stage of my research project, I was mainly interested in the way the inhabitants of Curaçao experienced the constitutional restructuring and their new country. In order to start a conversation about this topic I for instance mentioned *Pais Kòrsou* or my research as the reason for my stay on the island. It was not always possible to record these interviews, since they often happened in day-to-day situations and I did not always intentionally start an interview. During a

conversation somebody would say something interesting and I would ask a question about it and in this way an informal interview setting emerged spontaneously. I always carried a small notebook and my recording device with me, so if I was not able to record the interview, I was able to write some quotes down immediately. My inability to record the conversations was partly due to my inexperience with informal ethnographic interviews. I was afraid I would ruin the moment and the conversation if I took my recording device out of my bag and ask for permission to record the conversation. A recording device did not seem to fit with the informal character of the conversations and I was afraid people no longer wanted to talk openly with me when they were confronted with a recording device. Unfortunately, the field notes of these early conversations are less elaborate than I would have liked. As I got more used to conducting these informal interviews, I tried to introduce the recording device into the conversations more often and as a result I have more detailed data of the later weeks in the field than the first. When I had an appointment with someone for lunch or I had a board meeting with We Lead, I did switch my recorder on with permission of those present, in order to have detailed and original data.

**Appreciative Interviews.** A specific research technique that fits within the practice of Appreciative Inquiry is the Appreciative Interview. These constitute the most important part of the 'discovery' phase of AI:

'Appreciative Interviews bring out the best in people and organisations: they provide the opportunity for people to speak and be heard, ignite curiosity and the spirit of learning, and increase organisational knowledge and wisdom.' (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010: 143).

The Appreciative Interview is mainly used to involve large numbers of people in the AI process by inviting them to conduct Appreciative Interviews themselves with colleagues, fellow community members or important stakeholders. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) dedicate a whole chapter to the practicalities of Appreciative Interviewing and give helpful advice about the crafting of positive questions, the training of interviewers and the analysis of Appreciative Interviews. The interview questions should be preceded by a lead-in that puts people at ease, introduces the topic and helps the interviewee to consider the topic from different angles. The lead-in is followed by a number of questions. The authors suggest an ordering of questions based on four different types of questions: backward questions, inward questions, forward questions and transition questions. The interview usually starts with backward questions that invites people to remember high point experiences. These are followed by inward questions that refer back to the backward questions and attribute meaning to them. Forward questions typically come last and encourage people to think about the future. Transition questions are often embedded in the forward questions and provide a link from the current state of affairs to the desired state in the future. Good questions are questions that 'help to forge personal connections between interviewers and interviewees', 'invite stories rather than abstract opinions or theories', 'are personal and affective' and 'draw on people's life and work experiences' (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010: 147-149).

In this context it is common for people to receive some training in interviewing and in Appreciative interviewing in particular. Special attention should be paid to the way in which the interviewers should record or write down the data from the interviews. Several different ways can be imagined, also depending on the

practical tools available, such as recording the interviews on tape or video or filling in a standard form during and/or after the interviews. An interview training can take many different forms, but from their experience Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) suggest a three-hour training session in which the participants are provided with background information on the project, practice interviewing, learn guidelines regarding note taking and decide upon an interview schedule. Interview training should furthermore provide the participants with interpersonal skills:

‘Interviewer training not only prepares people to conduct appreciative interviews, but it also provides them with essential interpersonal skills – listening, summarizing ideas, sharing stories, bringing out the best in people’ (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2001: 156).

Appreciative Interviews played an important role in this research project. In three workshops, a total of 44 youngsters received a three-hour training in Appreciative Interviewing, in which they learned about Appreciative Inquiry, basic interview techniques and did some practical exercises to practice with interviewing. Half of the participating youngsters were recruited through the We Lead network and through social media, whilst the other half existed of a class of students of Hospitality and Tourism Management. This research project was integrated in one of their courses. Following the AI literature, the interviewers were to be encouraged to interview a diverse set of people. When asked who they wanted to interview, the interviewers came up with a diverse set of people without needing to be encouraged. They each had quite specific ideas about whom to interview, varying from grandmothers to high government officials to the youth from the street. More about the choice of interviewees can be found later on in this chapter in paragraph 3.3 ‘Respondents and Participants’. The interviewers were encouraged to record the conversations in order to be able to stick to the language of the interviewees. However, not all the participants had the technical equipment to record conversations and some chose not to record it. The interviewers handed in a written report of each interview. They were relatively free in deciding upon a form for these reports. The following was mentioned in their assignment:

‘In your report of the interview write down stories and examples that are remarkable, inspiring, where you learned from, et cetera. You don’t have to try to remember and write down the whole interview’ (Hand-out Training, see Appendix 6).

The class of students handed in elaborate reports with a detailed report of each conversation, whereas most of the We Lead participants only handed in the answers in ‘key words’, if they handed in a report at all. Despite repeated requests to record conversations and send the recordings to me, I only received a few recordings. This has implications for the analysis of the interviews, as I will describe later on in this chapter under ‘Analysis’.

Since I have only conducted five interviews myself and the participants conducted the remaining two hundred interviews, I will hereby quote some of the participants about their approach in interviewing. These fragments originate from the reports the participants handed in. Several interviewers indicate to have recorded the conversations, for example:

*'While doing the interview, the whole conversation was recorded to listen back after writing the report. In this way I could write down exactly what the participants have said.'*

Other interviewers do not explicitly say whether they have recorded the conversations or not. The following fragment from a participant report shows how the participants tried to stick to the language and answers of the interviewees and tried not to judge them:

*'During this survey we have had to take in consideration that no answer is wrong. A very important aspect is preventing bias (giving examples, nonverbal communication) in order to maintain the information original. This report is written in the same language as in which the interviewee preferred the interview. After the interview, the data was immediately processed to prevent mixing up the data collected.'*

Another participant describes the interview procedure, which gives an insight in how she went about conducting the interviews:

*'While doing the interview I chose the right environment, a quiet place with no distractions and with no other people in the same environment that could cause disturbance. I have collected the data at different places, such as;*

- At their home*
- At my home*

*The interview was done as followed;*

- First of all I have introduced myself, and told the participant something about my school*
- Then I have explained our project and explained something about We Lead, Curaçao*
- Then I have asked them if I could record the conversation*
- While asking the questions I have tried to only ask open questions and encourage the participants to keep talking*
- After having the conversation I have sincerely thanked the interviewee for their enthusiasm and time to help me and We Lead, Curaçao with the project'*

The participants furthermore write that they have asked additional questions 'where this was felt as necessary' and did not always ask the questions in the exact order of the questionnaire.

**Group meetings.** There were two types of group sessions organised in the context of the Appreciative Interviewing. As mentioned earlier, the interviewers received training in Appreciative Interviewing and came back three weeks later to discuss what they learned during the interviews. Both of these sessions lasted three hours. Six sessions were held in total. There were three training sessions scheduled for We Lead participants and one for the class of students. Three weeks later two workshops were held, one for the We Lead participants and one for the group of students, to share stories of and about the interviews. The group was split up in two, mainly due to practical reasons. A condition for the participation of the class of students was that I would come to visit them during class hours, so I chose to host their sessions in their classroom. I have asked people to record each of these sessions for me with a video camera in order to capture what happened during these sessions. Unfortunately there were some problems with my video camera, which is why I did not manage to record one training session. These recordings were complemented with my own observations written down in the form of field notes.

I will say some more about the content of the sessions, to help the reader to get a better understanding of what the interview process looked like. The original programme of the first training sessions/workshops was the following:

1. Welcome & Introduction: 18.00 – 18.10 (Joeri)
2. Introduction We Lead: 18.10 – 18.25 (Daniel)
3. Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry & Project 'Curaçao, our nation': 18.25 – 18.35 (Joeri)
4. Exercise 1: Listening and not-listening: 18.35-19.00
5. Interviewing (round 1): 19.00 – 19.35
6. Plenary discussion: 19.35- 20.00
7. Break: 15 min 20.00 – 20.15
8. Interviewing (round 2): 20.15 – 20.35
9. Preparing for actual interviews: 20.35 – 21.00

The elaborate version of the workshop programme can be found in Appendix 7. The actual training sessions were slightly different; during the second workshop two We Lead board members suggested another exercise and the different parts of the programme lasted shorter or longer than planned. The training started with an introduction. The participants were asked to introduce themselves, say why they chose to visit the workshop and share a dream for Curaçao with the group (1). This was followed with an introduction of We Lead through a game; the participants were asked to stand in a circle and one person was asked to stand in the middle. This person was instructed to 'fall back' and was tossed around by the others in the circle, who each represented an actor in the society of Curaçao (2). I continued by introducing the project and the basics in Appreciative Inquiry (3). Followed by an exercise about the art of listening, from which a bridge was made to interviewing (4). We shared our previous interview experiences and collectively came up with some interview tips and tricks. I complemented these with some interview guidelines which were based on my Appreciative Inquiry handbook, hand-outs from interview trainings I followed on Utrecht University and my own experiences. The participants furthermore practiced interviewing on each other by using the questions of the project (5 & 8). In between each exercise there was time to collectively discuss the experiences during the exercise (6). Every participant received a training hand-out alongside the interview questions in three languages (English, Papiamentu and Dutch). The hand-out can be found in Appendix 6. The last 25 minutes were spent on the practicalities of the interview process: who to interview? How to record or write down notes during the interviews? When should the interviews be finished (9)?

After conducting the interviews, the interviewers have come together again to collectively discuss their experiences and make a first step in the analysis of the data by identifying important stories in small groups. In this meeting they also thought of a way to share the stories with other people. This is what the meeting looked like (for a more elaborate version of the programme see Appendix 7):

1. Welcome (15 min)

2. Fun exercise (10 min)
3. Sharing stories & Searching for patterns (45 min)
4. Present your findings to the rest of the group (45 min)
5. Break & Fill in short Survey about the project (15 min)
6. What to do with the results? (30 min)
7. How to continue? (15 min)
8. Ending (5 min)

The meeting started with a short introduction and there was space to share some experiences (1), followed by an exercise where the participants were asked to imagine the floor was a map of their island and stand on their own *bario* by figuring out together what the map looked like (2). The participants each told the group a small story about their *bario*, while metaphorically 'standing' on their *bario*. This exercise was meant to create an atmosphere of cooperation and a level of trust between the participants. The participants were split up in groups of five and asked to share the most inspiring stories they heard during the interviews (3). They were invited to make a physical representation of some sort on a large piece of paper, to share with the rest of the group (4). After filling in a short survey about the entire project (5), we continued by discussing the value of the results and the steps to take from here (6 & 7). In the end the participants were sincerely thanked for their participation and everyone received a certificate of participation (8).

Of course these meetings were also interventions and they could be seen as part of the development process of the participants, which is why I will describe the meetings in Chapter 5 as well. In that context I will pay more attention to the participants themselves and what they said and how they developed through these meetings.

**Observations.** Throughout the project, observations have played an important role. Walsh (2004) distinguishes between four observational roles: the complete participant, the complete observer, the participant as observer and the observer as participant. He argues that most ethnographers will position themselves somewhere between the third and the fourth role, because they should avoid the risk of 'going native', but need to seek ways in which they will understand local sense-making from within. In this research project I have tried to find a balance between these two observational roles as well. Especially during the first few weeks of my stay, there was a risk of 'going native', since I was mainly a 'participant as observer'. During the project 'Curaçao, our nation' I was sometimes a 'participant as observer', since I was actively engaged in the day-to-day activities of the project together with the We Lead board. However, I have tried to take a modest position and let the local participants and the We Lead board contribute where possible to leave space for the local cultural constructions and avoid that the project will depend solely on me, since the idea is that the project will continue to exist after I leave. I was therefore more of an 'observer as participant' in other situations (Walsh, 2004).

I have constantly written my experiences down in the form of 'field notes', which are, as is a common practice while doing observations, split up in the literal things I saw and experienced and the feelings they evoked in me.

There is a lot of debate about the role of field notes and the way they should be written down in the field of anthropology (Sanjek, 1990). Common practice is to 'jot down' the most important observations while being 'in the field'. These 'jottings' are subsequently drawn up at home in the form of more extensive 'field notes'. Furthermore, most anthropologists keep an intensive personal diary as well and also consider this as data. Some integrate these personal experiences and feelings in the field notes, while others keep them apart in a personal diary. Even though there is a considerable amount of literature on writing field notes, each anthropologist needs to think of his or her own 'system' (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995; Sanjek, 1990). As Holstein and Gubrium note, '*All field notes are inscriptions—not literal reproductions—of field realities.*' (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008: 386). It is impossible not to transform events and scenes according to conventions or preconceptions. Traditional or naturalist ethnographers are concerned with providing a 'snapshot' of the field and therefore need the field notes to be as accurate a representation as possible, whereas constructionist ethnographers are '*more concerned with what members do with words*' (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008: 386). These written notes are complemented with pictures I have made with my photo camera, to provide a visual account of my observations.

### **3.3 Respondents and Participants**

It follows from the Appreciative Inquiry approach that the 'whole system' should be involved in the research project (Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987; Ludema, 2001; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Therefore, I did not want to exclude any specific group from participating in the project and I have tried to involve as many different people as possible. In the first phase of the research project, I talked to all sorts of people about Curaçao and its future. I literally talked to everyone I saw or met during my stay in such diverse settings as during carnival, in a shop, at a bar and at someone's home. It was not my aim to have a 'representative' sample of the people of Curaçao, but to include different voices. Because I was a 'stranger' on the island, I felt I could easily move between different groups on the island, such as rich or poor, Dutch or Yu di Kòrsou, which enabled me to talk to a diverse set of people in diverse settings.

From my relational constructionist orientation, it follows that I wanted to organise processes that promote a non subject-object way of relating. Consequently, there was no hard differentiation between the 'researcher' on the one hand and 'the researched' on the other hand. Rather, the participants in the research project can be thought of as co-researchers. Throughout this text I will mention the 'participants' of the project Curaçao, our nation, which are both the young interviewers and the people that were interviewed. To avoid confusion on the part of the reader, I will refer to the youngsters that attended the workshops and entered into conversations with their fellow inhabitants as the 'interviewers' and the people that they entered into conversations with as the 'interviewees'. However, I do want to stress that this is a somewhat artificial difference. The interviews can be thought of as conversations of 'equals' and there was no hard differentiation between 'interviewers' and 'interviewees' either. The language of 'interviewers' and 'interviewees' furthermore suggests a more traditional interview setting, but in lack of a more fitting name for either group and the readability of the text, I nevertheless chose to use this language.

At one point the young participants who were going to conduct the interviews with fellow inhabitants had to be recruited and selected. It was pretty difficult to find youngsters willing to participate in the project. May was an especially busy month with exams, so most youngsters did not have much spare time. While I wanted to include participants from different backgrounds and was eager to include youngsters from poorer neighbourhoods, in the end we were glad with everyone who wanted to join at all. Still, there were participants from all sorts of different neighbourhoods, though most of them were students or planning to become students. For some reason most of the participants were girls. Their ages ranged from 17 to 31. I did not want to add a selection procedure to the project, because everyone who wanted to participate was welcome to join.

In the training session there was some time reserved to address the topic of choosing respondents. There was a slight difference here between the two groups. The class of Hospitality and Tourism Management students was encouraged to talk to people with different national backgrounds, since the course this project was integrated in was Cultural Management and the teacher required that they learn more about the different cultures on Curaçao from participating in the project. As one participant noted in her report:

*'The individuals that are being interviewed must have different ethnical backgrounds, but all must consider Curaçao as their island.'*

In the other group the participants were encouraged to talk to different sorts of people. Examples given were differences in age, gender, education level, ethnic background and neighbourhood. The following was mentioned in their training hand-out:

*'Interview at least 5 people before the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May. The more interviews and people involved, the better, so it would be great if you manage to interview more people. Interview at least 2 people outside of your family. Try to interview different sorts of people' (Hand-out training, see Appendix 6).*

In both groups the participants were encouraged to talk to both people in their personal circle as people they did not know before. The people that were approached by the participants were in general willing to participate; as one interviewer notes:

*'Everyone who participated was happy to do so and answered all the questions asked truthfully. This was seen when the participants took their time to think about the question asked in order to answer it.'*

### **3.4 Analysing the data**

These four research techniques have resulted in different forms of data: field notes, fragments of a more personal diary, transcripts of the informal ethnographic interviews, interview reports from the interviewers, reflection reports from the interviewers, pictures, documents, e-mails and other artefacts, such as posters, that were created during the process. Before analysing the data, I needed to 'prepare' the data. The field notes were all typed out, as was the case with the interviews. When it was not possible to record an interview, I have typed out the conversation as soon as possible. After this stage of preparation, I have begun with 'coding' all the data. I have used an emergent approach in coding; the codes were not set beforehand, but emerged from

the data. This is referred to as 'Open Coding'. In a later stage I have moved to 'Axial Coding' and 'Selective Coding', to look for patterns in the data (Boeije, 2010). According to Holstein and Gubrium (2008) the procedures of coding, categorisation and comparison can be used in a constructionist ethnography as well. I have explicitly chosen not to use software in the coding process. The coding software I had access to is mainly designed for a 'content analysis' and using this software encourages you to think in terms of a content analysis and in terms of a hierarchical 'coding tree'. Since I was mainly looking for stories, I did not deem this software useful in this context. I therefore coded all the interviews 'by hand'; I have printed all the interviews, field notes and other documents and I have written down words in the margin. When reading through the interviews and the accompanying codes a second time, I began to see patterns and re-labelled some of the codes accordingly. I have used stories as the unit of analysis and not the individual respondents. I use the definition of a story of Boje (1995):

'By a story, I mean an oral or written performance involving two or more people interpreting past or anticipated experience.' (Boje, 1995: 1000).

In this view the storyteller and the story listener are co-constructors of stories that get enacted simultaneously at different points in and around the organisation or group. There is also not 'one story' but a multiplicity of stories that can conflict with each other. Needless to say, I have not quantified the data in any way. The stories of Chapter 4 emerged from the process of open, axial and selective coding.

In the two workshops where stories about the interview process were shared, the participants have done a first analysis of the data. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) write about 'Appreciative Inquiry meaning making' as well. They name four characteristics of the process:

1. It takes place over time rather than at some point in time designated as the conclusion of the inquiry;
2. It focuses on participant experiences rather than on consultant highlights;
3. It revolves around qualitative, narrative analysis rather than quantitative analysis;
4. It encourages attention to higher ground rather than common ground (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010: 161-163).

The authors furthermore describe how such a process could take place:

'A useful tool for meaning making is narrative analysis, a process that helps people extract themes and energizers from the stories that have been collected through appreciative interviews. In small groups of six or eight, participants take turns sharing the most inspiring story they heard during the interviews. As stories are shared, group members listen and together find the meaning in them by naming the root causes of success embedded in the stories. Ideas can be recorded on a worksheet or flip chart page (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010: 163).

The second workshop with the young interviewers was based upon the process as described by Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010). The sharing of the most inspiring story or stories, the splitting up in small groups and working with visual aids to share the stories were used in the workshops (as described above under 'Group meetings'). The first analysis of the participants was used to come to the themes in Chapter 5. It was my

intention to use stories as the unit of analysis, similar to the stories in Chapter 4. However, there were several practical aspects that hindered a story-analysis. First of all, the interviews were conducted by others and not by me. It is considerably more difficult to do a story-analysis when reading mere reports of others, especially when these are not literal transcripts of the conversations that took place. Narrative and story-analysis are usually preceded by so-called 'narrative interviews' with as little questions and structure as possible. Because we worked with a longer set of questions in this research project, it was difficult to look for stories. I first noticed this when the participants did a first analysis of the data during the workshops and came up with patterns rather than stories. When I tried to look for stories myself, I noticed I kept thinking in terms of patterns and in the end decided it was not possible to do a story-analysis because of the practical aspects just mentioned. Instead, there emerged several patterns from the interviews. To come to these patterns I engaged in the process of open, axial and selective coding (Boeije, 2010) again.

It should be stressed that the analysing of the data is not seen as strictly separate from the data collection. The data was analysed at various stages during the data collection phase, which helps to direct the data collection (Boeije, 2010). In this context Holstein and Gubrium introduce the practice of 'analytic bracketing', which is best explained in the following fragment:

'The back-and-forth movement of analytic bracketing is far from arbitrary; it is keyed to emergent analytic needs. As the researcher documents constructive activities, questions regarding what is being constructed, what resources are used, and what conditions shape the process provoke a shift in analytic stance—a change in analytic brackets that is necessary to address such questions. Subsequently, the analyst's attention to the whats under consideration will, in turn, prompt the researcher to ask how these features of lived experience came to be regarded as real, inducing yet another shift in brackets.' (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008: 391).

### **3.5 Quality**

In postmodern approaches to science, there are different quality standards than in traditional approaches to science. As Kvale puts it '*In modern social science, the concepts of validity, reliability and generalisation have obtained the status of a scientific holy trinity.*' (Kvale, 2002: 300). All 'true believers of science' should strive for those concepts. While these concepts are perfectly legitimate in the discourse of 'modern' science, they lose their value and usefulness in other discourses or contexts. This raises some important questions: What counts as good work in a more postmodern science? How can quality be 'designed' in the research process? How can we reflect upon or evaluate postmodern research? One of the main points of critique on postmodern research is that there are no 'objective standards', or in other words 'anything goes'. Several authors suggest that there is no use in judging postmodern work according to modern standards, since both are different and should therefore be judged according to different standards (Chia, 1996b; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Kvale, 2002; Gergen & Thatchenkerry, 2006). So what we need are a new set of methods, values or standards to ensure and reflect upon the quality of postmodern work. The critique that therefore 'anything goes' in a more postmodern science is however unjustified. Because in a more postmodern or social constructionist approach to science, it is acknowledged that by doing research and writing a research report you do not describe reality, but create new realities, the responsibility of the researcher becomes even bigger. With that ethics and reflexivity become

central aspects in ensuring the quality of postmodern work (Chia, 1996a; Rhodes & Brown, 2005). Besides that, the local usefulness of the research becomes extremely important.

Kvale (2002) has developed a postmodern notion of validity, where the craftsmanship of the researcher, the testing of research claims through dialogue and the pragmatic value of the research are the three aspects of validity. The first form is concerned with the credibility and craftsmanship of the researcher. To put it differently, the validity of the research is derived from the *person* of the researcher. Communicative validity refers to the developing of 'truth' through communicative processes. The validity of the research is tested in dialogue between the researcher and the subjects, the scientific community or the wider society. The third form, pragmatic validity, stresses that knowledge is 'valid' when it helps us to take actions with the desired result. These 'desired results' cannot be objectively determined, which is why ethics and values are so important in research.

I have explicitly paid attention to these three forms of validity during the research process in order to ensure the quality of my research. Even though I have become more 'skilled' as a researcher over the years, I am still a junior researcher and am developing my craftsmanship. By including auto ethnographic aspects in the research project, I, 'the person' of the researcher, am the focus of research as well. Readers can follow me on my journey and see what choices I made and judge my 'craftsmanship' for themselves. The research claims were developed in dialogue with the participants of the project; in one-on-one discussions, in the workshops and at a later stage through discussing this text. As a result, the description of the process as put forward in this text, is not solely based on my personal understanding of the process. Nevertheless, I am the author of this text and had to make numerous choices in which stories and quotes to include and exclude. I have sent the draft version of this thesis to several of the participants in order to start a dialogue on the research claims I am making. Some of the comments I received, reminded me of the different understandings different people can have of the same occurrences. For instance my Dutch colleague of *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk* did not recognise herself in my version of events and did not want the text to become public like this. Together we tried to come to a version where we could both recognise ourselves in. Lastly, the research project should help us to take action. In this case, the research project itself is a form of action, since inquiry and intervention are seen as simultaneous (Hosking, 2006). I furthermore explicitly paid attention to which actions should follow from the project. I scheduled a meeting with the We Lead board about how to continue the project and it looks as if they are going to continue the project by continuing with the 4-D Cycle of Appreciative Inquiry. There are furthermore several ideas about making a magazine about the project, launching a media campaign and presenting the stories on a big event.



## **Chapter 4: Getting started: my early weeks on Curaçao**

In this chapter we will travel to Curaçao and follow me on my early weeks on the island in which I tried to adjust to the local culture and rhythm. I will tell this story in an ethnographic way. In paragraph 4.1 I will revisit the conversations I had with people about the new *Pais Kòrsou* and the culture of the island. I noticed several recurring stories were told. In these early weeks I got involved in multiple initiatives, which I will describe in paragraph 4.2. I explicitly tried to give myself some time to get used to the local ways of going on and meet people and from there on try to organise something like an Appreciative Inquiry project. These weeks were simultaneously really interesting as well as full of doubts about my research project. In paragraph 4.3 I will describe some of my doubts and my struggles to decide how to move forward. Partly due to conversations with others, I got myself together again and moved along into a more focused direction and an actual Appreciative Inquiry project. All the conversations and my experiences in each initiative contributed in one way or another to the Appreciative Inquiry project 'Curaçao, our nation' that eventually emerged.

### **4.1 Adjusting to the local rhythm**

During the weeks before my actual departure date to Curaçao, I felt I could not imagine my stay on the island or the way my project was going to turn out. Whenever I tried to visualise the three months ahead of me, my mind went blank. The full realisation of what I was up against hit me in the plane to Curaçao, when the young girl from Curaçao next to me asked me what I was going to do on Curaçao. She asked me whether I had any friends or family living on the island, on which I had to answer in the negative. She was furthermore shocked to find out I was going to live for three months with a woman I had never met before: "*I would never dare to do that.*", she said. From my previous visit to Curaçao I knew the island has many different faces; there seem to be several different local-cultural realities that appear to exist alongside each other. Even though I had only stayed on Curaçao for a month, I had the feeling I had a basic understanding of the way 'things were done around here'. I had therefore not expected to experience a 'culture shock', but something like that seemed to happen in my first weeks on the island. I explicitly wanted to be 'closer' to the people of Curaçao during this visit and therefore took a language course in Papiamentu before I left and decided to stay with a guest family. I arranged this through a girl I met when I followed an elective in anthropology at Utrecht University. This girl, Simone, had stayed with Dula, my guest mother, before and was going to stay there again for three months. She arranged for me to stay there as well and become her 'roommate' for six weeks. Simone was actually the only person I knew on the island, even though I only met her a few times. I was relieved that she offered to pick me up from *Hato*, the local airport.

When I arrived, I soon found out everything around me was different. I switched from my Dutch diet with mainly vegetables to a diet of meat with rice every day, with local dishes as 'cabritu' (goat), 'iguana' (iguana) and 'kolo stoba' (stew with cabbage and pig's tail) on the menu. The television was turned on with maximum volume from early in the morning, on which we watched American TV shows such as 'The prize is right' and 'The Maury Show'. In the evening we switched to the local TV station to watch the local news and more importantly the daily draw of the local lottery, *Wega di number Kòrsou*, for which Dula bought 'numbers' on a

daily basis. The news often featured stories about car accidents, assaults and drugs. I shared a car with Simone, since people that can afford it rather take the car than walk or use the public transport, mainly because of the high temperatures. Everybody around me except Simone spoke Papiamentu; which was despite my efforts to learn the language difficult to follow at first. In the meantime I learned to dance 'bachata' and 'merengue', for it was incomprehensible that I could go out to a bar without these basic dancing skills. My explanations that Dutch people often dance individually or in a circle did not do much good. In my early weeks I often went along with Dula on her daily chores; to the supermarket, to receive her social support at the bank, to visit her 88 year old mother and to the casino in the evenings. The pace of life was much slower than what I was used to; I learned not to make two succeeding appointments, because one appointment could well last hours. Before I knew it, I was part of a whole new world, with a new family and new friends, a new wardrobe and new daytime activities. An overall change of lifestyle of which I realised the full extent only after I was confronted with my 'Dutch life' again,



**Picture 1** Dula and me on the porch in front of Dula's home

when my mother and sister came to visit me after one and a half months on the island. In my neighbourhood, *Muizenberg*, Simone and I were the only *Makamba's* (European Dutchmen) and people I met on the island were always surprised to find out where I lived. The man I rented my car from, had to come to my house to fix my car one day and expressed his surprise: "A *makamba* in *Muizenberg*? I did not expect that!"<sup>15</sup> Even though the island was full of 'European Dutch' people, referred to as 'Makamba's' by the locals, I found myself in a circle where I was constantly the only Makamba or 'white' person, sometimes joined by Simone. These are only some examples of my life on Curaçao and are therefore not meant to be exhaustive, but serves merely to provide an illustration of my living circumstances on the island.

**Conversations about Curaçao.** On Curaçao everything seemed to happen *poko-poko* (slow), because of the high temperatures and the local culture and especially in my first week because it was Carnival, which is the national event of the year. *Poko-poko* literally means 'slow', but the 'poko-poko principle' has a juridical and sociological meaning as well. There are still Dutch standards used in law and government on Curaçao that do not always fit the local culture and context. The Court of the Netherlands Antilles ruled in favour of the local government in 1999, by stating that the Dutch standards were not always realistic on a small tropical island. In the following years, there are references to the principle in both jurisdiction and the broader implementation of Dutch standards by the local government (De Haan, 2004). Moreover, people make use of the *poko-poko* principle as a 'way of life', comparable to the *mañana, mañana* of the Spaniards (Boessenkool et al. (eds.), 2009: 22). I wanted to use my first few weeks to adjust to the local cultural ways of going on and try to organise something later on from *within* the local-cultural reality instead of imposing something from the outside. Especially since I heard from several local people that people from Curaçao are often suspicious when it comes to initiatives from a Makamba; they are known for claiming to 'know better' than the locals. It seems there is a role pattern in which the Dutch people are storied as 'experts' or 'teachers' and the people of Curaçao as

<sup>15</sup> "Een makamba in Muizenberg? Dat had ik niet verwacht.."

'students' that need to be taught, or in other words a subject-object way of relating (Freire, 1970; Hosking, 2006). My relational constructionist orientation impelled me to look for ways to come to non subject-object ways of relating. I did not know where and how to start at first. Freire (1970) suggests a shift from talking 'about' to talking 'with', so I started with talking and mostly listening to people and learn what they had to say about their island. I explicitly tried to take an open genuine posture towards all the people I encountered and tried to learn about their opinions and stories without judging them. In this way I hoped to open up to multiple and differing constructions (Hosking, 2006).

What better way to start than to celebrate carnival together with Dula and Simone and seize this opportunity to talk informally with people I never met before? I mostly started by asking whether anything had changed since the date '10-10-10', to get an idea of how people experienced the constitutional restructuring and their new country. These conversations emerged spontaneously and somewhere in the conversation I introduced 10-10-10 or my research project as the reason for my stay on the island, upon which the conversation turned to *Pais Kòrsou*. During the festivities I talked to a man who had worked for the police all his life and wants to run for Prime Minister of Curaçao in the coming elections. He told me about the tensions between 'white' people, mostly the Dutch *Makamba* and local people from Curaçao, *Yu di Kòrsou*. However, there is no strict boundary between the two. This man could be considered to be 'white', but his family has lived on the island for generations and Papiamentu is his first language. Still, in his opinion: "*people always blame the white people around here.*"<sup>16</sup> When he heard that my grandparents lived on the island for twenty years and my mother grew up here, he was pleasantly surprised. Now, I was no longer 'another Dutch girl', but a potential *Yu di Kòrsou*. When he heard I also learned to speak the local language, he was sure my research was going to work out; "*People here roll out the red carpet for you if they find out you speak Papiamentu.*"<sup>17</sup> Later that evening I tested my language skills in practice with a few local youth 'from the street' who hung out in Otrabanda, near the water. When I mentioned *Pais Kòrsou*, one of them immediately said: "*Oh, 10-10-10. Everything is stricter. There are more rules, more Dutch rules. For example Mambo Beach used to be open till three or four in the morning and now it has to close at twelve.*"<sup>18</sup> Another boy only spoke Papiamentu, so I asked him whether he thought if anything had changed; he did not have to think long: "*Ningun*" (nothing).

In the weeks after Carnival I had conversations of this kind on a daily basis. The conversations with Dula were of invaluable worth and it is hard to put into words how much I learned from her. Besides talking to Dula, I tried to start up a conversation about Curaçao everywhere I went to learn how different people think and talk about their island. It was relatively easy to get a conversation going with different sorts of people due to the local culture. Everywhere I went, I almost automatically had a conversation with someone, be it in a shop or on the street. It seemed like most people I met had all the time in the world to talk to me and were genuinely interested in what I was doing here on the island, contrary to the Dutch society I was used to, where people are often on a tight schedule and more 'businesslike' in attitude. After a while I began to see some recurring stories emerge from all the conversations.

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<sup>16</sup> "Mensen hier geven altijd de blanken de schuld van alles."

<sup>17</sup> "als je hier Papiamentu spreekt rolt iedereen hier de rode loper voor je uit."

<sup>18</sup> "Oh, 10-10-10. Alles is strenger. Er zijn veel meer regels, Nederlandse regels en daarom is bijvoorbeeld Mambo nu nog maar tot 12 uur open in plaats van tot 3 of 4 uur."

**“Nothing has changed”.** The first ‘story’ that struck me, was not so much a story of many words, as the absence of one. Like the boy I talked to during Carnival, more people had the feeling that ‘nothing had changed’ since Curaçao had become an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Moreover, they did not seem interested at all in the constitutional restructuring or the new status of their island. I was confronted with this story for the first time during my flight to Curaçao. Because the flight was overbooked, I was ‘upgraded’ to comfort class together with a girl my age and her baby. We immediately bonded over our ‘luck’ and chatted during the flight. At some point, I made a remark to her that it was interesting that I had to fill in a form for the immigration service, while Curaçao and the Netherlands were part of the same Kingdom. She explained to me that this had recently changed: *“Curaçao is no longer a part of the Netherlands now.”*<sup>19</sup> I attempted to explain to her that Curaçao was still a part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands; the only thing that has changed is that the overarching country the Netherlands Antilles has ceased to exist. The girl seemed to listen to me out of politeness, but my explanations did not seem to interest her much. For me this was a reminder that the constitutional restructuring is not something that interests everyone, especially not the technical aspects of it. Of course, there are several other ways to make sense of this small conversation. We probably had assumptions about the other. Perhaps she did not expect me to know or be interested about Curaçao like so many other tourists? Or could it be that I already assumed she would not be that interested in the constitutional restructuring? Maybe I hurt her feelings by claiming to ‘know better’ than she did about her own country? Over the weeks, I have met several people who simply shrugged when I asked them about *Pais Kòrsou* or 10-10-10; they were not interested in the constitutional restructuring and appeared to have lost their overall interest in politics and everything that was associated with politics. ‘Politics’ and ‘politicians’ seemed to be close to abusive words.

**10-10-10 as a way station for independency.** The second story had to do with independency. At a meeting with students from the faculty of law at the UNA (University of the Netherlands Antilles), I spoke to several students during the break about the new *Pais Kòrsou* and what people thought about it so far. A young girl said: *“A lot has changed since 10-10-10, there is more pride and there are more nationalistic feelings, in a good way.”*<sup>20</sup> Upon which her classmate said, *“10-10-10 is a way station for independency”*<sup>21</sup>. He was of the opinion that Curaçao is ‘not ready’ for independency presently, but that this is where we should be headed eventually, for instance in 50 years time. The opinions differ on whether independency is desirable. A middle aged student who used to work for the police said: *“I want to be independent within the Kingdom. They talk about a mother country here, it is not a mother but an oppressor.”*<sup>22</sup> Someone else said that: *“a whole part of the people is being pushed into marginality, the vision of people in society who do not want to have anything to do with the Netherlands any more.”*<sup>23</sup> During a ‘reunion’ of people from my language school, I spoke to some European Dutch people who emigrated to Curaçao. My teacher was on Curaçao to celebrate Carnival and had invited all her ex-students

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<sup>19</sup> “Curaçao hoort niet meer bij Nederland.”

<sup>20</sup> “Er is wel veel veranderd na 10-10-10, er is meer trots en er zijn meer nationalistische gevoelens, in de positieve zin van het woord.”

<sup>21</sup> “10-10-10 is een tussenstop naar onafhankelijkheid.”

<sup>22</sup> “Ik wil onafhankelijk zijn binnen het Koninkrijk. Ze spreken hier over het ‘moederland’. Het is geen moeder, maar een onderdrukker.”

<sup>23</sup> “men is bezig om een heel gedeelte van de bevolking weg te drukken, de visie van de samenleving van mensen die niet meer met Nederland te maken willen hebben.”

that happened to be on Curaçao for a *serbes friu*<sup>24</sup> at a local *snèk*<sup>25</sup>. The conversation turned to the local politics at a certain point. Some people expressed their worries about a political party which “wants to throw all the Dutch people out.”<sup>26</sup> An elderly woman who was not yet an official resident of Curaçao was advised to start making arrangements “before it’s too late”<sup>27</sup>. This same elderly woman thought the political stream that strives for independency and has anti-Dutch sentiments, was mainly caused by 10-10-10; “10-10-10 gave a new boost to the desire for independency.”<sup>28</sup> A young Dutch woman who runs a real estate company did not agree with the rest and thought not that much had changed. However, she was wondering why all of a sudden people have a problem with the situation as it is, “it was the same three years ago and then you heard nobody about it.”<sup>29</sup> She did not think it would come to the point that the European Dutch people would actually be thrown out; “nobody knows exactly who a *Yu di Kòrsou* is around here, it changes every time, it is far too complicated to decide who is Dutch or not.”<sup>30</sup> For some people, mentioning independency is like swearing in church. There are for example Dutch people that want to ‘protect’ the people of Curaçao from their own politicians; the Netherlands can function as a safeguard who can ‘check things’. Some people from Curaçao are also of the opinion that the Netherlands ‘should check things’, since “People are making a mess out of it here.”<sup>31</sup>

**“Everything is better in the Netherlands”.** The third story that seemed to buzz around the island was that ‘everything was better in the Netherlands’. At the university, a boy my age asked me how I liked my stay on the island. When I said I enjoyed it very much, he reacted with the following words: “But everything is better in the Netherlands.” I was surprised: “Not everything is better there. There are a lot of things better on Curaçao, right?” He did not seem to agree: “Well.. most things are better in the Netherlands.. compared to the rest of the world and to here.” I started to feel uneasy, could I as a resident from the wealthy Netherlands say that I liked Curaçao precisely because it is less organised and wealthy: “Ok, maybe if you talk about wealth you are right, but there are also things that are good about Curaçao, I like being here..” He looked at me hesitantly and said “yes, probably...”<sup>32</sup> Dula expressed her desire to live in the Netherlands often, and she was also of the opinion that almost ‘everything was better in the Netherlands’: “Once you have been to the Netherlands, you know everything is better there. Before I went there, I had no idea, I was used to how it was here. But once you have lived there, you think differently about everything here.”<sup>33</sup> I stayed a weekend on *Banda Bou*, the western part of the island in a so-called ‘weekendhome’ with Dula’s family and friends. When I asked a friend of Dula what she thought about their new country, she replied: “Everything is more expensive nowadays in the supermarkets.”<sup>34</sup> Which is an answer I have heard regularly, complemented in various ways with worries about the youth, crime and car accidents. There seemed to be some sort of ‘story of decline’ (Stone, 2001), everything is getting worse on the island and the island seems to be on the verge of something bad. This made me think of something the director of an

<sup>24</sup> Cold beer in Papiamentu

<sup>25</sup> Snack bar in Papiamentu

<sup>26</sup> “alle Nederlanders het land uit.”

<sup>27</sup> “Voor het te laat is.”

<sup>28</sup> “10-10-10 heeft weer een nieuwe boost gegeven aan het verlangen naar onafhankelijkheid.”

<sup>29</sup> “Drie jaar geleden was alles ook zo en toen was er niks aan de hand, waarom nu ineens wel?”

<sup>30</sup> “Niemand weet precies wie een *Yu di Kòrsou* is, het is veel te ingewikkeld om te besluiten wie Nederlands is en wie niet.”

<sup>31</sup> “Mensen maken er een zootje van”.

<sup>32</sup> “Alles is beter in Nederland.” “Niet alles toch.. er zijn toch ook veel dingen beter hier op Curaçao?” “nou.. het meeste is toch wel beter in Nederland, vergeleken met de rest van de wereld en met hier.” “Ja ok, qua rijkdom wel.. maar er zijn toch ook wel dingen goed aan Curaçao, ik vind het fijn om hier te zijn.” “ja...”

<sup>33</sup> “Als je eenmaal in Nederland hebt gewoond, weet je dat alles daar beter is. Voor ik daar heenging had ik geen idee. Ik was gewend aan hoe het hier was. Maar als je daar eenmaal hebt gewoond, denk je anders over alles hier.”

<sup>34</sup> “Alles is tegenwoordig duur, in de supermarkt.”

insurance company mentioned to my colleagues and me in 2009. In his opinion people have talked about the 'end of Curaçao' for over 400 years, it was always on the verge of collapsing, going bankrupt or worse, but "Curaçao is like a cat, it always lands on its four feet"<sup>35</sup> (Boessenkool et al. (eds.), 2009). After a while, I got a bit worried with the 'negative' answers; for how was an Appreciative Inquiry going to fit with all this? Prompted by my worries, I started asking some people, but what is good about Curaçao? Again I heard references to the Netherlands, which seemed to function as an example for many people. However, not in every sense, because the youngsters I spoke to who referred to 'more rules' or explicitly mentioned 'more Dutch rules', tended to regard this as a negative development. Besides the stricter opening hours of beach clubs, 10-10-10 was associated with the newly introduced paid parking system in *Punda* and *Otrabanda*.

**The place where you are born.** When I would stick to these three stories mentioned above, I would not do justice to the love people have for the island and the strong attachment to the island most people experience. This quote by a young man I spoke to in a beach club illustrates this nicely: "*It is the place where I was born. Here the weather is fine, the food is good and here you are free.*"<sup>36</sup> These elements were often named, complemented with Curaçao as the place where a lot of family members live. Every now and then someone was hopeful about the future of the new *Pais Kòrsou*, for instance when a car with two policemen pulled up next to my car when I was buying food at a *trùk i pan* (mobile snack bar) with Simone. At first we thought we were in trouble, but they appeared to be simply interested in what we were doing on the island and liked to learn more about our research. One police man said it was not realistic to expect that something had changed after only six months and that we needed to be patient: "*It is going to become better. Just wait and see.*"<sup>37</sup> While some youngsters complained about the new system with paid parking, a former minister of Curaçao, who used to be responsible for the constitutional restructuring saw this as the example that something can change on the island: "*Well, look, for me there are a few things changing in the attitude (...) Something simple, when you walked through the city, until seven months ago, you found cars everywhere. Under your desk there's a car, everywhere. And now, when you walk through town, all the cars are parked neatly, no double parking, we have a parking garage. These are the same people!*"<sup>38</sup>

These stories exist alongside each other and are sometimes conflicting; such as for example 'everything is better in the Netherlands' versus '10-10-10 as a way station for independency'. Since the unit of analysis is stories instead of individuals or groups in society, these (conflicting) stories can be told by the same person and cause tension within a person as well as within society at large.

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<sup>35</sup> "Curaçao is als een kat, het komt altijd op vier poten terecht."

<sup>36</sup> "Het is de plek waar ik geboren ben. Het is hier lekker weer, het eten is goed en je bent hier vrij."

<sup>37</sup> "Het wordt wel beter. Wacht maar.."

<sup>38</sup> Nou kijk voor mij er zijn een paar leuke dingen die aan het veranderen zijn in onze attitude.(...) Iets heel eenvoudigs, als je in de stad loopt, liep, tot zeven maanden geleden, dan vond je overal auto's. Bijna onder je lessenaar staat er een auto, hiervoor, overal. Als je nu in de stad loopt, alle auto's staan netjes, bijna niemand staat dubbel geparkeerd, we hebben een parkeergarage. Het zijn diezelfde mensen!"

## 4.2 Getting involved with multiple initiatives

Besides conducting informal ethnographic interviews with people, I used my early weeks on the island to explore possibilities for a potential Appreciative Inquiry project. Before leaving for Curaçao, I had decided to work with the initiative *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk* (Young People of the Kingdom), since I felt the need, prompted by my supervisor, to choose a local community to work with and have a place to start. Before I knew it, I was involved in several initiatives and had some decisions to make about how to move forward to come to an actual master project. I will first tell something about the three initiatives I got involved with.

***Jongeren van het Koninkrijk (JvhK)*** is a group of young people who are starting up an organisation that aims to bring young people from the different parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands together. This organisation can be seen as a fruit of the recent restructuring of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The press release of *JvhK* explicitly mentions that the people on the different islands have chosen to remain a part of the Kingdom in referenda preceding the restructuring and have chosen for the continuance of some sort of relation with the Netherlands (Website *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk*); hence, the idea to deepen the relation. In this press release it is furthermore mentioned that people from different parts of the Kingdom do not really ‘know’ each other and that their opinions are considerably influenced by negative stereotypes. *JvhK* wants to function like a ‘bridge’ between the different groups in the Kingdom and to the future. In order to perform that function, they want to organise lectures, discussions and social activities where different groups can meet each other and share their ideas about the future of the Kingdom. They focus mainly on ‘young people’ (in their definition people up to the age of 35), because they are independent and open-minded; and in their words: “*young people are the future.*”<sup>39</sup> However, they do want to involve other generations as well in their activities and invite them to share their experiences. I came up with the idea to help set up a Curaçaoan department of *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk* and somehow use the ideas of Appreciative Inquiry in this context. One of the two founders of the initiative, Irene, was to be on Curaçao during my first month, so I started up a conversation with her when I came to the island. We talked about ways to involve local youngsters in our initiative. During one of our first meetings Irene, who has some contacts on the University of the Netherlands Antilles (UNA), said: “*the kingdom is something that is alive here with the students. No doubt that some students are willing to participate in the initiative.*”<sup>40</sup> Irene was asked to give a guest lecture at the faculty of law in March and I went along to talk with students about joining our initiative. After the lecture, Irene and I met up with three students from the faculty of law who were interested in the initiative, Timothy, Angy and Andrea, a couple of

times and immediately started brainstorming with them about a first activity on Curaçao. It should be an ‘interactive lecture’, where we could hear young people’s opinions and make them aware of the initiative. Because the exams were scheduled in May and June, we decided upon a date in the end of April. During the first meeting, Timothy wondered whether “*(...) the Kingdom is something that is*



**Picture 2** Meeting of *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk* at UNA

<sup>39</sup> “Jongeren zijn de toekomst.”

<sup>40</sup> “Het leeft daar en er zijn denk ik best mensen te vinden die zich hier voor in willen zetten.”

*alive with young people? We work with it every day, but what do other people think about it?*<sup>41</sup> Which was something I was wondering about as well. We brainstormed more about the initiative and its potentials. Angy suggested we could set up a youth parliament for the Kingdom and Timothy came up with the idea of organizing exchanges within the Kingdom.

In our early conversations, I noticed how Irene mainly focused on the future of the Kingdom, while I felt personally more connected to the future of Curaçao or *Pais Kòrsou*. I expected that the group of young people on Curaçao would mainly be concerned with the future of their island, perhaps in the context of the Kingdom, while Irene seemed to think that the future of Curaçao was not the main topic. In her opinion, the initiative should focus on the Kingdom as such: *“The focus on the Kingdom is what distinguishes JvhK from other initiatives.”*<sup>42</sup> To me, the Kingdom was quite an abstract notion, which did not seem to resonate with a large group on the island, while Irene, who moved in quite different circles than I did, thought that *“It touches the core of people’s lives here.”*<sup>43</sup> Irene tackled the topic from a judicial angle, which is quite logical since she is doing a PhD about the equality in the Kingdom at the faculty of law. On the contrary, I had the feeling the Kingdom could be translated into something that was close to the people, by pointing to the personal connections people have with the ‘Kingdom’: a lot of people have lived in the Netherlands for a while, have family in the Netherlands and visit the Netherlands on a regular basis to visit family and friends or to go on holiday. We often had a different view on things, which Irene mainly attributed to our different backgrounds: a judicial and an anthropological background (even though technically I am not an anthropologist). I struggled with our different views; how could I work with these differences and let our different backgrounds complement each other instead of divide us? How could we enter into a dialogue without fixing each other opinions and ideas as either ‘anthropologist’ or ‘judicial’ and because of that incompatible?

While I had heard a considerable number of people mention independence as a serious option, Irene preferred to take the results of the referenda as a starting point; as is in line with the starting point of *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk*. As a result, independence was not thought of as something we should pay attention to, since in 2005 only 5% voted for independence. To me it seemed that we should not take this as a premise, given that there are people and political parties thinking about or striving for independency. It seemed to me the desire for independency has increased since 2005 and the results of the referendum in 2009 hinted at a different sentiment in society. Therefore, I did not see a reason to exclude the opinions of people who strived for independency, while I had the feeling that independence was something Irene explicitly did not want to talk about. I furthermore got the feeling that she personally thought it was not a good idea to think about independency at this stage. I would like to hear and talk about the different perspectives of people on Curaçao and I started to wonder whether *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk* offered the context for this. Who were we to decide where people should or should not talk about? If we would decide for others what was ‘good’ to talk about, this would facilitate subject-object ways of relating (Van der Haar & Hoskin, 2004), while I wanted to try to come to non subject-object ways of relating. I noticed the initiative appealed extremely to certain parts of

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<sup>41</sup> “Is het Koninkrijk iets dat leeft onder jongeren? Wij werken er elke dag mee, maar wat denken andere mensen erover?”

<sup>42</sup> “De focus op het Koninkrijk is wat JvhK onderscheidt van andere initiatieven.”

<sup>43</sup> “Het raakt mensen in de kern van hun bestaan.”

the society on Curaçao, whilst other people I spoke to started to twist their face upon hearing the name *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk*. A journalist I was talking to exclaimed: “*It is so Dutch!*”<sup>44</sup>, while someone else said at a later stage “*I won’t come to your first lecture and sit there with all those legal experts, no way!*”<sup>45</sup> I did not want to give up on the initiative so easily, simply because I had some differences of opinion with one of the founders. So, I continued working with the initiative, while simultaneously working with other initiatives. On the other hand I began to think that JvhK did not prove to be the right context for my AI project on the island; the initiative seemed to me to exclude certain voices (related to independence), seemed to focus on a small target group at that point (mainly jurists) and the initiative somehow evoked feelings of irritation in some people (for example ‘too Dutch’).

**Participating in a project as student-assistant.** One of the people I was most looking forward to talking to was Valdemar Marcha, the professor who was the commissioner of our research project two years earlier and who had made a considerable contribution to our project. He told me that he liked my research proposal;

“*Your proposal is a thesis in itself!*”<sup>46</sup> And he continued with the following words:

*“In my opinion there are three things: your love for the island and the people here, your skills and talents and the culture here and the attitude of the people here. Right now, I think there is a slight tension between the first two and the third. You want to talk about the future. People here don’t think about the future. They live by the day. Or they are making plans for Carnival next year. Thinking about the future is a Dutch idea, it does not fit within our culture here.”*<sup>47</sup>



**Picture 3** With Valdemar Marcha

He was of the opinion that my whole proposal was perhaps too ‘planned’ or in other words too ‘Dutch’. We talked about the cultural differences between the Netherlands and the Caribbean. Valdemar Marcha referred to the different styles of governing as described by Levi-Strauss (1962): the ‘engineer’ and the ‘bricoleur’. The engineer likes to work with a plan, has a businesslike attitude and is focused on results, while the bricoleur lives from day-to-day and improvises with the materials and situations at hand. The Dutch can be compared to the engineer and the *Yu di Kòrsou* with the bricoleur. The journalist and writer Boeli van Leeuwen refers to the resourcefulness on Curaçao as the ‘ingenious anarchy’ (van Leeuwen, 1990). I said that I was explicitly trying not to come here with a blueprint for my research, but first get a feel of the local-cultural ways of going on, before moving on with my research project. Upon hearing this he became really enthusiastic. He complimented me on several later occasions on this attitude. However, after our conversation I did become worried that my idea to organise a project about the future of Curaçao did not fit with the local culture. As usual, I discussed this with Dula, my guest mother:

<sup>44</sup> “Het is zo Nederlands!”

<sup>45</sup> “Ik kom niet naar jullie lezing om daar een beetje tussen al die juristen te zitten, geen denken aan!”

<sup>46</sup> “Jouw opzet is al een hele scriptie!”

<sup>47</sup> “Naar mijn mening zijn er drie dingen: jouw liefde voor en betrokkenheid bij het eiland en de mensen, jouw talenten en kennis en de cultuur en de houding van de mensen hier. Nu denk ik dat er een spanning bestaat tussen de eerste twee en de derde. Jij wilt praten over de toekomst, maar mensen hier denken helemaal niet na over de toekomst. Mensen hier maken nu hooguit plannen voor carnaval van volgend jaar. Nadenken over de toekomst is een Nederlands idee, het past niet bij de cultuur hier.”

Joeri: “Valdemar Marcha said to me that the people here do not think about the future, which I thought of as the focus of my research, but it does not fit with the people here”

Dula: “I only live for today. I live for the here and now. Not for the future.”

Joeri: “Don’t you have any dreams for the future or things you want in life?”

Dula: “With the world as it is today? No.. The world has changed.. I would like to win a car though.”

Joeri: “And for your son and your grandchildren? Don’t you want a good future for them?”

Dula: “They all live in the Netherlands.. There is a better future for them there than here.”<sup>48</sup>

The talk with Professor Valdemar Marcha eventually led to a job as his student assistant on a project about the political process preceding 10-10-10, or in other words the process that led to the autonomous status of Curaçao within the Kingdom. I went along to interview former government officials and ministers who were involved with the constitutional restructuring. I learned that the parties involved had underestimated the amount of work that needed to be done to come to an autonomous country. Ideas that were made to involve the citizens of Curaçao to think along and plans that were written about nation building were no longer seen as a political priority and therefore left aside. When talking to these officials, I could understand better why a lot of people were not so interested in the restructuring or did not know much about it. It seemed to me there was an exclusive focus on the technical aspects of the restructuring. Valdemar Marcha introduced my research project in these conversations as well; notably, the government officials tried to turn my project into a research that solely focused on the government and policy level, which was not my intention. An interesting side effect of these conversations was that I had a chance to talk to some ‘respondents’ of our research project in 2009 (Boessenkool et al. (eds.), 2009). The research project had made a bigger impression on people than I had expected; everyone remembered the project and asked me a few questions about it. This made me realise that even though we did not explicitly work with ‘change’ in this research project, this does not mean that the research project did not make an impact. Because as Hosking (2006) notes ‘All acts now are seen as the potential to change how processes ‘go on’ and the change agency is ‘located’ in ongoing processes and not in ‘a change agent.’ (Hosking, 2006: 64). This excursion mainly provided me with an understanding of how (former) government officials had a very different outlook on 10-10-10 and were mostly concerned with the administrative processes, instead of the societal meaning of becoming an autonomous country. Since my interest was in a more societal or even symbolic understanding of the constitutional restructuring and not so much in the restructuring as such, I did not explicitly use my experiences from this project in my own research project. As we shall see in the next chapter, Valdemar Marcha nevertheless played an important role in my research project by inviting me into his classroom to integrate my research project in a course he taught.

**Learning about We Lead.** While working for *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk*, I saw a ‘post’ on the *JvhK* Facebook page of someone named Gwendell Mercelina Jr. It had been there for considerable time, but because I heard Irene mention Gwendell and I remembered him from a BBQ with active young people during my previous stay on the island, I decided to take a look. When I started reading, my heart literally started to beat

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<sup>48</sup> Joeri: “Valdemar Marcha zei tegen mij dat mensen hier niet nadenken over de toekomst, dus dat ik dat wel leuk heb bedacht voor mijn onderzoek, maar dat het niet past bij de mensen hier.”

Dula: “Ik leef alleen voor vandaag. Ik leef voor het nu. Niet voor de toekomst.”

Joeri: “Heeft u dan geen dromen voor de toekomst of dingen die u wilt?”

Dula: “Hoe het tegenwoordig is? Nee..” “De wereld is veranderd..” “Ik zou wel graag een auto willen winnen.”

Joeri: “En voor uw zoon of uw kleinkinderen? Wilt u geen goede toekomst voor hen?”

Dula: “Ze wonen allemaal in Nederland.. Er is daar een betere toekomst voor ze dan hier.”

faster: this was the sort of initiative I had envisioned while working on my proposal in the Netherlands. The text was from Gwendell's web log and introduced We Lead:

'This new year will be decisive in the history of our nation and its future as it is still the first year of Pais Kòrsou. (...) We have to take this opportunity to leap over the threshold to become an advanced nation. We can achieve this if we join forces and unite. (...) To this end, let us join forces and work together towards making Curaçao a better place whether in politics, business, the culture industry, scientific community, the labour force or civic organisations. (...) And We Lead will stand ready to do its best side by side with every citizen especially the youngsters, to realize these goals.' (Weblog Gwendell Marcelina Jr., 2011).

What struck me about We Lead was that it saw 10-10-10 as a symbolic new start as well, was trying to make Curaçao a better place by involving people and appeared to be an organisation formed and headed by local youngsters. In my enthusiasm, I immediately sent Gwendell, who turned out to be the chairman of We Lead, a Facebook message. To my surprise, he texted me back within the hour:

*Dear Joeri, I just read your beautiful message on my fb. Thank you sincerely and tomorrow we lead has a board of directors meeting on 7.30 pm. I will mail you back. Gwen<sup>49</sup>*

With these words the contact was made and from then on we were engaged in an intensive conversation about a possible project together through phone conversations, Facebook, Skype, Google chat and a few face-to-face meetings. In our first meeting on March the 16<sup>th</sup> of 2011, Gwendell told me how We Lead came into being. The idea came to him in a dream and when he woke up he knew he had to organise something. The foundation was officially created on August 12<sup>th</sup> 2010, the International Youth Day. Gwendell asked five other people to join him and together form the 'board of directors' of We Lead Curaçao. In the first year they wanted to focus on the back office and around August 2011 We Lead was officially going to be 'launched'. Several different 'movements' were to be created: arts, politics, social-educational, environment and sports. Youngsters would be recruited to be active in these movements and contribute to them in their own way. Gwendell was already thinking about doing 'research' before the official launch: "We like to know what young people think about Pais Kòrsou up until now, what they think about the island, what they find important and think about the leaders of the island."<sup>50</sup> He wanted to use this research to build the movements. At first he was thinking of a quantitative survey, since he wanted as many people as possible to be heard. However, when I told him about Appreciative Inquiry, he seemed really interested. When I asked him whether the board would be interested to actively participate in the project and for instance conduct interviews, he seemed surprised by my question: "Of course we want to interview people!"<sup>51</sup>

From that day on, we stayed in touch about a possible project together. Because Gwendell did not want to decide anything without the rest of the board, I had to present my ideas to them first, before we could move forward. I was in a bit of a hurry, because of my relatively short stay on the island, but for the next few weeks,

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<sup>49</sup> Beste Joeri, ik las net op mijn fb je mooie bericht. Hartelijk bedankt morgen heeft we lead ook een board of directors meeting om 7.30pm. ik mail je terug. Gwen

<sup>50</sup> "We willen graag weten wat jongeren over Pais Korsou tot nu toe denken, wat ze van het eiland vinden, wat ze belangrijk vinden en wat ze denken over de leiders van het eiland."

<sup>51</sup> "Natuurlijk willen wij ook mensen interviewen!"

however enthusiastic Gwendell appeared to be, nothing concrete seemed to happen. I did not manage to meet with Gwendell face to face for a while and was starting to doubt whether I would actually meet the rest of the board on time. In the meantime Gwendell did send me a document called 'We Lead philosophy', which I read with interest. This is the first part of this document:

'The WE LEAD Foundation was created to emphasize the role of the youth in constructing their ideal nation. WE LEAD helps to construct the bridge to cross for every citizen to be united together as a nation, build new leaders that will lead their country with determination, enthusiasm, transparency, and love. This process starts from bottom to top, where you find the youth taking their responsibility as the builders of a nation. WE LEAD focuses on the social, educational, cultural, political, artistic, sportive, health and environmental areas of a nation carried by the youth movements. Our mission is to develop young people as new leaders and nation builders through engagement in their community. It is a process through which all people have access to and control of structures and mechanisms that govern their lives. Educating and encouraging (empowering) young citizens to strive towards excellence, hope, union, peace and change. Constructing a nation built on leadership and respect, to protect, facilitate and provide social security, transparent information and diversity. Together in union with all citizens, working on the social, educational, cultural, political, sports, arts, health and environmental areas of the nation. Our philosophy: engage, empower, evolve.'<sup>52</sup>

#### **4.3 Deciding how to move forward**

After approximately a month on the island, I was in a state of utter confusion about my research project. I had the feeling everyone was pulling me in a different direction, partly because they wanted to make my research project into something that fitted with their own ideas. In the meantime I was unsure about my own ideas. I felt I 'did not do anything' so far, but at the same time thought I had done a lot by talking to people and writing extensive field notes. Even though I had spent considerable time reading and learning about Appreciative Inquiry before I left for Curaçao, I was unable at first to 'translate' the theory to my new surroundings. With nobody to share my ideas with, who had any background or experience with this kind of work, I felt myself reducing Appreciative Inquiry to a 'positive focus'. Since I was mainly busy with conducting informal ethnographic interviews, I made the choice to try to introduce positively oriented questions into these conversations and was fairly disappointed when the people I talked to were not 'answering positively' and kept for instance referring to the Netherlands as the place where 'everything was better'. As my supervisor rightly pointed out to me in a Skype conversation: "*Well, that's not doing an Appreciative Inquiry, that's just asking people more or less leading questions using your language. So the question is: can you organise an Appreciative Inquiry and how would you do that?*" This particular Skype conversation on April the 5<sup>th</sup> happened to be the first time I actually talked to my supervisor since I came to Curaçao and signalled the ending of the first chapter of my stay on the island. We agreed that I had to "*decide, pretty soon, which basket you are going to put you're eggs into, and go with it.*" About the work I had done so far, she simply said: "*Well, that's useful. If you got that, you could actually be mapping out what the master's project could look like.*" Which I must confess was a little shocking at first, since I thought what I was doing was my master project. Although I felt like abandoning the whole research project for a day after this conversation, because I simply did not see how it was going to work, I pulled myself together and got to work the following day. I decided I had three likely scenarios if I was to organise an

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<sup>52</sup> The original document is written in English

Appreciative Inquiry project: I would initiate an AI project with *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk*, with *We Lead* or with both of them.

Because I had little previous experience with doing an AI project, I was insecure about how to move forward. From the literature I learned to be careful not to create subject-object relationships, where I was the 'knowing' researcher, therefore I wanted to develop a project together with the local community and invite others to become co-researchers. However, as my supervisor rightfully pointed out to me, I needed to '*[F]ormulate some sort of concept that if you want to people to come and play, you can give them some idea to what it is you want them to come and play with.*' And use this concept to engage in a further dialogue with others about the project. I realised that trying to avoid subject-object relationships did not mean that I was not able to initiate anything. I read and learned about Appreciative Inquiry and could bring that to the table, whereas the other people I would work with knew more about the local-cultural context. In that way everybody would be able to contribute to the project in his or her own way. I came up with a project proposal based on the literature of Appreciative Inquiry, the Imagine Chicago methodology and the conversations of the past month. I sent the proposal to both possible partner organisations and scheduled meetings with both of them the following day. Here you will find a fragment of the proposal:

### ***Imagine Pais Kòrsou***

*On the symbolic date of 10-10-10 Curaçao has become an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands: Pais Kòrsou. This has been seen both as a promising new start and as something that does not interest many people, especially not the ordinary 'man on the street'. A lot of people wonder whether anything has actually changed after six months. Still, this unique moment in history gives us the opportunity to think about the future of Pais Kòrsou: on what sort of island do you want to live?*

### ***Imagine Pais Kòrsou together***

*To explore on what sort of island we want to live, a project will be organised to imagine Pais Kòrsou together with everyone on the island who wants to give his or her opinion. Participants in this project will be trained as interviewers and ask people on the island several questions about Curaçao. What do they think of the quality of life on Curaçao? What changes would they most like to see on the island? How would they want Curaçao to be a generation from now? This project is based on the ideas of Appreciative Inquiry; instead of focusing on what goes 'wrong', people are invited to imagine the island they would like to live on and how to achieve this change. Everyone is invited to participate in the project and be heard, for the future of the island concerns everyone.*

### ***Why is this a valuable project?***

*First of all, the participants will learn important skills by doing the interviews. In similar projects special relationships were established between the interviewers and the interviewees, across generations and cultures. People hear about each other's dreams, share personal stories and are invited to reflect upon their lives here on Curaçao. This project will inspire people and serve as a first step towards a positive future for Pais Kòrsou. Existing organisations and initiatives are invited to join the project and use what they learn about people's dreams in their work.*

Since both the meetings were decisive for the way the project turned out, I will shortly describe both of them here. The first meeting that was scheduled was a lunch with Gwendell. Joûrich would join us too, which would make it the first time another We Lead board member joined the conversation about the project. I shortly talked with Gwendell about the project outline I wrote and was curious what he thought of it:

Joeri: *“So, that is about it. But the question is if we can find people who would like to participate.”*

Gwendell: *“We must find them!”*

Joeri: *“And of course what you think about it... “*

Gwendell: *“That is not a question, you know that it is not a question! If it fits for our plan, it completes us.”<sup>53</sup>*

After a while Joûrich joined us and we were introduced to each other.

Gwendell shared his ideas to make a documentary about the process and to print a magazine with the results. Joûrich was a little bit more cautious, especially when he heard I was leaving on the first of June: *“We just need to examine whether it is achievable.”<sup>54</sup>* I also thought we had a tight schedule, but that it should be doable: *“It does not have to be that much work. We must find people who want to join first.”* Joûrich:

*“It will take two weeks to find people.”<sup>55</sup>* We discussed practicalities, such as how many interviews per person were realistic. I suggested three

per person, while Joûrich thought five would be possible: *“Maybe five. However much you need! The more interviews, the better for you, right?”<sup>56</sup>* We also talked about which language the project would be in. We Lead often communicates in English and my master is in English, so Gwendell suggested the whole project should be in English. I thought it better if people could interview each other in their first language, due to the character of the questions, which were to invite personal stories. Gwendell: *“But first we need to talk to the board. I won’t do anything without permission of the board.”<sup>57</sup>* The actual decisions were kept for later, but I had a good feeling about the conversation and had the feeling that ‘Imagine Pais Kòrsou’ was actually going to happen.



**Picture 4** Meeting with Gwendell and Joûrich

That same evening, I discussed the possibilities of starting up a project with *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk* over dinner with Irene. I started the conversation by saying I spoke to my supervisor and had to make some choices and start to work on a concrete AI project, either with *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk*, We Lead or both. Irene answered: *“I do not know about your other projects, but I think that if you would choose us, all the ingredients are there. With the meeting with the Red Cross that is planned and the lecture on the UNA, you have everything where*

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<sup>53</sup> Maarja dat is een beetje het idee.. maar de vraag is natuurlijk of we mensen kunnen vinden die dit willen doen en of mensen het leuk vinden.

Gwendell: We moeten dat vinden hoor..

Joeri: En wat jij ervan vindt natuurlijk...

Gwendell: tss.. dat is geen vraag he, dat is geen vraag! If it fits for our plan, it completes us.

<sup>54</sup> “We moeten alleen onderzoeken of het haalbaar is..”

<sup>55</sup> We hebben twee weken nodig om mensen te vinden.”

<sup>56</sup> “Misschien vijf. Zoveel als jij er nodig hebt! Hoe meer interviews, hoe beter voor jou, toch?”

<sup>57</sup> “Maar eerst moeten we met de board praten. Ik ga niks doen zonder permission van de board.”

*Jongeren van het Koninkrijk stands for: social and substantive activities.*<sup>58</sup> I tried to explain that it was not just attending these meetings I was after, however interesting they were for *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk*: “*What I have to do now, is organise a project. I am planning to try to involve youngsters in this project. Each of them can talk with a few people and ask them on what sort of island they want to live.*”<sup>59</sup> Irene said: “*You could combine the two, you could start with the island and then move on to the level of the Kingdom. Together it is a Kingdom, it is one.*”<sup>60</sup> I was glad Irene wanted to combine the two, but had the feeling I was failing to explain to her what an AI project would entail. I said: “*It is not only about organizing meetings, for these meetings to be interesting for my research they have to be designed in a certain way. For instance, what is the central question, which forms do you use? I would explicitly choose to have only a small plenary session and use smaller settings to give more people the opportunity to speak.*”<sup>61</sup> Irene: “*I do not see the need, you don’t have to be afraid people will stay quiet. And you have the meeting of the Red Cross. I think you will totally get all your data with these two meetings!*”<sup>62</sup> We went on like this for a while and did not seem to get any closer to each other: Irene was glad with the meetings that were scheduled for the following months and thought them to be ‘valuable data’ for my research, while I kept trying to explain that I wanted and needed to organise an altogether different project for my research project. In the end I proposed I would ask the students of the UNA what they would think of it, upon which Irene agreed. A few days later, I explained shortly to them I was trying to organise an AI project and involve the lecture in this and what they would think of the idea to experiment with the form and themes of the lecture. And with that actually make it little less like a ‘lecture’, so that the young people could be heard and think of a future for the Kingdom together. At first there was silence. “*Can’t we think of a few questions and ask them in a survey to the people present? We can use their answers for the next activity*”<sup>63</sup>, Andrea proposed. “*There has to be space for own themes and questions, it should be an interactive lecture*”<sup>64</sup>, Timothy answered. When we continued talking about the lecture, the programme was made in such a way, partly due to practical reasons, that there was only space for a few questions after two former ministers-plenipotentiary had given a lecture. At this point, I did not see our lecture or the overall initiative moving toward something that could look like an AI project.

**Some thoughts on the first part of my stay.** Because I had a good feeling about the conversation with We Lead and thought a valuable project could come out of this and because my time on the island was limited, I decided to go for this project and make it work. If I could somehow combine it with *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk*, that would be great, but now was the time to start moving towards an actual AI project and We Lead seemed to provide a context for that. It seems to me that there is a difference in the way I approached *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk* and We Lead. With the latter I was much clearer about a project from the start and

<sup>58</sup> “Ik kan niet voor je andere projecten spreken, maar ik denk dat als je ons zou kiezen alle ingrediënten aanwezig zijn. Met de bijeenkomst met het Rode Kruis die gepland staat en de lezing op de UNA heb je alles waar *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk* voor staat: sociale en inhoudelijke activiteiten.”

<sup>59</sup> “Wat ik nu moet doen, is een project organiseren. Ik ben van plan om jongeren te betrekken bij dit project. Elk van hen kan dan met een paar mensen praten en hen vragen op wat voor soort eiland zij zouden willen wonen.”

<sup>60</sup> “Je kan die twee combineren. Je kan beginnen met het eiland en dan doorgaan op het niveau van het Koninkrijk. Samen is het een Koninkrijk, het is een.”

<sup>61</sup> “Het gaat niet alleen om het organiseren van bijeenkomsten, om deze bijeenkomsten interessant te laten zijn voor mijn onderzoek moeten ze op een bepaalde manier georganiseerd worden. Bijvoorbeeld, wat is de centrale vraag? Welke vormen gebruik je? I zou er expliciet voor kiezen om alleen een korte plenaire sessie te doen en verder in kleinere settings te werken om meer mensen de kans te geven om aan het woord te komen.”

<sup>62</sup> “Ik zie daar de noodzaak niet van. Je hoeft niet bang te zijn dat mensen stil zullen blijven. En je hebt de bijeenkomst van het Rode Kruis. Ik denk dat je echt al je data zult krijgen met deze twee bijeenkomsten!”

<sup>63</sup> “Kunnen we niet een paar vragen bedenken en die vragen in de vorm van een survey aan de aanwezigen? We kunnen de antwoorden gebruiken voor een volgende activiteit.”

<sup>64</sup> “Er moet wel ruimte zijn voor eigen thema’s en vragen, het moet een interactieve lezing worden.”

during our initial conversations we moved towards an official 'go' or 'no go' moment with permission from the entire board. Because I was not clear at all times and also participated in the daily affairs of *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk*, people got different expectations of my role. This could have contributed to equalling my research project with working for and attending meetings from the initiative, as seemed to have happened with Irene.

## **Chapter 5: Curaçao, our nation**

In this chapter I will tell the story of the Appreciative Inquiry project titled 'Curaçao, our nation' which I organised together with We Lead. Since I was but one of the many 'travellers' or co-researchers, I will try to include the voice of the others wherever I can by quoting them. I will tell this story in a way similar to Chapter 4, in a chronological order and an ethnographic style of writing. First of all, we will have a look at the way in which I continued to organise an Appreciative Inquiry project together with others in paragraph 5.1. In paragraph 5.2 we will continue with the actual conversations the participants had with their fellow countrymen in the context of the project. In the paragraph 5.3 I will explicitly focus on the perspective of the young interviewees; what did they think of participating in this project and what did they learn from it? I will end by shortly saying something about the possible continuation of the project in paragraph 5.4

### **5.1 Organising an Appreciative Inquiry project together with others**

In this paragraph, I will continue where we left off at the end of Chapter 4. I finished with the fruitful and inspiring conversation I had with Gwendell and Joûrich and my decision to move forward to an actual AI project together with We Lead. However, before we could start, there was one more important 'step' to take: presenting the project proposal to the entire We Lead board and ask the board for official 'permission' to start up the project. We could only start up the project if the entire board would support the project; hopefully the board members would not only consent with the project, but also feel animated enough to participate in the project.

**Teaming up with We Lead.** On April the 18<sup>th</sup> a meeting was organised with five of the six We Lead board members. I saw this meeting as a way to invite more people into the conversation about a possible AI project. The We Lead board exists of six young people with ages ranging from 19 to 32: Gwendell, Ledrah, Cherelle, Daniël, Joûrich and Ruënna (see picture 5). As mentioned in Chapter 4, I had chosen 'Imagine Pais Kòrsou' as a preliminary project title, because I was inspired by the Imagine Chicago projects and I wanted to make an explicit reference to the new title of Curaçao as an autonomous country, since this was in a way the starting point for the project. The title happened to be the first thing to be commented on by the We Lead board members. One of the members remarked:

*"The official name of Curaçao is Pais Kòrsou. Country of Curaçao. Hopi laf (very lame) (...) Sint Maarten is not country of Sint Maarten. It's official but I really hope they will change it. The Netherlands is not country the Netherlands."<sup>65</sup>*

It is perhaps worth noting that I had the feeling that by using 'Pais Kòrsou' instead of 'Curaçao' in referring to the island, I was speaking the 'local' language. While it appeared from this conversation that 'Pais Kòrsou' did not resonate with people on Curaçao, at least not with all of them. Instead of evoking pride, the name of their country was ridiculed and associated with a malfunctioning government which was not even able to come up

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<sup>65</sup> "Korsou ta number ofisial ta Pais Korsou. Land Curaçao, hopi laf. Sint Maarten, no ta country of Sint Maarten. Maar het is officieel, maar ik hoop dat het echt veranderd wordt. Land Curaçao, het is geen land Nederland!"

with a suitable new name for the island. This example shows how difficult it is as an ‘outsider’ to ‘become a local’ or even just to understand local-cultural practices. As Hosking (2004) notes, even an act as simple as a handshake ‘relies upon reference to a great many local cultural practices’ (Hosking, 2004: 7). All these practices, of which many are tacit, need to be learned in the process of becoming a local. It is easy to make a mistake and with that be identified as an ‘outsider’.

**Picture 6** First meeting with We Lead Board

**Picture 5** The We Lead Board: f.l.t.r Ruënna, Daniël, Cherelle, (Joeri), Gwendell



After a small discussion about the name of Curaçao, I continued presenting the project proposal and shortly introduced Appreciative Inquiry. Because I wanted to create non subject-object ways of relating and organise the project together, I stressed that this was only a first proposal which could be altered and developed further together. Most of all, I was interested in learning their opinions and thoughts about the project. The responses differed; Ledrah for instance had a relatively short answer and did not react to the more substantive aspects of the proposal:

*“Uhhh.. yes.. I think it is interesting, good topic. Uhhh... Yes, I don’t have much to say at the moment.”<sup>66</sup>*

Whereas Daniël gave a more lengthy answer in which he shared his earlier experiences with AI:

*“I think it is a good plan. I worked with Appreciative Inquiry a couple of years ago. I work as a volunteer at Scouting and we did an Appreciative Inquiry with the whole organisation and it works well, it went perfect. The only thing is time, because it is so open and you can’t plan a framework or something, that is not possible. It is a dynamic process, as it were. And it took one and a half years, while we planned it to take 10 months. So, I think we should definitely do this and we are going to do it. You definitely have my support in all this, but we have to pay attention to the time, because you have to leave in June and we have less than two months left.”<sup>67</sup>*



I was pleasantly surprised that Daniël had worked with AI before and hoped he could use his experiences in this project. He asked me in which way I was going to integrate the 4-D cycle in the project; did I want to cover all of the ‘D’s’ or just one of them? I responded that the project I would do for my master thesis could be seen as the ‘discovery’ phase, with a few excursions to the ‘dream’ phase. I was glad Daniël asked me about

<sup>66</sup> Uhhh... ja.. het project lijkt me wel interessant, goeie topic. Uhhh.. Ja eigenlijk in eerste instantie heb ik niet zoveel te zeggen...

<sup>67</sup> Nou ik vind het zeker een goed plan. Ik heb een paar jaren geleden met Appreciative Inquiry gewerkt. Ik werk als een vrijwilliger voor het wereldbureau van de scouting en daar was ik tot vorig jaar een van de adviseurs en daar hebben wij toen met de hele organisatie een Appreciative Inquiry gedaan en het werkt heel goed, het ging echt perfect. Het enige met de tijd, omdat het zo open is en je kan gaan raamwerk inplannen of wat dan ook, dat gaat niet. Het is een dynamisch proces zeg maar. En dat heeft meer dan anderhalf jaar geduurd en we hadden tien maanden ingepland. Dus ik vind zeker dat we dit moeten doen en dat we het gaan doen ook. Je hebt ook mijn steun daarbij zeker, maar wel dat we moeten gaan opletten met de tijd, want jij moet 1 juni weg en we hebben iets minder dan 2 maanden.

the 4-D cycle in front of the group, because I did not pay that much attention to it in my introduction of AI. Because of his question and the discussion following his question, the project seemed to get a new meaning. Even at this early stage, there was talk of We Lead continuing the rest of the 4-D cycle after I would move back to the Netherlands. The talk about the project shifted, instead of a short project for my master thesis, the project became a We Lead project.

While talking together for over four hours, the project steadily came into being and got more body. We decided to try to involve 50 youngsters in the project. Since each of us would participate in the project, we were already with seven people, including myself. I had previously decided to participate in the project as well, since I did not want to position myself 'above' the other participants and tried to become 'part of' the AI process, as is suggested by Van der Haar and Hosking (2004). I was furthermore curious what participating in this project would be like and felt I would send the wrong message by asking everyone to conduct interviews, without conducting any interviews myself. Together we would recruit the remaining 43 interviewers. Joûrich was of the opinion this should not be too difficult, whilst Daniël was not so sure about it: "*Here on Curaçao it is difficult, you send an e-mail and you don't get a reaction.*"<sup>68</sup> Joûrich had to agree: "*Everyone here is like that.*"<sup>69</sup> Note that both Daniël and Joûrich talk in terms of what *is*, and how it is a problem, instead of talking in terms of possibilities and positive values (Hosking, 2006: 65). We agreed it would be more effective to approach people from our own network. I was worried this would lessen the diversity of the participants, but Joûrich assured me all the board members 'moved in different circles'. We furthermore discussed how we would make sure the participants would interview people from different backgrounds, instead of interviewing only their own family members and decided in the end that we had to trust the participants and entrust them with the responsibility to talk to different people. In the end we set dates for the workshops, the interview period and the day everyone would get together again to share experiences and stories. I made a mental note to pay attention to the role the We Lead board would take during the rest of the project. In my view they were 'participants' of the project, but concurrently they were in a different position than the rest of the participants that were yet to be recruited, because they were actively involved with designing the project from the start and had an interest in the project from the perspective of We Lead.

**Deciding about questions.** During the meeting with the We Lead Board, we had made the decision that I would make a draft set of questions, which we would all test on a few people from our personal environment and comment on the questions based on our experiences. I crafted the questions with the help of an Appreciative Inquiry Handbook by Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010), where a section was dedicated to 'the art of the question' and the different sort of questions an Appreciative Interview should consist of (see paragraph 3.2 Research Techniques under 'Appreciative Interviews'). I furthermore had a close look at the questions asked during the Imagine Chicago project, since I would be doing Appreciative Interviews in the context of a community, an island instead of a city and this project is furthermore cited as a successful example of Appreciative Interviewing throughout the AI literature. Both the questions that were used during the

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<sup>68</sup> "Op Curaçao is het moeilijk, je stuurt een mail en je krijgt geen respons."

<sup>69</sup> "Ja zo is iedereen hier."

Imagine Chicago project as the draft questions I sent to the We Lead board members can be found in the appendix (appendix 1 and 2). These are fragments of the reactions I received after sending the draft questions by e-mail. The first answer came from Gwendell:

*'Some changes I would like to bring are: Research title: Curaçao, Our Nation – or Our Nation Curaçao. It combines better as a suiting campaign title, which we can use for branding our launch and the research with presentation. Like the project stands for creating change and developing new leaders. As for the appreciative inquiry questions, after I had test them out on a few people I miss the parts of: What is it that's working on Curaçao? Whats going well on Curaçao? The focus on why they are staying? What drives them on the island? What turns them on? - So we can find out what creates development and so we can stay focused on the positive parts of our nation. And also to emphasize the WE LEAD philosophy I would like to have some questions where we can ask. To get the role of the youth in nation building. Who people see as role models/leaders in our community or in general (international/regional/local)? And young leaders that give hope to the community (international/regional/local)?'*

Daniël partly reacted on Gwendell's suggestions and came with two suggestions of his own:

*'The questions you presented are very adequate and can be easily asked during the interview. I just wanted to make some suggestions on adding questions regarding:*

- *The type of leadership that they expect for our country*
- *Their opinion on politics and how it should be*

*I see that Gwendell made some suggestions in similar fashion. Other than those, I think we have enough covered for the interview, and we need to make sure that it doesn't become too long.'*

Lastly, Joûrich reacted on both Gwendell and Daniël:

*'I join with Daniel, a bit more questions about our political system and leadership and with Gwendell about the part what people expect from the youth and its development. For We Lead the opinion of society about the youth and what is good about the youth is very interesting. I do not have any other remarks. The basic questions are really good. It is up to the interviewer to ask more questions when there is more information during the interview.'*<sup>70</sup>

The other board members (Ruënna, Ledrah and Cherelle) did not react or give feedback on the questions.

Gwendell suggested including more questions with an explicitly appreciative focus and some questions that focus on the role of the youth in nation building, in line with the We Lead philosophy. Daniël also suggested some questions about the leaders of the island. I tried to integrate all the suggestions into the new set of questions, while at the same time making sure that there would not be too many questions. However, despite my efforts, there were probably still too many questions. At the time I weighed including the suggestions of the We Lead board members above the length of the set of questions, since I was so eager to organise this project together with them, instead of deciding about the questions myself. The decision about the questions was also

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<sup>70</sup> Ik sluit me ook zo een beetje aan met Daniel over een beetje vragen over ons politiek systeem en leiderschap en ook met Gwendell vooral over dat gedeelte van wat men verwacht van de jeugd en zijn ontwikkeling. Voor We Lead is de mening van de maatschappij over hoe ze de jeugd van tegenwoordig zien en wat er allemaal daar goed aan is zeker interessant. Verder heb ik geen meerdere opmerkingen. De basisvragen zijn heel goed. Het ligt aan de interviewer om goed te kunnen doorvragen wanneer er meer informatie aanwezig blijkt te zijn bij de geïnterviewde.

**Interview Questions**

- 1. How long have you lived in Curaçao ?
- 1. What first brought you to Curaçao?
- 5. What is it like for you to live in this community?
- 2. When you think about moving to Curaçao, what was your first experience?
- 3. Thinking back to the questions, following G. Gendell, what have been the high points for you in the project?
- 4. Why have you decided to live here, and what is the 'Imagine' project for you?
- 5. What are in your opinion the things that work well in Curaçao?
- 5. Who do you see as a role model or leader in our community or in general?
- 1. Who do you think of as young leaders that give hope to the community?
- 5. What do you expect for the future of Curaçao?
- 7. What sort of leadership do you expect for our country?
- 1. 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 Curaçao?

9. What changes on the island would you like to see most?

- 1. What do you imagine your own role might be in helping to make this happen?
- 5. 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?

**Recruiting and training participants.** In the meantime, each of us had put considerable time and effort in recruiting participants for the project. We had scheduled three workshops or training dates in a row on the third, fourth and fifth of May. We arranged the locations through personal connections of Daniël and Ruënna, a Youth Centre and a theatre respectively. I was to be in charge of the content of the workshops and designed a workshop programme that would equip the participants with the necessary skills to conduct the interviews, would make the participants impassioned about the project and would enable them to contribute to and shape the project (see paragraph 3.2 Research Techniques under ‘Group Meetings’ and appendix 7). It was difficult to know beforehand how many participants would visit our workshops. We half-heartedly worked with an enrolment policy; in the communication through e-mail and Facebook participants were asked to send an e-mail to We Lead with their date of attendance. Most participants were however recruited through personal networks and these participants did not officially subscribe. Joûrich, who was responsible for most of the participants by far, did send a list around with ‘his’ participants, whilst the others did not. It is questionable whether an enrolment policy ‘fits’ with the local-cultural reality; perhaps our half-heartedness was caused by the friction between two cultures; the Dutch planned ‘engineer’ and the Curaçaoan ‘bricoleur’ (Levi-Strauss, 1962).

**Picture 8** Practice interviewing

On the first workshop day only two new participants showed up, complemented with the We Lead board members. We started by sharing a personal dream for Curaçao, in order to get to know one another and share our motivations for being at the workshop and joining the project. The three-hour session further consisted of an exercise about the art of listening, explaining and discussing the basics of Appreciative Inquiry, introducing the project, review interview skills and practice interviewing on each other with the interview questions used in the project. Due to a lack of participants the second workshop session was cancelled. The third workshop was attended by 18 people (including four We Lead board members). Even though I had made a



tight schedule for the evening beforehand, the workshop evolved spontaneously. Daniël introduced an exercise about non-verbal communication and when I had the feeling that people were more willing to share their experiences in Papiamentu, I took a step back and let the conversation switch to Papiamentu. When I asked a question in Dutch people seemed to feel obliged to answer in Dutch and the participants were silent or stuck to short answers. However, when one of the participants asked a question to the rest in Papiamentu, a lively discussion emerged in Papiamentu. Due to the switch to Papiamentu, Daniël naturally became the new conversation leader. I felt I was the ‘outsider’ here and the only one present for which Papiamentu was not the native language. The project was not about ‘me’, but about the participants and it therefore felt better to take a step back in the second half of the workshop.



Thanks to Valdemar Marcha, the project was also integrated in a course he taught for Hospitality and Tourism Management students, which brought 22 more participants and another workshop. The course was called 'Cultural Management' and dealt with the concept of culture, both theoretically and empirically. I approached Daniël to prepare and lead the workshop together with me. We had learned from the first two workshops what worked and what did not and used what we learned to 'perfect' the workshop programme. In order for the project to be integrated in the course, the students had to talk to people from different national



Figure 9 Exercise in communication

backgrounds. During all the workshops, participants reacted positively. One participant for example said he would easily do more than five interviews and immediately had ideas about whom to interview. A girl exclaimed at the end of the workshop that this was 'the best class she ever had!' When Jôurich asked all those present at the third We Lead workshop who wanted to become active within We Lead at a later stage, everyone raised their hands, which was a promising sign. A young girl was curious what we were going to do with the results that would come from the interviews and how we were going to present it to the government.

Someone else remarked that it was not just about showing it to the government, but to the entire population. "Well, in that case, maybe we could make a play out of it?", the girl put forward. In the last group there was one young man who said about the project: "I think it is really valuable. We do not think of organizing such a project ourselves, but it is really valuable to know about each other's ideas for the future. And also that it is positive." We agreed to come back together in three weeks time and conduct and write down the interviews before that day.

## 5.2 A multi-layered conversation about Curaçao

After the interviewers were 'trained', it was time for us (the We Lead board and I) to take a step back; the project was now in the hands of the 44 youngsters who were about to have conversations with a variety of people on the island. Our task was similar to that of the rest of the participants, namely to enter into a conversation about Curaçao with at least five other people. 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. All sorts of stories were shared; both personal stories and stories about Curaçao. People learned about their family history from their grandfather, got to know a neighbour, 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. It is difficult to completely reconstruct these conversations, but the interview reports that were handed in by the interviewers give us a fairly good idea of what these conversations looked like. A first analysis of the interviews was done by the young interviewers during the workshops and in the reflection reports which the students had to hand in together with the interviews for a grade. From their analysis, complemented with my own analysis, a number of patterns emerged from the interview data, which I will describe in this paragraph in order to get a feeling of what happened during the interview process (see paragraph 3.4 Analysing the data). In this context, I will quote both quotes from the interviewees as well as the interviewers' observations.

**Different constructions of positive.** Throughout the entire project it was said that the people on the island have a natural tendency towards negative thinking and as a consequence the ‘negative questions’ were said to be easier to answer than the ‘positive questions’. Personally, I do not feel that there were any explicit ‘negative’ questions asked in the interviews. In my view, there was a difference between questions that explicitly referred to ‘positive’ aspects such as question number five ‘What are in your opinion the things that work well in Curaçao?’ and more ‘neutrally’ formulated question such as question eight ‘How would you describe the quality of life in Pais Kòrsou today?’ However, following Van der Haar and Hosking (2004) (see chapter 2, 2.3 Appreciative Inquiry) what is considered as ‘negative’ or ‘positive’ is locally constructed and my idea of what is positive, does not necessarily have to be the same as other constructions on Curaçao. One interviewer notes the following in her reflection report:

*‘The main aspect that I have learned from participating in this project is that a lot of individuals are thinking in a negative way; What is going wrong? What needs improvement? And so on. I got the feeling that these questions had put the participants to think, some had to really think hard before giving an answer. The main similarities that I’ve encountered while interviewing the participants is that first of all it is easier to answer the negative questions than the positive.’*

Another interviewer writes that asking ‘positive’ questions required a lot of effort from her personally:

*‘It’s also easy for someone to talk about negative things and what all they dislike. So, this project was definitely a challenge for me. I had to get to know the person first, let him/her get acquainted with the project and then try to get this person in the mood of giving me most positive answers than negative. It was not easy at all, I noticed that people tend to criticize a lot about their own country. I also noticed that when people tend to be asked a question that acquire a positive answer, they will pause for a moment to think deep of what they are going to say’*

The difficulty of answering questions about ‘what goes well’ can also be seen in the answers given by the interviewees. One man notes that “*nada no ta funshonando optimal*” (nothing functions optimally), where another girl is even reluctant to answer: “*Do I really have to answer? Because everything here is a mess*”<sup>71</sup> Despite the positively oriented questions and the invitation to focus on what works well, instead of focusing on problems, a number of aspects are repeatedly mentioned as being ‘no good’ or ‘problems’ on the island. Such as the rising cost of living on the island; everything from gas and water prices to prices in the supermarket is *karu* (expensive) nowadays. Two other examples are the high levels of crime and the holes in the road, mainly caused by tropical storm ‘Tomas’ last year. A (negative) story that was especially prominent throughout the entire project, as the interviewers noted as well, was the story about the politics and politicians on the island. As a interviewer notes, it seems as if almost everyone has the same view on politics:

*‘Politics and politicians is a very sensitive subject since most of the interviewees found that politicians should work together for the Island instead of arguing. Doing this project I learnt that people will have different outlook on life and what is important to them but somehow their view on politics were the same.’*

Politicians are accused of serving themselves, instead of the community and are in their current position to “*fill their own pockets*” only:

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<sup>71</sup> “Mi mester echt kontesta? Paso tur kos aki tin pompamentu.”

*“I don’t follow the politicians on our island very well, but from what I have seen and hear I think they are all corrupting the community. A good politician should understand the values, norms, beliefs and culture of the community to understand what is best for our community.”*

Despite the supposed tendency to think negatively and finding it difficult to answer ‘positive questions’, positive stories were shared during the interviews and were re-told in the course of the project. Curaçao is often referred to as simply being *dushi* (nice, beautiful, good). People give answers such as: *“For me living in Curaçao is like gold, oro as we say in Papiamentu.”*, *“It’s like paradise.”*, *“We are blessed here.”* and *“Every day is for me a positive experience and memory.”*<sup>72</sup> An example of such a positive story that seemed to buzz around the island was the story about the good *“relationship between inhabitants”*. These two interview fragments illustrate this story:

*“If you don’t have money to pay the bus, you will definitely see someone and then you say can you drive me to my mother or to the city. That sort of things are good things and you live with your neighbours, right? You know exactly who lives next to you, you see them. Even if you do not sit with them, you know this is my neighbour, if anything happens. The people are really servicial [benevolent], that’s true. The people really help each other here.”*<sup>73</sup>

*“There are different positive aspects on Curaçao, for example we are solidary with others. Last year with the tropical storm Tomas that passed over Curaçao, we were very generous with helping the people that suffered from the storm.”*<sup>74</sup>

When paying closer attention to what people consider as ‘working well’ on the island versus ‘what is going wrong’/needs improvement et cetera, it becomes clear that what is negative and what is positive is a local construction and that there are different local constructions of what is positive existing alongside each other on Curaçao. Aspects that are mentioned as being ‘good’ or ‘working well’ on Curaçao are for instance the local food, the retirement benefits, the Dutch passport, tourism, the education system, public transportation, infrastructure, gossip, traditions, the climate, no hurries and *Selikor* (the government company that collects garbage). Some of these same aspects are at the same time considered as being things that do not work well and need to be improved as soon as possible, such as for example the infrastructure, the education system and public transportation.

During the first round of workshops, several participants asked what they had to do if someone answered negatively on a question during a conversation. We discussed how you could decide when something ‘was’ positive or negative. Following my relational constructionist orientation, I was careful not to fix something as either positive or negative. I encouraged the participants to do the same, in order to avoid subject-object

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<sup>72</sup> “Tur dia pa ami ta un eksperensia i memoria positivo.”

<sup>73</sup> “Als je geen geld hebt om de bus te betalen, dan zie je sowieso iemand en dan zeg je rij me even naar mijn moeder of rij me even naar de stad. Dat soort dingen zijn wel goeie dingetjes en je leeft met de burenheden? Je weet precies wie naast je woont, je ziet ze. Al ga je niet bij hun zitten, je weet het is mijn buurvrouw, of mocht er iets gebeuren. De mensen zijn wel echt servicial, dat wel, dat wel. De mensen helpen mekaar hier.”

<sup>74</sup> “Tin diferente kos positivo pa loka ta trata Korsou, por ehempel nos ta solidario ku otro. Ana pasa ku e rabu di e tormenta tropical Tomas a pasa riba Korsou, nos tabata hopi generoso ku yudansa na esnan kua sufri danyo.”

relations between the interviewers and the people they had conversations with, where the interviewers decided for the other what was positive and with that silence other conceptions of the positive. Or voices that did not want to talk positively at all. We collectively decided that there 'was no wrong answer' to the questions and with that attempted to come to equal relations, or non subject-object relations in the words of Hosking (2006). A young man notes during an interview that people on Curaçao tend to 'make a problem out of everything'; "*it is no fun if there is not a problem*". Could 'thinking negative' or 'complaining' even be an aspect of the local culture? And if so, is that something that needs to be changed or not? Who could decide about that? During the second workshop a young girl makes a cautious remark about the relation between culture and the tendency towards thinking negatively:

*"I don't want to say it's our culture, but you see the bad first before the good."*<sup>75</sup>

The methodology of Appreciative Inquiry presumes that focusing on positive aspects is inherently 'better' than focusing on what goes wrong for coming to positive futures; hence the need for the 'unconditional positive question' (Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett, 2000). How can the unconditional focus on the positive be combined with a culture where you 'see the bad before the good'?

**Changes for Curaçao.** People 'hope to see a change'; all sorts of changes are mentioned as being vital for the continuing well-being on the island. From lowering Aquaelectra rates to lowering crime levels to closing down the Isla refinery. As in the previous research project on Curaçao in which I participated (Boessenkool et al. (eds.), 2009), there was a call for a 'mentality change', though perhaps less pronounced. What stands out is the way Curaçao is described as needing to be 'build up', 'developed', 'brought forward' and 'grow'. This suggests that the current state of the island is 'immature' or even 'undeveloped'. It is not surprising that people were eager to answer questions about changes they would like to see on the island. People did not have the questions in front of them, so most people were startled by the question immediately following these questions: what could be your own role in making these changes happen? Some people reacted somewhat frustrated: "*Ami so?*" (Just me?), "*How can I lower the rates of Aquaelectra? If you know a way then please do tell me.*" and "*A, no, I can't help to close the buraku's (holes). The government should do that.*"<sup>76</sup> People's first response seems to be to point to the *gobiernu* (government). It is their task to take care of the island and bring the necessary changes; 'normal' people cannot help them nor do anything to change their course. Voting is the only means through which the government can be influenced, but since most people do not think highly of politicians and politics in general, people often feel they do not have the power to change anything.

During the workshop, a girl puts forward that she noticed that people were startled or even 'shocked' when they were asked what they imagined their own role was in creating these changes:

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<sup>75</sup> "Ik wil niet zeggen dat het onze cultuur is, maar je ziet eerst de slecht voor de goed."

<sup>76</sup> "A nee ik kan niet helpen om buraku's dicht te maken. Dat moet de regering doen."

*“What I actually really noticed, is that if you ask what are you doing to change that, that it is a real shock for them. People realize what it is they are saying, like OK I want that that happens, what are you doing yourself. For example when someone said he wanted to improve the infrastructure and I asked what can you do about it. He said to me, what do you want me to do? Go to Kooyman and buy bags with cement and close the holes myself?”<sup>77</sup>*

A young man reacts by pointing out it is not that ridiculous to do something about the roads yourself and that this is exactly what happened in certain neighbourhoods:

*“You are laughing, but that is what the people did, in Mahuma they have done that as well. They have seriously collected money and they have bought cement and asphalt and everything themselves and they have actually improved the street. They just did it themselves. Even though it is not allowed, because it is government property. But they just did it themselves.”<sup>78</sup>*

Some people have apparently decided to no longer wait for the government and take matters into their own hands; these private initiatives are said to ‘make up’ for the ‘failing’ government.

Throughout the conversation there was a call to for the inhabitants of Curaçao to ‘start at home’ or ‘start with them selves’. If everyone would do this, it would be just ‘a matter of time’ before Curaçao to become a ‘better place’:

*“Curaçao a better nation for every one should start at every person itself. If I do it, you do it, no matter of time Curaçao would be a better place.”*

Some people seemed to realise that they can contribute to a better nation and can help to ‘make a change’, however small. For instance by being a friend and neighbour:

*“No, I would not go into politics, but I mean I can do changes, I can make the changes by being the friend and neighbour to somebody so yea I guess.”*

By being a good person and employee:

*“Changes should be taken every time and everywhere and Curaçao is not an exception. My role in making these changes I think should start at me and myself. Doing my job I can be a good person and by being a good person and employee making my other colleagues happy. As we say that badness is contagious, good things can also be contagious.”*

Or by simply greeting people:

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<sup>77</sup> “Wat ik eigenlijk echt heb opgemerkt als je vraagt wat doe jij om te veranderen, dat het echt een grote schok voor hun is. Men realiseert zich eigenlijk wat men allemaal zegt, van ok ik wil dat dat gebeurt, wat doe je zelf. Bijvoorbeeld toen iemand zei dat hij de infrastructuur wilden verbeteren en ik vroeg wat kan je er zelf aan doen. Toen zei hij tegen mij wat wil je dat ik doe, naar Kooyman gaan en zakken cement kopen en de gaten zelf gaan dichtmetselen?”

<sup>78</sup> “Je lacht he, maar dat hebben de mensen gedaan bij Mahuma hebben ze dat ook gedaan. Ze hebben echt geld binnengehaald en ze zijn zelf cement en asfalt en alles gaan kopen en ze hebben de straat echt verbeterd, dat hebben ze gewoon zelf gedaan. Ook al mag dat niet het is overheidsgrond, maar ze hebben het gewoon zelf gedaan.”

*“I believe if I start with myself and do everything that I believe is a good thing to do, so a simple bon dia [good morning] and bonochi [good evening], things will slowly change.”<sup>79</sup>*

Something seemed to have happened during the interviews as well; while reading the interview transcripts, you can almost feel how startled and even annoyed people are when they are asked what their own role can be. What can I do about it? It is after all the government’s job and they are doing something wrong, not me. Nevertheless, this question somehow worked as an invitation to reconsider your own role and critically look at yourself as well as explore the possibilities of actually doing something yourself. For instance in the following fragment, where a woman who starts by blaming and pointing to the *gobiernu*, becomes inspired to do something herself and even offers to become actively involved within We Lead:

*“Me? No, there is nothing I can do. That should be the Gobiernu. The government should do that sort of thing, because even if you want to say something, you write it in the newspaper, you shout it on the radio and in the phone. And you know what it is? They say they don’t have any money. And as soon as they say that, it is no use talking any further to them. Then they say, yes madam, we don’t have any money, our hands are tied. I don’t know what they mean, that the Netherlands don’t send them any money or something, but they say there’s no money. (...) Yes, maybe if there is a group, or people, that are interested to sit together and discuss what’s going to happen in the future. What we can do in the future, I would like to join, you know? Because then you can share your opinion. (...) We should start that! Something like that, I think, because there are a lot of people huh, because every afternoon around six you hear so many opinions on the radio of so many people. (...) They are just on the radio and then nothing. I think that is a shame, because I don’t know that much, but sometimes I am listening and I think: there are some smart people, there are not just stupid people living here! They are always on the radio. It seems as if the government is the only one doing something, what they say happens and nobody opens their mouth. But on the radio I hear so many people with good ideas. And now the light is even burning in me! I want to call sometime to say, yes we must do something, because every day, year after year, you have so many different opinions and there are really good ones among them. So I am going to call to say: Hello, what are you doing with all those opinions? But maybe people are too lazy, I don’t know. But I think we should just make a group, maybe have a meeting once a month and talk about it. But everybody is busy with them selves, that is also true. Because something like this does not happen in one day. Maybe we can write down all the names from the radio, maybe I can write down the names for you guys and call them. Or talk to them, are you really interested, we should start something. That really is a good idea you know.”*

People should not only start with themselves, but *ban traha huntu*, start ‘working together’, as well. There seems to be a shift in thinking from individual responsibilities to a shared responsibility. As one person points out, the society as a whole needs to start thinking in terms of ‘we’ instead of ‘me’:

*“Well, I want it to be just everybody living in the best interests for one another and of course themselves. They have to be good for themselves, and that people stop thinking in the form of me, me, me and start thinking in the form of us or we.”*

An example of an issue on which “the whole country should work together” is closing down the Isla refinery, which causes high levels of pollution. Literally ‘everybody’ should help or work for the island:

*“I think that everybody including the youth, old people, government, just everybody should help our island, our Pais Kòrsou.”*

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<sup>79</sup> Mi ta kere si mi kuminsa na mi mes i hasi tur lokual ku mi ta kere ta bon manera djis un simpel bon dia i bonochi lo trese kambio tiki tiki.

If the island is to 'move forward', people should stop blaming each other:

*"Actually, everybody must work for our island to move forward. Stop pointing fingers at each other."<sup>80</sup>*

By working together, the island can become 'our' place:

*"Most of all work together. Don't break down others. Start to work together in the same way as other people who have a good life here. Because if we work together this place will become OUR place."<sup>81</sup>*

There is a noticeable irritation with the politicians of Curaçao, who are thought to give the wrong example by constantly fighting with each other instead of working together:

*"Well, politics now, is cut throat politics, because everybody fighting for themselves and not for the whole country of Curaçao and not for interest of them people here and that in order for things to go well here, different issues to go well, or to work well on the island, the government have to put their heads together and think together and not bring down one and the other."*

**Proud of Curaçao?** The inhabitants of Curaçao are more than once accused of complaining and being *malcria* (spoiled) and as a result of that do not realise or see the worth of their island:

*"Everything works well, nothing is bad! We as a community just complain about things, where if you would look at our neighbours in the Caribbean you would see that things are good here on the island."*

However, how you value Curaçao largely depends with which other countries you compare the island:

*"The quality of life I would describe as high but there is a great part that is not visible that lives in bad conditions; it depends who you want to compare it to."*

People that are not originally from Curaçao appear to judge the island in a different manner than the *Yu di Kòrsou*. For immigrants from other parts of the Caribbean, Curaçao is a prosperous island filled with job opportunities. As one interviewee notes, compared to Jamaica, Curaçao is a 'nice' and 'quiet', with low levels of crime and violence:

*"It is nice here. When you have an election, it is not war and fire, you can put up the colours. In Jamaica you can not put up the colours, nobody puts up the colours. Because they fight you and kill you. So there are some nice things about Curaçao, some nice things that I see. They not go and shooting up the police. I realize they respect police. Back home they don't respect the police, when they see them they shoot them, yes man. Anytime they see police they shoot them up the cars, here I see they respect police. Some nice things about Curaçao. I like the climate here. God make the rain fall. I see that rain fall and sun shine some time, I see that god has love for us and make rain fall when we're ready. It's a quiet island, it is not such a fuzzy island. It is not such a bad island, no, you can live here."*

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<sup>80</sup> "Eigenlijk tur hende lo tin ku traha pa nos isla bai dilanti. Stòp di mustra dede."

<sup>81</sup> "Vooral samenwerken. No kibra otro. Kuminsá traha huntu meskos ku e otro hendenan ku ta bon biba aki ku si ta traha huntu lanta lugá riba NOS lugá."

Immigrants from the Netherlands are on the other hand more likely to choose to live on Curaçao because of the climate, the beautiful beaches and the absence of the density of rules. As this Dutch woman says:

*“I would say the rule-free living system they got here, here you can paint your house the colour that you like and that you think fits the house, and you can put on loud music when you have a party at home, without caring about the neighbours because they are at the party. I think this part is working really good on the island.”*

Due to historical reasons, people that are originally from Curaçao often compare the standard of living on Curaçao to that of the Netherlands, instead of with other Caribbean islands. The Netherlands is frequently seen as an example or even functions as the standard for judging Curaçao (see paragraph 4.1 under ‘Everything is better in the Netherlands’). Someone who compares Curaçao to the Netherlands can only come up with a few things that ‘work well’ on the island:

*“The weather, traffic lights and that's about it. Compared to the over organised Dutch society.”*

Somehow the *Yu di Kòrsou* are said to lack national pride and seem to appreciate their island less compared to immigrants. We Lead saw this project as an attempt to ‘nation building’ after 10-10-10. The We Lead board was not alone in stressing the need for nation building or even *patriotismo*:

*“Patriotism, if we are good patriots, our place will move forward.”<sup>82</sup>*

Young people should know about their history and learn about their island. One of the interviewers writes about this as well in her reflection report:

*“I think that before changing everything we should also start at home in our family will be far enough. And if school has teaches us more deeply and proud about people like Tula, Felix Chakuto Efraim Jongkeer etc. we as Curaçao would have appreciate this country much more, but all we got at school was about wim & pim, “de aap is in de boom”. We would have more love if you compare the love with the one that the Venezuelan have for Simon Bolivar. Those nations since young the kids are aware at school and at home who is Simon and why he is so important. Parents hold their baby and to make him sleep they sing the Venezuelan anthem here in Curaçao they sing ‘Baka maluku’ and at the end of the day al those kids looks like ‘baka’ [cows] indeed.”*

This interviewer makes an explicit connection between the lack of national pride and the Dutch influence, for instance in the educational system. It seems more people feel the need to loosen or even sever the connections with the Dutch in order to become a well functioning and ‘proud’ nation. Someone wishes for instance “for the Dutch people to return back to Holland” and the call for independence is mentioned throughout the interviews. Not just in a constitutional sense of the word; independence as the ability to achieve things yourself, without outside help. For instance by being financially independent of the Netherlands:

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<sup>82</sup> “Patriotismo, si nos ta bon patriótiko nos lugá ta bai dilanti.”

*“An island that is growing and really stands on their own especially since Holland isn’t helping so much anymore with money and so you know.”*

Or by having more *Yu di Kòrsou* on higher positions:

*“I see YU DI KORSOU in every important and higher positions in our community instead of Dutch people.”*

The fact that Curaçao has recently become an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands is not explicitly mentioned as being either the imminent cause for a need for nation building or a catalyst for nationalistic feelings. It is however striking that although Curaçao has only been an autonomous country for around six months, not one of the two hundred interviewees refers in any way to his or her former country, the Dutch Antilles. Either the national identity has consolidated itself in a relatively short period or the Dutch Antillean identity was not so prominent in the first place, as Sluis (2004) has argued earlier. Some interviewees nevertheless explicitly refer to 10-10-10 as a new start for their island or even as their best memory on the island:

*“My most positive experience is 10-10-10, because since that day we are working for a better Curaçao.”<sup>83</sup>*

*“A moment that was very emotional was the day 10-10-10 when they sang the national hymn and rose the flag.”<sup>84</sup>*

Notwithstanding the call for nation building, people do seem to have a sense of national pride and all mention more or less the same symbols when they are asked which images or people represent the island to them. Everybody mentions the *Handelskade*, ‘our’ harbour, the two famous bridges (the Queen Emma Bridge and the Queen Juliana Bridge) or *Punda* and *Otrobanda* in general. Followed by the sun or the climate in combination with the ‘beautiful beaches’, *Kenepa* beach in particular. The *dushi kuminda* (delicious food) appears frequently, as do the hotels and tourism in general. Carnival and *Seu* are the two local festivals on which people are really proud and which also provide numerous people with their best memories on the island. There are also people that represent the island, for example *Tula*<sup>85</sup> and *Doctor Da Gosta Gomez*<sup>86</sup>. Most of these can be found on the posters that were made during the workshops as well (see Appendix 8). Strikingly, besides these more historical figures, a few names of young sport heroes are mentioned in almost every conversation: *Churandy Martina*, *Andrew Jones* and *Hensley Meulens*.

*“Uhm, well, I don’t know if this is really a role model but, other than these people I don’t really think there are role models, uhm the athletes of Curaçao, the runner, Churandy Martina. And the baseball players and so, they come from Curaçao and I see those as role models and leaders in the community. (And who as young leaders will give hope to the community?) I really think those athletes because, then they can show somebody else that has a big dream, you know, to be an international somebody, they can push somebody else that can do it that have a*

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<sup>83</sup> “E eksperensha mas positivo ta 10-10-10, paso desde e dia aki nos ta rumbo pa un miho Korsou.”

<sup>84</sup> “Un momento ku tabata hopi emoshonante tabata e dia di 10-10-10 ku nan a kanta himno i subi bandera.”

<sup>85</sup> *Tula* was a slave on Curaçao and the leader of the slave revolt in 1795. He is still revered on Curaçao today as a fighter for human rights and independence.

<sup>86</sup> *Doctor da Gosta Gomez* was the first prime-minister of the Netherlands Antilles and played an important role in the negotiations with the Netherlands to come to the *Statuut* (charter) of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1954.

*dream.”*

Besides being ‘role models’ and ‘examples’, these sport heroes are appreciated for the way in which they contribute to the international image of the island and have helped to ‘put Curaçao on the map’:

*“I think that sport is something that is really helping Curaçao to be on the map. With baseball the island is getting a lot of recognition. “*

Churandy Martina has furthermore improved the image of Curaçao:

*“Shurandy Martina, because he is a youngster who has done something positive and improved the image of Curaçao.”<sup>87</sup>*

To be internationally known and respected seems to be important to the inhabitants of Curaçao, people dream that Curaçao will be *“much more international and known”<sup>88</sup>* in the future. Possibly prompted by the tourism industry, which is dependent upon the international image of the island for its success. People worry that problems on the island will harm tourism, but are nevertheless proud that despite all the problems *“people still come to visit our island”*. This is also illustrated by the following wish for Curaçao:

*“If I need to describe how I see Curaçao in ten years; I would say; Curaçao will be the most important island in the Caribbean.”*

**A positive future for Curaçao?** Notably, people seem to be hopeful for the future of the island, which forms a contrast to the stories described in chapter 4: “Nothing will change” and “Everything is better in the Netherlands”. It is however in line with the findings of the Boessenkool et al. (2009), from which it was concluded that people on Curaçao have ‘sceptical hope’ for the future. As an interviewer notes:

*“Similarities were found in the opinion of people who are natives from Curaçao; they are hopeful for the future and believe that change will come, despite of the current state of affairs on the island.”*

People do perhaps not think about the future on a daily basis, as Valdemar Marcha mentioned in an early stage of the project, but people do have beautiful dreams for the future of Curaçao when asked. These dreams were mostly answers given to the last question of the interview: ‘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?’ Note that the question asks people how they would *want* Curaçao to be a generation from now, not how they *expect* Curaçao to be a generation from now. However, according to the literature, acting ‘as if’ is self-fulfilling and human systems move to the future they envision in the here and now (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004), because of their heliotropic nature (Cooperrider, 1990). A few examples of how people want their island to be in the future:

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<sup>87</sup> “Shurandy Martina, paso e ta un hoben kuta hasi algu positivo i kuta saka kara di Korsou.”

<sup>88</sup> “hopi mas internashonal i bekend”

*“In ten years I see Curaçao as it is right now, because I think Curaçao is going very well.”*

*“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.”<sup>89</sup>*

*“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.”*

*“I see youngsters and the youth in nice clothes. I want that no pants hang low as 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 that because they are black they are worth less.”<sup>90</sup>*

*“I think about a country with prosperity, good level of education and everything they bring with them, social classes that can permit that as well, freedom of expression, sufficient work for everybody who lives here, a much lower level of crime. We produce our food ourselves for a large part etc.”<sup>91</sup>*

These dreams and all the other dreams that were shared in the conversations are a first step towards the ‘dream’ phase of Appreciative Inquiry and together they sketch the ‘ideal Curaçao’. We can use and work with these dreams in one way or another during activities to come.

Some people interpreted the question differently and portrayed a scenario for the future of Curaçao if nothing will change and things stay the way they are. Even though this was only a small minority in quantitative terms, the ‘worst case scenario’ for the island was heard and resonated with the students. One respondent had noted that Curaçao would become ‘like Haiti’:

*“If things continue as they are and don’t change in politics, with people such as Helmin Wiels, no more investments are being made on the island by foreigners and that there is not enough income for people than I see Curaçao becoming Haiti in 15 to 20 years from now. In this scenario there is no ‘middle class’ anymore; you would have people living like in Souax for example, just to illustrate, and Spaanse Water.”*

Even though this was only mentioned once in all the interviews, one group integrated ‘Haiti’ in their poster and group presentation. The young man that conducted this interview also mentioned this as one of the things he learned from the project in his assignment:

*“Curaçao might end up as Haiti in 15 to 20 years if things remain to the same as they are now. Change is required, be that from politicians and us!”*

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<sup>89</sup> “Mi ta tende awa blou ta bati na mega pier, hopi turista, dushi airu fresku i limpi. Nos infrastruktura, kayanan, yená di turista, pero ta kana safe i trankil paso e pueblo mes ta kuidanan sin ladronisia. Un Korsou mas limpi i bunita anto tur hende na trabou.”

<sup>90</sup> “Mi ta mira hobenan i hubentut ‘nechi’ bisti. Esei mi kemen ku no karson ta kologá abou na modi bisa. Mi ta mira nan ta papia nechi ku otro. Mi ta mira nan ta trata otro ku respèt. Mi ta mira nan ku oportunitat grandi pa estudio akinan komo afó tambe. Anto mi ta mira ku nan ta balorá nan mes sin pensa paso nan ta pretu nan ta bal ménos.”

<sup>91</sup> “Mi ta pensa riba un pais ku prosperidad, bon nivel di edukashon i tur loke e ta trese ku ne, klasenan soshal ku por permiti esei tambe, libertad di ekspreshon, trabou sufisiente pa tur hende ku ta biba aki, un nivel di kriminalidat hopi abou, Nos mes ta produzi nos kuminda pa un gran parti etc.”

Figure 10 Close up



In class people reacted by laughing and yelling: “Oh, my god!” when the group presented that Curaçao would become like Haiti. This made me wonder: why was this ‘worst case scenario’ so powerful? How could this be understood in the context of Appreciative Inquiry? The young participant seemed to use it as a means to plea for action. Despite the AI literature, where it is suggested that envisioning positive futures leads to positive change, I could see this ‘negative future’ or ‘worst case scenario’ acting as a catalyst for change as well. However, there is a difference between it acting as a catalyst or motivation for change and its ability to actually create positive futures.

### 5.3 Sharing stories and experiences with the interviewers

Here, I will tell the story of the project from the interviewers’ point of view. How did we share our experiences? What did we think of participating in the project and of the interview results? What did we learn from participating in this project? In order to learn how the interviewers experienced participating in the project and what they thought they had learned from participating, they were asked to give their opinions in a written form. The class of students wrote a reflection report about the project and the group that was recruited through We Lead filled in a short set of questions about the project during the second workshop. Fragments from both will be used in this paragraph.

**A positive conversation about Curaçao.** In the weeks preceding the second meeting with all the interviewers, there was not much contact between the interviewers or the interviewers and myself. I had tried to stimulate mutual exchange and contact through an online community, but despite the huge success of online network Facebook on Curaçao, this community did not seem to work and nobody actually uploaded documents or started a discussion topic. I send an e-mail to all the interviewers with an excerpt of an interview and with a reminder of our second meeting half way through, but got no reactions on the e-mail. It was considerably easier to stay in touch with the class of students who participated in the project, because of their fixed timetable. I visited their class several times to ask whether they had any questions. Some of these students e-mailed me as well to ask a question about the project. Valdemar Marcha, their teacher, encouraged my visits to the classroom by saying it was ‘good to have a personal connection with the students’. I was really curious how the interview process was going and was fairly frustrated that I could no longer do anything but make sure I had conducted my own five interviews and prepare the second workshop and the practicalities surrounding it. I found it difficult to no longer be able to ‘control’ the research process, as in more conventional research projects.

On May the 24th, the second workshop with the group of students was scheduled. This time I was joined by Gwendell, because he liked to be there and Daniël was engaged elsewhere, and my boyfriend who was visiting



from the Netherlands and agreed to record the workshop by video camera for me. We gave the students the following exercise:

**Picture 12** Presentation during workshop 2 with the group of students

Split up in groups of five, share inspiring stories that you heard during the interviews with each other. Are there some stories that you keep on hearing? Use a large piece of paper to present the things you have learned to the rest of the class. You can make drawings, write down key words: use your creativity.

The students set to work in three groups of five (not everyone of the class of 22 students was present) in separate classrooms. I noticed they discussed the answers they heard on each separate question instead of solely focusing on stories as such. Two groups chose to make something like a 'positive core map' (Whitney & Trosten-bloom, 2010: 163) on which all the positive aspects of Curaçao they heard during the interviews were integrated. The third group had seemingly tried to analyse all that was said in the interviews and split that up in five themes (positive aspects, education, future, politics, youth) with several underlying themes. An example of a poster presentation held (see picture 13):



*“We have drawn and written everything positive that we have heard from the interviews. The big picture Curaçao, right here you can see the bridge, which is really famous. Handelskade, this is the question what kind of image, symbol, whatever, so most of this we took from this question. So here you can see the cruise ship, which symbolizes tourism on Curaçao. Education, can be better, but compared to other islands, countries, Curaçao is good. Carnival. Sports: Meulens, Jones and Martina. Right here you see permanent vacation, some people told us that every day, except on Monday, there is something to do. Even though Curaçao is small, you don't have to ride hours to get to a club or happy hour. So we travel a lot here, this here is actually a plane. We are really thankful for our tap water; we don't have to buy bottles. Hende muhe [women], someone told us that women on Curaçao are really strong and independent. Last, but not least we have a beach setting, a lot of people have told us that what is good are the beaches and the beach weather, the climate. Yeah, Tula and Sablika, the slaves. Those [under the bridge] are the leaders of the future, you guys also, but all our names are here in the middle.”*



Picture 14 Poster with individual stories

The workshop of We Lead participants was held two days later at a facility of the Red Cross Curaçao. Unfortunately, the turn out was low and only nine of the original group of twenty-two participants were able to make it. Gwendell had sought contact with all the participants preceding the workshop and they stated that they were either too busy with exams to make it or had not been able to finish the interviews and would therefore not come. Gwendell explicitly invited them to come, whether they had finished up their interview reports or not, unfortunately without much success. Nevertheless, this workshop was valuable and the participants that were present were actively engaged. They set to work in two groups and made and presented posters based on their experiences during the interviews. One of the two groups made a poster comparable to the 'positive core maps' of the group of students, whereas one group depicted the most inspiring stories of each group member. Here, the level of analysis was stories, but notably the poster existed of four separate stories instead of an integrated whole (see picture 14).



**Reflecting upon the questions.** We furthermore exchanged our interview experiences with each other; here our small numbers proved an advantage and there was a lively conversation about the process in which all those present participated. A considerable amount of time was devoted to the questions used. One girl

mentioned people complained that the questions were 'difficult', which was agreed upon by the other interviewers:

*"The questions are difficult. There were a lot of thinking questions. It were questions that they could not immediately answer."*<sup>92</sup>



Another girl did not think the questions in themselves were that difficult, but their positive orientation was:

*"The questions are not that difficult, but because we normally look with a different perspective at it instead of positive, it is really difficult to express it positively or to express it in another atmosphere. And a lot of people had difficulties with that. And I think that because of that it were too much questions. So it was quite intensive."*<sup>93</sup>

Several interviewers had experienced that people who are originally from Curaçao, thought these questions were not 'meant for them'. One young girl remarked that the people she interviewed kept saying the following to her:

*"Why do you come with these questions? I live here right? These questions are not for people that live on Curaçao."*<sup>94</sup>

I was curious how that could be, since the questions were all about the island and who could know better than the people who had lived there all their lives? One girl remarked that the first question 'How long have you lived on Curaçao?' might have caused this feeling, while another girl observed the following:

*"What I have noticed is that for people from Curaçao itself, it is more painful to answer these questions than for people outside of Curaçao."*<sup>95</sup>

In my opinion, this is quite an interesting observation. From my own interview experiences, I also had the feeling that there was a difference in answers and the way people experienced the conversations between the *Yu di Kòrsou* and the other inhabitants of the island. What this difference was, what it meant and why these questions were painful was something I could not quite grasp the meaning of, neither did the other interviewers.

The interviewers were asked to write down their opinion on the overall project and in this context again voiced the opinion that the questions were too difficult and that there were too many questions.

<sup>92</sup> "De vragen zijn moeilijk. Het was veel denkvragen voor hun. Het zijn vragen die ze niet meteen kunnen beantwoorden."

<sup>93</sup> "Het zijn niet zulke moeilijke vragen, maar omdat we normaal met een ander perspectief ernaar kijken in plaats van positief is het heel moeilijk om het positief uit te drukken of in een andere sfeer uit te drukken. En daar hadden mensen heel veel moeite mee. En ik denk dat het daarom misschien ook te veel vragen was. Dus het was best wel intensief. "

<sup>94</sup> "Waarom kom je met deze vragen? Ik woon hier toch? Deze vragen zijn niet voor mensen die op Curaçao wonen."

<sup>95</sup> "Wat ik heb gemerkt is dat mensen van Curaçao zelf is het iets pijnlijker om te beantwoorden dan mensen van buiten Curaçao."

*“I think there were too many questions, given that most people had difficulties answering the questions.”*

It was also suggested to translate the ‘big words’ into language that would be understandable for everyone. Strikingly, the group of students did not comment in any way upon the questions. Could it be that they had experienced less difficulty with the questions because they were specifically urged to talk to people with different national backgrounds? Were the questions more suited for ‘outsiders’ who had not lived on Curaçao their entire life or was there possibly something about the questions that touched a sensitive spot of the *Yu di Kòrsou*?

**Sharing what we learned in the conversations.** In both groups, we talked about what we learned from the conversations after presenting the posters to each other. Or in other words, what did we think of the ‘results’ of the conversations or interviews? Who else should know about what we learned from people and how can we share what we have learned with others? In the group of students, one girl started by saying:

*“I think they are important, especially maybe for the government to see the results, so they can see what do the people expect. What do the people think? What can they improve to stay better or be better?”*

Again, the government was the first to be thought of. However, another girl reacted upon her classmate and suggested to share the findings with the whole nation:

*“I think it is good for the whole nation to be aware of the results that you guys have. I don’t know how you would present it, I don’t know about only in a document form. Because if I heard from my group, a lot of people have quite the same ideas or opinions about some things. We have different ethnic backgrounds, but yet the ideas are still quite the same. I thought we were more divided by thoughts, but still I see there are some similarities by thought within the community.”*

*Joeri: “That surprised you?”*

*“Not really surprised me, but yet I thought really it was like either you are that side or the other side.”*

This quote also illustrates how this interviewer realised there are more similarities between different groups on Curaçao than she previously assumed and you are not always ‘either that side or the other side’. Another thing that stands out is that this girl talks about ‘the results that you guys have’ instead of the results that she has or we have together. The conversation about the results and what to do with them was meant as an invitation to the participants to decide for themselves what they wanted to do with their results and involve the participants in whatever was going to happen next. Still, it seems that it was never entirely ‘their’ project, but that of ‘you guys’ or in other words We Lead and/or my master thesis. Perhaps this was brought about by the ‘forced’ participation of the group of students; their teacher simply announced in the first lecture that they were to participate in this project. This is in conflict with the ‘free choice principle’ that Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) put forward as a principle of Appreciative Inquiry. People should be able to decide for themselves if and in what way they want to contribute to and participate in an AI project.

The conversation moved on to how we would share what we had learned. All those present agreed that a written presentation of the results would not be sufficient, especially if we wanted to reach the entire population of Curaçao. Suggestions were buying 'air time' and presenting the results on TV and radio. Another interviewer stressed that in her opinion it was not so much about the results as such, as how the results could be used to come to action:

*"For me the results was common, because those are topics that you are hearing. I think for example the politicians, they know that they are a mess and they know the Handelskade is perfect. What for me is the biggest thing is what is going to happen next? Because we are aware of that. I think more people on Curaçao, the politicians, they know the strong point and weakness of Curaçao. For the future, what's going to happen? So, we have to do something with the strengths and make them stronger and we do something with the weakness. Because this information, I think is not new. For me, presenting this, they know it already. Everybody knows that Curaçao is not that united, but what are we going to do?"*

Obviously, this was an important question: what are we going to do to come to 'action'? Might talking with people already be a form of 'action'? In the AI literature the 4-D cycle is often used as a tool to design and think of an AI project; where the latter 'D's', design and destiny, more explicitly focus on action. At this point, Gwendell stepped in to share something about the way in which We Lead is going to continue with the 4-D cycle and invite the interviewers to become involved in this process.

**Becoming familiar with hopeful and appreciative ways of talking.** Similar to the girl cited above, who no longer thought 'you were either this or that side', other interviewers have also experienced certain changes in the way they see or talk about things. By talking to people from different backgrounds about their ideas and dreams for the island, the interviewers have experienced that despite the different backgrounds on the island, the inhabitants can be united and work together. Like this interviewer writes while reflecting upon a conversation with a girl who was not originally from Curaçao:

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

Another interviewer furthermore wants to share what she realised during the process with others on Curaçao:

*"I would think it is important to realise that it does not really matter what your background is. Because when we got this assignment we were instructed to talk with people from different backgrounds and just local people. I tried to talk to people with different backgrounds and while I am doing the interviews I did not see much of a difference afterwards. Because the people that I did see before as, I have an Indian friend, I will interview her. But when I wrote down the answers I did not see much of a difference between her answers and someone you would define as local. So if you can make the public aware that just because you look different that don't exactly mean that you are something different or they think differently. That you can work together. That is the first thing I think should happen."*

During the project, the interviewers became familiar with more hopeful and appreciative ways of talking and thinking. Several interviewers mentioned they have learned from Appreciative Inquiry and because of

participating in this project they try to look more positively to Curaçao and learned to appreciate Curaçao more:

*'Curaçao has a lot of positive things going on. So what I learned is to look at the Glass half full instead of half empty.'*

*'It's amazing to hear how people come from all over the world all the way to Curaçao to look for opportunities. It makes me think that Curaçao has more opportunities than we realize.'*

In the second workshop a girl mentioned she heard people who were not originally from Curaçao tell her that the people of Curaçao should be proud of their island, because compared to other places Curaçao is well of. Several interviewers have indicated that they have become prouder on their island, because they saw their island through the eyes of others; especially through the eyes of people who have not lived on the island for generations and somehow appreciate the island more. Some things are 'normal' for the *Yu di Kòrsou* while for people who come from different places it is not:

*'From this conversation I've learned that sometimes the population doesn't know how pretty the island is, and that particular places are normal for us, but to others, with different backgrounds, come to the island and really like it because from where they are from it's not normal. This is how you start to appreciate your own country.'*

Or sometimes you take certain things for granted:

*'But hearing him say that he considered it a high point made me feel really proud. It is a part of my culture that I enjoy, but I do however feel that I take it for granted. I can't imagine not spending time during these festivities with my friends and family, and having fun. It made me think of Carnival differently, and appreciate it more.'*

In each case, the interviewers have become 'proud' or have learned to appreciate their island more. One interviewer is not only proud of her island, but has learned to view things from a positive angle and trust the capabilities of the *Yu di Kòrsou* as well:

*'I have learned that we should be proud of what we have as a country and our island itself. We have what allot of people want in their country for example the beaches, the beautiful buildings in our city and the weather. I have learned also to view thing from a different/ 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.'*

Numerous stories and dreams that were shared between the interviewers and the interviewees were a source of inspiration for the interviewers. A young woman shared with the group how she was inspired by a conversation with another girl who organised sports activities for young children in her neighbourhood. She was impressed by the way in which this young girl did something herself to contribute to the society she would like to see. Perhaps she will follow the young girl's example in one way or another. Another interviewer also indicates that she learned that to come to change, everyone can help to make this change become a reality:

*'From this conversation I have learned that it's not only about what you like to see changed, but also how we each individually could directly or indirectly have an influence to make this change a reality.'*

Someone else remarks that she was inspired because she talked to a ‘good youngster’ during an interview, opposite to the prevailing negative opinion in society about the youth:

*‘I was inspired by this young person, seeing that nowadays everyone is pointing fingers towards at the youth. This interview shows that there’s still good people with fruitful thoughts in our society.’*

During the workshop one of the interviewers told the rest of the group what inspired her most from the conversations she had with others:

*“Especially with role models we are used to hear Churandy Martina<sup>96</sup>, but I had a few people who had people from their environment as role models, for instance friends or leaders from the Scouting. I thought that really beautiful. It means that we are doing well in certain areas, that we do not have to look far from home, but that we can also appreciate indoors. That is not something we normally hear. Normally, ‘nobody is good and nobody can do anything’ is the mentality. And that it was now nevertheless good, I found it really beautiful.”<sup>97</sup>*

The ‘nobody is good and nobody can do anything’ mentality this girl describes closely resembles the ‘first you are nothing, than you can do nothing’ of the old priest Amado Römer mentioned in Chapter 1. Notably, this time people were able to appreciate people from their personal environment, in spite of this mentality.

**Combining ‘fun’ and ‘work’?** Besides becoming more familiar with appreciative and hopeful ways of talking, the interviewers improved their social skills, such as interviewing and especially listening to others or as one of the interviewers says, ‘learn what Curaçao looks like through the eyes of others’:

*‘I thought the project instructive. You learned what other people thought through the interviews. I also learned to listen to each other, in order to absorb the information. I thought the project was good. In this way you learn what Curaçao looks like through the eyes of others.’<sup>98</sup>*

The length of the conversations differed considerably, from around fifteen minutes to two and a half hours. In the latter case, you have to be polite as an interviewer and keep on listening:

*“With some people I have talked for over 2,5 hours. I thought, shit, they keep on talking, they keep on talking. But you have to keep on listening, but it was fun. So I really trained my skills to listen and listen to people. That was for me something really nice that I have witnessed.”<sup>99</sup>*

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<sup>96</sup> A famous sprinter from Curaçao

<sup>97</sup> Vooral bij role models zijn we gewend op Churandy martina te horen, maar ik had een paar mensen die echt mensen uit hun omgeving als role models hadden, vrienden of bijvoorbeeld leiders van de padvinderij. Dat vond ik echt heel mooi. Dat betekent dat we in een bepaalde richting goed bezig zijn, dat we niet ver van huis hoeven zoeken, maar dat we ook binnenshuis aan het waarderen zijn. Dat is niet iets wat we normaal horen. Normaal is niemand goed, niemand kan wat de mentaliteit. En dat het nu toch goed was, vond ik heel mooi.

<sup>98</sup> “Ik vond het project leerzaam. Dus je leerde wat andere mensen denken via de interviews. Ik leerde ook naar elkaar luisteren om zo alle informatie op te nemen. Ik vond het project goed. Zo leer je ongeveer hoe eigenlijk Curaçao eruit ziet in de ogen van anderen.”

<sup>99</sup> “Met sommige mensen heb ik echt 2,5 uur zitten praten, ik dacht shit, ze praten maar, ze praten maar. Maar je moet blijven luisteren, maar het was wel leuk. Dus ik heb echt mijn skills getraind om naar mensen te luisteren en luisteren. Dat was voor mij echt iets heel leuks dat ik heb meegemaakt.”

From the reflection reports the students wrote about the project and the questions the We Lead participants

1. What is your overall opinion about the project, project Curaçao, on the topic of the youth participation? What the entire project. This is could have been an example of one of the questionnaires:

*It was a fantastic idea, I liked how when you start talking to the interviewee they didn't stop talking and especially the youngsters and that gave me a really good feeling because they have the interest to talk about the 'things'. I think I could ask more people if I started earlier.*

2. What did you learn from the project?

*I learned what people in my community thinks and what do we have to do to change our lives and make our land a better place.*

3. How are you going to use what you have learned in the future?

*Trying to finish my school, keep going on youngsters activities so I can build up myself with information and knowledge and so when I'm all grown up help to make my island a better place.*

4. Following from your answer on question 3: Is there anything We Lead or Joeri Kabalt can do that would help you?

*Yes, to keep us up to dated with other projects.*

One interviewer furthermore states that she has 'learned the value of cooperation' due to the cooperative nature of this project:

*'In my opinion the project Curaçao our nation is a really informative means for our youngsters. I personally thought I knew a lot, but because of this project I have learned much more. Besides learning how to interview, I also learned the value of cooperation.'*<sup>100</sup>

The timing of the project, combined with the short interview period appeared to be an issue, as one interviewer notes:

*'I was too busy with exams, so it was a busy time. But I did manage to do the interviews, unfortunately not to send them to you, but I did do them.'*<sup>101</sup>

<sup>100</sup> "Voor mijn opinie is het project Curaçao, our nation echt een leerzame middle voor onze jongeren. Ik persoonlijk dacht dat ik veel wist, maar dankzij dit project heb ik veel meer geleerd. Naast leren om te interviewen, heb ik ook het verband van samenwerking geleerd."

<sup>101</sup> "Ik had het druk met tentamens dus het was een drukke tijd, maar het lukte me wel om de interviews te doen, helaas nog niet om het naar jou op te sturen, maar ik heb het wel gedaan."

This is probably the reason why there are still participants who did have conversations with five people, but have not finished or sent their interview reports to this day. Overall, the project was considered as being ‘fun’ and some of the interviewers indicate their interest in participating in other projects or follow-up projects as well:

**Picture 16** Receiving certificates of participation

*‘It was great, learn a lot and knew what other people thinks about our island! The group was awesome, I had fun! Yes, do more of these kinds of lessons so more guys can do it. And maybe some other lessons. And again was great!’*

It is however essential to combine the ‘fun’ part with some ‘hard’ appointments as to handing in interview reports. For there are participants who have participated actively in the ‘fun’ part such as attending the workshops and conducting the interviews, but have not managed to write a report of the interviews. This especially goes for the ‘volunteers’ recruited through We Lead; unlike the class of students they are not graded or obliged to hand anything in on time. This is at the same time an advantage and a disadvantage. The We Lead participants have chosen to participate in this project and are



willing to do so in their spare time, whereas the students had no choice in the matter. On the other hand, the students had time scheduled to spend on this project and therefore managed to do more work for it. They furthermore had an incentive to actually ‘finish’ the project by handing in the interview and reflection reports, because they would receive a grade for the project. This was probably why the students handed in reports of about 20 pages, with notes on their interview approach, a detailed description of the interviews themselves, a reflection on each interview and an overall reflection report. Complete with pictures of Curaçao and the positive aspects of Curaçao. From the group of We Lead participants only a handful of people actually handed in all their interviews and they paid considerably less attention to writing down the interviews.

At the end of both workshops, the participants received a certificate to thank them for their participation in the project.

## **5.4 An ongoing process**

As one interviewer notes in her questionnaire: we should continue with the project and use what we have learned to come to a shared vision and to action:

*“People should not leave the research at this, but involve more people and also strive for a shared vision and also work for this.”<sup>102</sup>*

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<sup>102</sup> “Men zou het research niet hierbij moeten laten meer mensen erbij betrekken en ook naar een gemeenschappelijke visie strijden en ook hiervoor werken.”

A journalist I befriended also told me that it was remarkable that people have shared their hopes and dreams in this project and even got inspired by the project, but that I should be careful not to leave it at this and let people become disappointed again. With this in mind, I found it difficult to leave the island. I felt (and still feel) personally connected to the project and would therefore like to help with the parts to come. However, perhaps I should accept that my part is played and that the others, the We Lead board, the interviewers, the interviewees and all the others that are interested can continue with the project in one way or another. With regard to 'de-centring' self and empowering local people to do the project, leaving the island would make sure I would not get too involved. Still, I had some doubts whether the project would actually continue and in my opinion it would be a shame not to.

The 4-D cycle was a good way to story the project, because people had the feeling they had now completed the first 'D' and that there was therefore more to come. I organised a meeting with the We Lead board about how to continue the project or process after my departure to the Netherlands. All the board members were determined to continue the 4-D cycle in one way or another. For the second 'D', Dream, there were already numerous ideas, such as organizing an Open Space meeting with people from all parts of society in which the results of the discovery phase would be used as a starting point. Jourich even suggested writing a book about each stage in the 4-D cycle. At the time of writing, the plans to continue the project are still there and I am curious to learn what will happen in the future. I hope We Lead will find a way to involve the interviewers and even the interviewees in the process and in that way build on the experiences in the first part of the project.

## **Chapter 6: Reflecting upon and learning from the project**

In Chapter 1 we started out with some stories about Curaçao; a call for a ‘mentality change’ seemed to buzz around the island in relation to the new autonomous status of Curaçao. Because of the island’s history, people were said to have a lack of an own identity, a lack of self-respect and a passive and indifferent attitude towards for instance politics and the future of the island. This mentality supposedly needed to change in order to profit from the chances offered by the new constitutional structure resulting in an autonomous Curaçao. These stories that are told about and by the people of Curaçao are not ‘new’, but the new *Pais Kòrsou* offered a new motive for working with these stories. How could I, as an outsider and scientist, work with these stories without imposing my ideas and views of what is ‘good’ on others and motivate people from ‘within’ without being another external force that claims to ‘know better’? Relational constructionist approaches to development and change offer a radically different conception of change where *‘the change agency is ‘located’ in ongoing processes and not in ‘a change agent’* (Hosking, 2006: 64). These ongoing processes offer the possibility of the construction of non subject-object ways of relating, wherein different people, things and realities are treated as *‘different but equal’* (Hosking, 2006: 62). I have tried to put these ideas ‘to work’ in the context of Curaçao by working with a particular approach to development and change, Appreciative Inquiry.

In this concluding chapter I will reflect upon the process by revisiting the central research question and reflect upon my experiences during the process by making use of the literature from Chapter 2. In paragraph 6.1 I will start out with revisiting the central research question and the research aims as formulated in the Chapter 1. In paragraph 6.2 I will focus on two themes that emerged from the work in the field and need some further theoretical exploration: ‘what is positive?’ and ‘constructing non subject-object relations’. In paragraph 6.3, I will continue with what I learned as a ‘change worker’ and add some suggestions for other researchers and practitioners and end with some final thoughts on the research project in paragraph 6.4.

### **6.1 Changed ways of talking about the future of Curaçao?**

I used a central research question to guide my efforts throughout the research project, which I will presently revisit:

**How can relational constructionist approaches to development and change help to come to changed ways of talking about the future of Curaçao?**

Because of the understanding of Appreciative Inquiry as an ongoing process, it is not useful in this context to think of the research project in terms of an ‘intervention’ with a pre- and post- measurement (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). Rather, this research project can be thought of as being part of an ongoing process, in which ‘inquiry and intervention’ are simultaneous (Hosking, 2006). In answering the research question, it is therefore helpful to look at the *process*. In Chapter 4 and 5 I have provided you with an elaborate story of both my first few weeks on Curaçao as well as the Appreciative Inquiry project, ‘Curaçao, our nation’, that emerged during

the second part of my stay on the island. It is interesting to see how the tone of the conversations seemed to change gradually over time as more people entered into the conversation about Curaçao. At first, people seemed sceptical about the future of their island, people appeared to be disappointed or even indifferent towards politics, politicians and the new autonomous status of their island and kept on pointing to the Netherlands as 'the place where everything is better'. The relationship with the Netherlands appears to be a complicated one and throughout the conversations the Netherlands figured in different qualities; as an example or as the 'villain' from which the ties need to be severed; hence the story about 10-10-10 as a 'way station for independency'. Nevertheless, people do feel a strong sense of love for their island. It was difficult to get to these latter feelings of love and connectedness at first. However, when more people entered the conversation in the context of the Appreciative Inquiry project 'Curaçao, our nation', the language seemed to shift slightly from deficit vocabularies (Ludema, Cooperrider and Barrett, 2000) and blaming (Gergen, McNamee & Barrett, 2001) to vocabularies of hope (Ludema, 2001) and possibilities (Hosking, 2006). Naturally, elements of those earlier stories kept on coming back, but people seemed to have embraced the invitation to centre possibilities and appreciation. I will try to reflect upon the process by using the research aims that were put forward in Chapter I.

Help to open up new possibilities of being for the participants. The participants can be divided in two groups, the young interviewers and the people they entered into conversations with. Following my relational constructionist orientation, the participants can be thought of as co-researchers instead of mere data collectors and informants. Besides, the aim of research has shifted from providing a 'mirror' of reality out there (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000) to exploring together what '*sorts of social life become possible when one way of talking and acting is employed versus another*' (Hosking & McNamee, 2006: 30). Therefore the focus is not on the 'data' the interviewers collected, but on how participating in this project helped to open up new possibilities of being for both the interviewers as the interviewees.

The interviewers have indicated that they have improved their organising, social and cooperative skills by participating in the project, but most of all that the conversations they had with their fellow countrymen inspired them and made them see Curaçao 'through the eyes of others'. Especially the conversations with people who were not originally from Curaçao enabled them to look at Curaçao with new eyes and as a result of that made them appreciate their island more and become proud on their island. By literally meeting different people and learning about their personal stories and dreams for the island, people from different 'groups' in society got a 'face' (Gergen, McNamee & Barrett, 2001). Several interviewers say to have realised that the community on Curaçao is perhaps more united than they thought and the differences between different 'groups' in society are more nuanced than they assumed. As one girl noted, before participating in this project, she thought that 'either you are that side or the other side'. She has realised, by talking to people from different national backgrounds, that the inhabitants of Curaçao share ideas about and dreams for the island, despite their differences. This is a beautiful example of how participating in the project has changed the participants in one way or another. It seems she has moved from a hard differentiation between groups to a more nuanced view. Meeting different people enabled the participants to shift from thinking in terms of a 'hard

differentiation' to a 'soft differentiation' (Hosking, 2004, 2006). Positive stories, for instance about young people helping their community, inspired the interviewers and gave them hope.

The participants, both interviewers and interviewees, became more used to hopeful and appreciative ways of talking about the island, their fellow inhabitants and themselves. For the interviewers this was more so than for the interviewees; they spend considerably more time on the project than the interviewees and there is more 'evidence' on the part of the interviewers. It would have been interesting to learn how the interviewees think back about their interview experience. The interview reports give us some idea about how the interviewees experienced the conversations. The interviewees have reacted to the invitation to look at their island and their own role in contributing to the future of the island from a different angle. The conversations proved a context to think and talk about Curaçao in terms of possibilities rather than in terms of deficits.

How can the participants carry forward what they have learned? Hopefully, the participants are able to employ these new ways of talking and seeing in their day-to-day life; in their studies, work, personal relationships, and so on. I furthermore sincerely hope that this part of the project is only a start of more to come. By inviting the interviewers and interviewees in follow-up projects, they will receive a chance to develop these newly acquired skills and ways of talking more.

Help to come to changed ways of talking about (the future of) the island. The participants noted that the people they had conversations with tended to think negative and consequently found it difficult to answer the positive questions. It was even suggested that 'seeing the bad before the good' was part of the culture of Curaçao. An interesting thing that happened was that we kept bumping into stories about the Netherlands; the relationship with the former coloniser seems to play an important role to this day, especially in thinking about the future of the island. There seems to be a love-hate relationship with the Netherlands and somehow these feelings of love and hate are transferred to the own island. Everything is better in the Netherlands and the Netherlands should even take over control on Curaçao since they will do a better job than the locals, but at the same time there are voices in society that explicitly want to distance themselves from the Netherlands, hence the desire for independence. Feelings of inferiority and national pride exist alongside each other, complemented with feelings of injustice and the need for international (or perhaps Dutch) recognition and more nation building, since people are said to lack national pride. This may partly explain why the *Yu di Kòrsou* tended to appreciate their island less than immigrants and the questions were said to be 'painful' for the *Yu di Kòrsou*, which intrigues me. How to make sense of all this? In the literature on development and change and Appreciative Inquiry, there are ample examples of how people are 'stuck' in deficit discourses or vocabularies (Cooperrider, 1990; Hosking, 2006; Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett, 2000; Ludema, 2001), but not much can be found about the relationship with the former coloniser and its role in creating such discourses. I have read Freire (1970) in an early stage of my research project. He is referred to in AI literature for developing a dialogical method of (action) research and promoting non subject-object ways of relating, but he especially focuses on post-colonial societies. According to him the people that live in (post-)colonial societies, in his words 'the oppressed', have internalised the 'oppressor', which causes internal struggles and a split personality:

'The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor which consciousness they have internalized. The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting him; between solidarity or alienation; between following prescription or having choices; between being spectators or actors; between acting or having the illusion of acting through the action of the oppressors; between speaking out or being silent, castrated in their power to create and re-create, in their power to transform the world. This is the tragic dilemma of the oppressed' (Freire, 1970: 32-33).

As a result the oppressed lack self-confidence, have a submissive and impassive mentality and feelings of fatalism, which is mostly in line with the writings of Marcha and Verweel (2000, 2003) and the ideas of the priest Amado Römer.

However, the tendency to answer negatively was partly broken through by the Appreciative Inquiry process. The participants were invited to look at their lives and island from a different angle and people did share positive stories in the conversations. Notably, people seemed overall positive about the future of Curaçao. Almost everyone reacted to the invitation to imagine a positive future for Curaçao. Cooperrider (1990) argues that human systems are heliotropic in character and move towards positive images of the future. It is too early to say whether people actually moved towards these futures, but the participants did create positive images of the future together. In the context of the project 'Curaçao, our nation' people had a positive conversation about Curaçao and participating in this project as participant or interviewee has offered people a new vocabulary; a vocabulary where hope and trust in the future figure prominently, instead of deficits, blaming and problems.

Help to come to changed ways of constructing 'self': release potentials and create a sense of agency. A lot of people seemed to have feelings of 'helplessness', which can for example be seen in the lack of power people experience with regard to politics. People have the feeling that 'politics is a mess', but do not see how they can influence politics or other aspects in society that are supposedly the responsibility of the government. Contrary to the literature on Curaçao (Marcha & Verweel, 2000; 2003), people did not appear to be 'indifferent' when asked what changes they would like to see on their island. They had all sorts of ideas and visions for their island. In the conversations, there seems to be a slight shift from 'learned helplessness' to 'learned helpfulness' (Cooperrider, 1990; Hosking, 2004; Saha, 2009; Thatchenkerry, 2005). Simply put, the credo seemed to be to 'start with yourself'. Instead of hiding behind or feeling burdened by their inability, some people searched for ways in which they could contribute to a better future for Curaçao in their everyday life, for instance by being kind to others or greeting people on the street. In the context of this project, people were invited to story themselves differently, as agents of change instead of 'powerless' or 'helpless' people that automatically point to the *gobiernu* (government).

Besides that, a stronger conception of 'us' and 'we' seems to be under construction. The desire to shift from blaming, pointing fingers and division to 'working together' was expressed. As Gergen, McNamee and Barrett (2001) argue, people normally tend to avoid conversations with people that are conceived of as different, whereupon the accounts of the other become simplified. In this project the participants were invited to talk to

'different' people, both different from themselves and different from each other. The AI project worked with the five components of transformative dialogue put forward by Gergen, McNamee and Barrett (2001). People with different backgrounds shared personal stories, in which the interviewees were urged to take a genuine posture and an attitude of openness ('there is no wrong answer'). In the conversations 'imaginary moments' for Curaçao were shared and the future of Curaçao served as a 'common purpose':

'As participants move toward common purpose, so do they redefine the other, and lay the groundwork for a conception of "us"' (Gergen, McNamee & Barrett, 2001: 709).

People seemed to start with constructing a different self in relation to others, self as being part of a bigger community, an 'us'.

Try to help people to help themselves and initiate a process that can continue without me. I tried to organise an Appreciative Inquiry project together with others, in the hope that the project could continue without me. By working together, the project should become a co-creation of people and with that facilitate the motivation and training of people to continue with the project. By trying to come to non subject-object ways of relating (Hosking, 2006), I hoped to facilitate a project wherein the participants would be motivated 'from within' instead of by me as an 'external force'. I furthermore did not want to impose my ideas of what is 'good' or of the desired direction of change on others. First of all, it is good to learn that people are already organised on Curaçao and it is therefore not really necessary to 'help people to help themselves'. People are fully capable of doing that already. Van der Haar and Hosking (2004) see Appreciative Inquiry as 'an ongoing process', rather than as an intervention with a beginning and an end. Following this view, the process has only just begun and the question is how the process or processes will continue. We Lead has a role in continuing the process, as do the other participants. Even though I still have some doubts that the project will continue without me, the last conversation I had with the We Lead board for my departure was promising. The board was determined to continue the 4-D Cycle and there were numerous ideas how to do so; from Open Space meetings to magazines and TV commercials to share the results. Several people varying from consultants to government officials and journalists have indicated to be interested in the project and help with a continuation of the project. What my own role will be in all this has yet to be discovered. I will most likely be involved in one way or another from a distance, but I do not exclude the possibility that I will be more actively involved and go back to Curaçao for some time. At the time of writing, the conversation about the continuation of the project is still in full swing.

## **6.2 Some themes that emerged in the field**

Before going 'into the field', I read literature about approaches to development and change rooted in a social/relational constructionist thought style and about Appreciative Inquiry specifically. How do my experiences during this project correspond with or differ with the literature as described in Chapter 2? As described in the section above, the project did approximate several of the expectations that are put forward in the AI literature, such as the construction of positive futures (Cooperrider, 1990; Gergen, McNamee & Barrett, 2001), handing a vocabulary of hope and possibilities (Ludema, 2000) and helping people to move from learned helplessness to learned helpfulness (Cooperrider, 1990; Hosking, 2004; Saha, 2009; Thatchenkerry,

2005). However, there were also some themes that kept on coming back throughout the process that ask for some further exploration.

**What is positive?** Throughout the research project I worked with 'positive' constructions. As is stressed by Van der Haar and Hosking (2004), what is considered 'positive' is a local construction and consequently there is not one general understanding of 'positive'. How 'local' these constructions are also seems to differ, in line with the body of thought of Hosking (2004, 2006). Sometimes 'local' means Curaçao, whereas there are different understandings of what is positive existing alongside each other on Curaçao as well. For instance the public transportation on the island is both seen as 'working well' and as one of the things that need immediate improvement. I began to wonder whether what 'positive' and 'negative' mean, when they are thought of as local constructions. How can you know what is positive or negative and who can decide about that? I wondered whether there was not a tension between the emphasis on appreciation and positive values on the one hand and the opening up to multiple local cultural realities and constructions on the other hand. What if people don't want to focus on appreciation, possibilities and positive values? How can you emphasise positive values, without imposing a certain view of the positive on others?

Most of the AI literature fails to address the question of negativity. Not only is there a lack of advice in what to do when one encounters 'negativity' in the field, it can be questioned whether including certain 'negative elements' might even be beneficial to the process. For example Saha (2009) noted that people needed the negative experiences in their life to come to dreams for a better future, or in his words the *'construction of positive was founded in relationship with negative situation'* (Saha, 2009: 93). As described in Chapter 2, there have recently been authors who have taken issue with the increased tendency to equate AI with 'the positive' (Boje, 2010; Bushe, 2007, 2010a, 2010b; Fitzgerald, Oliver & Hoxsey, 2010). I tend to agree with Bushe (2007, 2010a, 2010b) and Fitzgerald, Oliver and Hoxsey (2010) that a lot of practitioners value the positive principle above other principles of AI and that this is undesirable. Fitzgerald, Oliver and Hoxsey (2010) argue for the embracing of the 'whole person', including his or her 'negative' sides. Van der Haar and Hosking (2004) are also of the opinion that focusing on negative aspects may have *'very positive implications for how relating continues'* (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004: 13).

In this context it is interesting to go back to Cooperrider's original understanding of positive. In his early work (Cooperrider, 1990) he writes about human systems as 'heliotropic'; just as a plant grows in the direction of the sunlight, so do human systems move towards positive images of the future. He argues that positive images are more powerful catalysts for action than 'neutral' or 'negative' images. However, he does not give an explicit definition of what is positive, but he does stress the contextual nature of organisations and human systems. How can we profit from the 'power of the positive' without imposing our view of the positive on others and with that facilitate subject-object ways of relating? In line with Cooperrider's understanding of positive, complemented with the writings of Van der Haar and Hosking (2004), you can not know beforehand what a certain community will construct as positive and as an AI practitioner, you should therefore be careful not to intervene or impose your own idea of positive on others. However, focusing on appreciation and possibilities, whatever they are, does give people energy and helps them to move to these same positive constructions.

Thus, centring appreciation and opening up to multiple local realities and constructions do not necessarily exclude each other.

How can we understand the trumpeting of the 'unconditional positive question' by Ludema, Cooperrider and Barrett (2000) in this context? Perhaps the questions are unconditionally positive, but the answers are up to the interviewees; or as we imprinted upon the participants 'there is no wrong answer'. A focus on appreciation and possibilities cannot simply be equated with a focus on 'the positive'. Rather appreciation seems to be about not judging what is good or bad. A new question arises: for how do you know which questions are regarded as positive in a certain local cultural context? And to make it even more difficult, how to take into account all the different understandings and local cultural realities within that context? A way out of this is to avoid standard sets of questions, make the questions together with the community and involve different groups in the process. This is something I could have paid more attention to. I did develop the questions together with the We Lead board members and we all tested them on community members, but it would perhaps have been better to explicitly involve different groups in the drafting of the questions.

From my experiences in the field, I do understand it is tempting to equate AI with the positive and I have even done this myself at one point when I was confused about my course of action (see paragraph 4.3). One thing that I have learned from this project is that reading about AI and actually designing an AI project are two very different things. The theory of Appreciative Inquiry is fairly complex and philosophical and it is not at all easy to translate these ideas to the day-to-day activities in the field. Add all the difficulties you will encounter in a specific context and reducing AI to the positive is an easy way out of the complexities. Of course the name 'Appreciative Inquiry' does not help in this context. This is perhaps one of the risks of Appreciative Inquiry; it is deceptively simple and the positive focus immediately appeals to people. However, when AI is reduced to the positive it is no longer Appreciative Inquiry, at least not in the sense of a relational constructional approach to development and change, which promotes the construction of non subject-object processes. Indeed, Appreciative Inquiry is a very subtle and delicate process if subject-object ways of relating are to be avoided. A process where there is space for multiple understanding of the positive alongside each other and where 'good' and 'bad' are not polarised.

**Constructing non subject-object processes.** Just as with the positive focus, it was more difficult to come to non subject-object ways of relating than I imagined beforehand. At first, I was at a loss at how to start or what to do. I did know that I wanted the process to be cooperative, I did not want to impose my view on others or position myself above the others and I wanted to '*treat multiple different local realities as different but equal*' (Hosking, 2006: 62). However, this has seemed to bring me to a standstill at first. I was hesitant in initiating anything myself, because I did not want to play the part of the normal researcher and decide for the rest what was going to happen (see paragraph 4.3 for a more elaborate description). Throughout the project I felt torn between initiating something myself and my desire to facilitate non subject-object ways of relating. I was unsure how much I could do without crossing some imaginary line. I explicitly invited others to organise the project together with me, but I kept having doubts whether people felt genuinely that they could contribute and in which degree people actually contributed. Perhaps people did not dare to do so or expected me to take

care of the organisational part, since that is what researchers normally do. For moving to non subject-object ways of relating not only entails a shift in thinking on the part of the researcher, but also on the part of the researched.

Whenever there were some suggestions on the parts of others, I was overly eager to concede to their suggestions. An example is the set of questions that was used throughout the project, in which I integrated all the suggestions from the We Lead board members. I truly feel that I organised the project together with the We Lead board, but even they did not change that much in the project proposal that was supposed to function as a start for further dialogue. I had tried to write this proposal on the basis of all the conversations during the first part of my stay and take the things I learned about the local culture and about We Lead into account. Looking back, I feel the other participants had less space to actually change the project. The interviewers were relatively free in with whom, how and when they would enter into the conversations and the way in which they would write these conversations down. The questions were however already formulated, even though they merely served as a guideline and participants were motivated to switch the order of the questions or add questions.

In the literature, it is said that '*Non S-O ways of relating can be constructed in processes that treat multiple different local realities as different but equal*' (Hosking, 2006: 62). I encountered multiple realities and constructions in the field and tried to treat them as 'equal'. However, this was not always easy. I also found it difficult to deal with the differences I encountered in the first part of my stay on the island. The differences between the life I built up with Dula and her family and friends and the activities I engaged in for *Jongeren van het Koninkrijk* seemed to be incompatible to me at the time. Even though I was resolved to treat the different local constructions and realities as 'different, but equal' (Hosking, 2006; Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004), I felt I was unconsciously more drawn to Dula's life and We Lead, which resembled the 'true' Curaçao for me. After a while I felt I could easily move between these different 'worlds' and did no longer see them in terms of a 'hard differentiation'. The boundaries between different realities were more blurry than I assumed at first; in fact I gave up on pretending to 'know' about these different realities at all. Which is not surprising, since reality construction processes are multiple, ongoing and simultaneous and there is no fixed state of things that we can more or less know about (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004).

### **6.3 A first experience as Change Worker**

This research project was my first experience as a 'change worker', instead of a 'normal' researcher. As Alvesson and Deetz (2000) note, in a more postmodern discourse of science, the researcher takes a radically different position than in more traditional discourses of science. Instead of an objective expert, the researcher is seen as 'positioned' and 'active'; consequently the person of the researcher becomes the object of research as well (Gergen, 2009), which is why I am talking about my own experiences in this context in the first place. What I learned from this research project has to do with my personality and character, but my experiences can nevertheless be helpful for other practitioners as well.

**An emergent design.** I tried to work with a local/emergent design, in the understanding of Alvesson and Deetz (2000), wherein the research concepts gain their meaning in an interaction between the researcher and the researched in the field. In this project the distinction between ‘researcher’ and the ‘researched’ was less pronounced; instead the participants and perhaps even the interviewees can be thought of as co-researchers. Working with an emergent design is perhaps one of the most important aspects of doing this kind 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 others involved in the process.

However, working with such an emergent design not only requires a shift in thinking on the part of the researcher (and on the part of the community members), but also asks a lot of the researcher personally. In my experience it is difficult to switch to a radically emergent design. As described in Chapter 4, the uncertainty and unpredictability of the process made me feel confused and insecure and hindered me in moving forward. I found it difficult to no longer be able to ‘control’ the research process, as in more conventional research projects. As a researcher you need to be flexible and work with what you have at that particular moment, you need to engage in an ongoing dialogue with the community about the process and make decisions about where you are all headed when needed. In this project, the process was everything but linear or predictable; there were times when I felt I was standing still and times I had to run to get it all done. Working with an emergent design is furthermore thwarted by the requirements of third parties, in my case the requirement of Utrecht University and my master programme. Normally, a proposal with detailed information as to what you are going to do in the field is expected. This does not necessarily have to be a problem, in my experience the writing of a proposal helped me to structure my research ideas, as long as you are able to deviate from the proposal and leave space for the emerging process. In this project, I had a clear time restriction, which made it difficult to let the project emerge in its own tempo. However, there will always be practical aspects that need to be taken into account and as a researcher you need to find a way to work with those. I learned it was only possible to know afterwards what worked and what did not in a specific time and context, which seems to be inherent to this type of change work and forms another argument for working with an emergent design.

**De-centring self?** Before leaving for Curaçao, I voiced several concerns to my supervisor regarding my person and whether I was the right person to initiate a change process on Curaçao. I am after all a *Makamba*, a white Dutch girl. What was my business with Curaçao? Would people on Curaçao not see me as ‘another Dutch person’ and therefore be unwilling to participate in the project? 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. Nevertheless, I did wonder whether my efforts to ‘become a local’ affected the process and becoming or living among the ‘locals’ is even a necessary condition of coming to a successful AI project. As Hosking (2004, 2006) notes, it is extremely difficult to ‘become a local’ because even simple acts rely upon many, often tacit, cultural practices. Which is why I sometimes made ‘mistakes’ and was easily identified as an ‘outsider’. So 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 such 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. Saha (2009) noted the need for the researcher to be 'part of the community' as well:

'Effort to build this non subject-object is about being a part of the people; living among them and listening to them as such by which change worker together with the community determines ways of doing; not just using mere techniques of listening after entering in a community with already decided project' (Saha, 2009: 114).

In my view, it can only be helpful to learn the language and learn about the people you want to work with by living among them and listening to them. This does not mean you have to be 'like' the community members, for you are different; even if you would want to try you would need a long time to become a local and then the question arises what exactly defines the local, since there are always multiple local realities and understandings. Nevertheless, I noticed I longed to be 'part of' the community instead of to be regarded as an outsider. Therefore, I did all I could to become a local and become part of the AI project as well, by positioning myself as one of the participants. I do not think the key lies in 'becoming a local', but being open-minded and truly listen to the people you work with in order to put yourself in their place, is in my view a prerequisite for a project to be 'successful'.

#### **6.4 Appreciating Curaçao**

Overall, it seems the Appreciative Inquiry process opened up new vocabularies and ways of talking and storying Curaçao and the future of the island. Strikingly, I set out to see how approaches to development and change could help to come to changed ways of talking the future of the island, while I learned throughout this project that ways of talking about the future of the island start with changed ways of talking about self and others closer around you. People have faith in the future when they think they can contribute to this future themselves. This quote from a participant that was already mentioned in Chapter 5 illustrates this nicely:

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

The 'nobody is good and nobody can do anything' mentality this girl describes closely resembles the 'first you are nothing, than you can do nothing' of the old priest Amado Römer mentioned in Chapter 1. Somehow the normal mentality of 'nobody is good and nobody can do anything' was set aside, at least for the duration of the conversations, and people did appreciate and value the people around them. Relational constructionist approaches to development and change and Appreciative Inquiry can help people to come to changed ways of talking about themselves and help to come to new vocabularies. However small this change was in the context of this relatively short project. Even though we still have a lot to learn about how to organise 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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# Appendices

## Appendix I: Interview Questions Imagine Chicago

Taken from: Browne, B.W. & Jain, S. (2002). *Imagine Chicago: Ten Years of Imagination in Action*. Page 13.

### IMAGINE CHICAGO INTERGENERATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How long have you lived in Chicago? In this community?
  - 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 city of Chicago, what particular places, people or images represent the city to you?
3. Thinking back over your Chicago memories, what have been real high points for you as a citizen of this city?
4. Why did these experiences mean so much to you?
5. How would you describe the quality of life in Chicago today?
6. What changes in the city 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?
7. Close your eyes and imagine Chicago as you most want it to be in a generation from now. What is it like? What do you see and hear? What are you proudest of having accomplished?
8. As you think back over this conversations, what images stand out for you as capturing your hopes for this city's future?
9. What do you think would be an effective process for getting people across the city talking and working together on behalf of Chicago's future? Whom would you want to draw into Chicago conversation?

## Appendix 2: Draft Interview Questions

### Questions:

1. How long have you lived on 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, what particular places, people or images represent the island to you?
  
3. Thinking back over your memories here on 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 on Curaçao?
  
5. What are in your opinion the things that work well on 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?

## **Appendix 3: Interview Questions in English**

### **Introduction (read aloud before starting with the questions):**

On the historic date of 10-10-10 Curaçao became an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands: Pais Kòrsou. This has been seen both as a promising new start as something that does not interest many people, especially not the ordinary 'man on the street'. This unique moment in history gives us the opportunity to think about the future of our island: on what sort of island do we want to live? Together we can envision a better future for our island and make a first step in constructing this future. A group of young people from Curaçao will talk to five persons each and ask them questions about our island. This project is based on the ideas of Appreciative Inquiry; instead of focusing on what goes 'wrong', people are invited to imagine the island they would like to live on. Everyone is invited to participate in the project and be heard, for the future of the island concerns everyone. The youth will play an important role in constructing their ideal nation, but they cannot do this alone. The future of our nation Curaçao is your future too, it is our nation. We ask you to share your personal stories, dreams and ideas for Curaçao with us, so we can use these to construct our ideal nation together. We can learn from your stories and they can inspire others. We will use your stories, together with the stories of all the other people to build a movement to help the youth in their task to construct their ideal nation. If there are any stories you don't want other people to know, just say so during the conversation.

### **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?

**Summary Sheet (to be filled in after completion of the interview):**

1. What was the most inspiring story you heard in this conversation?

2. What have you learned from this conversation?

## Appendix 4: Interview Questions in Papiamentu

### Introdukshon (lesa na bos altu prome ku kuminsa hasi e preguntanan):

Riba e fecha simboliko di 10-10-10, Korsou a komberti su mes den un pais autonomo den Reino Hulandes: Pais Korsou. Esaki a wordu mira tantu komo un komienso nobo prometedor komo un suseso ku no ta karga interes di hopi persona, especialmente no di e “homber komun riba kaya”. E momento uniko aki den historia ta duna nos e oportunidat di pensa riba futuro di nos isla: “Riba ki tipo di isla nos ke biba?” Huntu nos por krea un vishon di un miho futuro pa nos isla i tambe dal e prome pasonan pa konstrui e futuro aki. Un grupo di personanan hoben di Korsou lo kombersa kada un ku sinku persona i hasi na nan preguntanan tokante nos isla. E projekto aki ta basa riba ideanan di “Appreciative Inquiry”; na lugan di pone e enfoke riba kosnan ku ta kana robes, hende ta wordu stimula pa imagina e isla riba kua nan lo ke biba. Tur hende ta wordu invita pa partisipa den e projekto aki pa asina wordu skucha ja komo e futuro di nos isla ta algu ku ta konserni kada un di nos. Hubentut lo hunga un papel importante den e konstrukshon di e nashon ideal pero nan lo por hasi esei nan so. E futuro di nos nashon Korsou ta bo tambe su futuro, e ta nos nashon. Nos ta pidi bo pa komparti bo experensianan personal, bo sonjonan i bo ideanan pa Korsou ku nos, pa asina nos por huza e informashonnan aki pa asina huntu nos konstrui nos nashon ideal. Nos por siña for di bo experensianan i nan lo por inspira otro. Nos lo huza bo experensianan huntu ku experensianan di tur otro persona pa krea un movimiento ku lo juda hubentut den nan tarea pa konstrui e nashon ideal. Si tin kualkier experensia di bo ku bo no ke pa otro personanan sa, djis bisa esaki durante di e kombersashon.

### Preguntanan:

2. Pa kuantu tempu bo ta biba kaba na Korsou?
  - a. Kiko ta loke na prome lugan a trese bo famia aki?
  - b. Kon bo ta experensiendo e bida komo parti di e komunidad aki?
  
2. Ora bo pensa riba e isla kompleto di Korsou, kua luganan, personanan o imagenan en particular ta representa e isla aki pa bo?
  
3. Or abo pensa bek riba bo memorianan akin a Korsou, kiko tabata e experensianan di mas positivo pa bo komo siudadano di e isla aki? Dikon e experensianan aki a nifika asina tantu pa bo?
  
4. Dikon bo a skohe pa biba i keda aki na Korsou?
  
5. Kiko na bo opinion ta e kosnan ku ta funshona mas miho na Korsou?
  
6. Ken bo ta mira komo un ehempel o un lider den nos komunidad o en general?
  - a. Ken bo ta pensa di dje komo hobenan lider prometedor ku ta trese speransa pa nos komunidad?
  - b. Kiko bo ta spera di e hubentut di Korsou den nan tarea pa konstrui un miho nashon?

7. Ki tipo di liderato bo ta spera i desea pa nos pais?

a. Kiko ta bo opinion tokante politika manera e ta awor i kon politika lo mester ta den bo konsepto?

8. Kon lo bo deskribi awendia e kalidat di bida den Pais Korsou?

9. Kua kambionan ta esunan ku mas bo ke mira riba nos isla?

a. Kon bo ta imagina ku bo mes rol lo ta pa yuda pone tur e kambionan aki sosode?

b. Ken lo por traha ku bo?

10. Sera bo wowonan i imagina Korsou manera abo lo ke mir'e un generashon mas leu for di awor aki. Splika nos kon e ta. Kiko bo ta tende i mira?

**Resumen (pa wordu jena despues di final di e entrevista):**

3. Kiko tabata e experiencia mas inspirativo ku bo a skucha durante di e kombersashon?

4. Kiko bo a siña for di e kombersashon?

## **Appendix 5: Interview Questions in Dutch**

### **Introductie (lees hardop voor je begint met de vragen):**

Op de historische datum 10-10-10 is Curaçao een autonoom land binnen het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden geworden: Pais Kòrsou. Dit wordt zowel gezien als een veelbelovende nieuwe start als iets dat niet veel mensen interesseert, vooral niet de gewone 'man on the street'. Dit unieke moment in de geschiedenis geeft ons de kans om na te denken over de toekomst van ons eiland. Op wat voor soort eiland willen we leven? Samen kunnen we een beter toekomst bedenken en een eerste stap maken in het creëren van deze toekomst. Een groep Curaçaose jongeren praat elk met vijf personen en vraagt aan hen vragen over het eiland. Dit project is gebaseerd op de ideeën van Appreciative Inquiry; in plaats van te focussen op wat er niet goed gaat, worden mensen uitgenodigd om zich voor te stellen op wat voor soort eiland zij zouden willen leven. Iedereen is uitgenodigd om mee te doen, want de toekomst van het eiland raakt iedereen. De jeugd speelt een belangrijke rol in het creëren van hun ideale natie, maar zij kunnen dit niet alleen. De toekomst van onze natie Curaçao is ook jouw toekomst, het is onze natie. We vragen u om uw persoonlijke verhalen, dromen en ideeën voor Curaçao met ons te delen. Wij kunnen van uw verhalen leren en zij kunnen anderen inspireren. We zullen deze verhalen gebruiken, samen met de verhalen van andere mensen, om een beweging te bouwen die de jongeren helpt om hun ideale natie te creëren. Als er verhalen zijn waarvan u niet wilt dat anderen deze horen, kunt u dit tijdens of na het interview aangeven.

### **Vragen:**

1. Hoe lang heeft u op Curaçao gewoond?
  - a. Wat bracht uw familie hier op het eiland?
  - b. Hoe is het voor u om in deze gemeenschap te wonen?
  
2. Als u denkt aan het hele eiland Curaçao, wat zijn specifieke plaatsen, mensen of beelden die het eiland voor u belichamen?
  
3. Als u terugdenkt aan uw herinneringen op Curaçao, wat waren echte hoogtepunten voor u als inwoner van dit eiland? Waarom betekenden deze ervaringen zo veel voor u?
  
4. Waarom heeft u besloten om hier te wonen en op Curaçao te blijven?
  
5. Wat zijn naar uw mening de dingen die goed gaan op Curaçao?
  
6. Wie ziet u als een rolmodel of leider in onze gemeenschap of in het algemeen?
  - a. Aan wie denkt u als jonge leiders die hoop geven aan de gemeenschap?
  - b. Wat verwacht u van de jeugd van Curaçao om een betere natie te bouwen?
  
7. Wat voor soort leiderschap verwacht u voor ons land?

a. Wat denkt u over de politiek nu en hoe zou de politiek moeten zijn in uw mening?

8. Hoe zou u de kwaliteit van leven in Pais Kòrsou vandaag de dag beschrijven?

9. Wat voor veranderingen op het eiland zou u het liefst willen zien?

a. Wat zou u eigen rol kunnen zijn om dit te laten gebeuren?

b. Wie zou er met u samen kunnen werken?

10. Sluit uw ogen en stel u Curaçao voor zoals u zou willen dat het over een generatie van nu is. Hoe ziet het eruit? Wat hoort en ziet u?

**Summary Sheet (In te vullen na het interview):**

5. Wat was het meest inspirerende verhaal wat je hebt gehoord tijdens dit gesprek?

6. Wat heb je geleerd van dit gesprek?

## Appendix 6: Hand-out Workshop I

The original lay-out of the workshop hand-out was altered and only the text is displayed here.

### Project Outline:

On the historic date of 10-10-10 Curaçao has become an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands: Pais Kòrsou. This unique moment in history gives us the opportunity to think about the future of our island: on what sort of island do we want to live? Together we can envision a better future for our island and make a first step in constructing this future. WE LEAD foundation and Dutch student Joeri Kabalt now launch a project in which you can participate! A group of young people from Curaçao will talk to at least five persons each and ask them questions about our island: What do they think of the quality of life on Curaçao? What changes would they most like to see on the island? How would they want Curaçao to be a generation from now? You can decide for yourself who you want to interview: your grandmother, neighbor or the prime minister.

This project is based on the ideas of Appreciative Inquiry; instead of focusing on what goes 'wrong', people are invited to imagine the island they would like to live on. This could be a great opportunity for you to improve your interview and social skills, learn about other people's dreams for Curaçao and contribute to the future of Pais Kòrsou. Everyone is invited to join, because the future of our island concerns all of us. You will receive a basic training in interviewing of 2,5 hrs. The training will take place at 3, 4 and 5 May at 6pm at JCC. On May 23 we will meet again to discuss what we learned from the conversations and how they can help us in constructing our ideal nation. At the end of the project you will receive a certificate from WE LEAD foundation and Utrecht University.

### Interview Guidelines:

1. Interview at least 5 people before the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May. The more interviews and people involved, the better, so it would be great if you manage to interview more people. Interview at least 2 people outside of your family. Try to interview different sorts of people.
2. Write down key words during the interview and write a report after the interview, preferably immediately when you arrive at home. Make sure to write the report before you do another interview, to avoid mixing up answers from both interviews.
3. In your report of the interview write down stories and examples that are remarkable, inspiring, where you learned from, et cetera. You don't have to try to remember and write down the whole interview.
4. If you are able to record your interview with your phone, mp3player or other recording devices, do so and send the audio file to [weleadCuraçao@gmail.com](mailto:weleadCuraçao@gmail.com) and [joerikabalt@gmail.com](mailto:joerikabalt@gmail.com) through [www.wetransfer.com](http://www.wetransfer.com) (if the file is too large to send by e-mail).

### Interview Tips & Tricks:

1. Choose the right environment for the conversation. Preferably a quiet place with no distractions and with no other people in the room.
2. Prepare your partner for the conversation. Tell them what to expect. How long is it going to take? What sort of questions are you going to ask? How are you going to write the answers down or are you going to record the conversation? Always ask permission to record the interview.
3. Take time to build a personal connection before you start with the actual questions. Talk about something else first and get to know each other a little bit, so people feel comfortable and at ease.
4. Give people time to take things at their own pace.
5. Show your partner that you are really listening and that you really care about his/her answers.
6. If you have any additional questions during the interview, please feel free to ask them.
7. Pay attention to the body language of your partner. Where will both of you sit down? Does your partner appear to be at ease (for example not checking his watch)? You can choose to 'mirror' your partner's position to make him/her feel at ease (don't exaggerate).
8. Repeat what you have learned in your own words to your partner to check whether you understood correctly (paraphrase).
9. End the interview by summarizing what you have learned and what inspired you most.

### Contact:

If you have any questions after the training or in the interview process you can contact us:

Joeri Kabalt (Research Coordinator): 510-5537

Ruëna Marcelina (Board Officer): 520-2555

Jourich Christina (Board Recruitment Officer): 523- 0474

[weleadCuraçao@gmail.com](mailto:weleadCuraçao@gmail.com)

## Appendix 7: Programme workshop I

1. Welcome & Introduction: 18.00 – 18.10 (Joeri)
2. Introduction WElead: 18.10 – 18.25 (Daniel)
3. Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry & Project Curaçao, our nation: 18.25 – 18.35 (Joeri)
4. Exercise 1: Listening and not-listening 18.35-19.00
5. Interviewing (round 1): 19.00 – 19.35
6. Plenary discussion: 19.35- 20.00
7. Break: 15 min 20.00 – 20.15
8. Interviewing (round 2): 20.15 – 20.35
9. Preparing for actual interviews: : 20.35 – 21.00

### 1. Welcome & Introduction: 10 min (Joeri)

- Introduce Programme.
- Who are you? What brought you here? Share a dream or wish for Curaçao.

### 2. Introduction Welead: 15 min (Daniel)

### 3. Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry & Project Curaçao, our nation: 10 min (Joeri)

- Introduce project
- Introduce Appreciative Inquiry
- AI principles

### 4. Oefening 1: The art of listening 20 min

- Team up in couples
- Ask you partner what he/she did this weekend.
- Pretend not to listen and act extremely uninterested.
- Back to the group: how did it feel to 1). Not listen to the other, 2). Tell a story when the other is not listening to you.
- Go back to your partner. Ask the same question again and be extremely interested. Try to really listen to the other, ask questions.
- Back to the group: What was this like? How can you translate this to the interview settings to come?

### 5. Interview Exercise 35 min:

- Who has experience with interviewing? What did you do/what was it like?
- Who has some tips about interviewing?
- Appreciative Interview as a specific type of interview; focus on stories, personal connection.
- Split up in couples, different from before & start interviewing, see how far you can get.

### 6. Plenary discussion: 30 min (write down on page)

- How did it go?
- What was it like to be interviewed?
- What was it like to interview someone?
- What went well?
- What would you do different next time?
- Were you able to use the tips & tricks? Which ones were helpful? How did you use them?

### 7. Break: 15 min

### 8. Interviewing (round 2): 30 min

- Switch roles

### 9. Plenary discussion: 10 min

- How did it go?
- What was it like to switch roles?

### 10. Preparing for actual interviews:

- Who would you like to interview? Encourage people to interview different people. Who fascinates you, who do you admire, who would you like to know more about?
- Interview at least 5 people before the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May. The more interviews and people involved, the better, so it would be great if you manage to interview more people. Interview at least 2 people outside of your family. Try to interview different sorts of people.
- Write down key words during the interview and write a report after the interview, preferably immediately when you arrive at home. Make sure to write the report before you do another interview, to avoid mixing up answers from both interviews. You can work them out on the computer if you want and send them.
- In your report of the interview write down stories and examples that are remarkable, inspiring, where you learned from, et cetera. You don't have to try to remember and write down the whole interview.
- If you are able to record your interview with your phone, mp3player or other recording devices, do so and send the audio file to [joerikabalt@gmail.com](mailto:joerikabalt@gmail.com) through [www.wetransfer.com](http://www.wetransfer.com) (if the file is too large to send by e-mail).
- **Questions?!**

#### 11. What next?

- 26<sup>th</sup> of May: all the interviewers come back to share their findings.
- Hand in the interview forms or send them earlier on to me.
- Receive a certificate.

## Appendix 8: Programme workshop 2

### 1. Welcome (15 min):

- ⇒ Share anecdotes from the interviews with each other: funniest, most inspiring et cetera moments.
- ⇒ Explain a little bit about analysis (narrative analysis) & today's aim and programme.

### 2. Fun exercise (10 min):

- ⇒ Imagine the map of Curaçao is on the floor; go stand on your barrio. Find out together with the others where you should stand.
- ⇒ Let some people tell their story: how does your barrio influence you? What do you bring from your barrio today?

### 3. Sharing stories & Searching for patterns (45 min):

- ⇒ Split up in groups of five and start discussing what you learned during the interviews.
- ⇒ Write down stories you heard on a large piece of paper while discussing.
- ⇒ See if you can make out a few common stories/red lines of the most important findings.
- ⇒ Think of a creative way to present the stories/your group's most important findings to the rest of the group in five minutes.

### 4. Present your findings to the rest of the group (45 min):

- ⇒ Each group presents the stories shortly to the rest of the group.
- ⇒ During the presentations someone write down the stories on a piece of paper/board to see whether the groups have different or overlapping stories.
- ⇒ Collectively decide which stories come together and which don't -> we will try to end up with 5-10 stories.

### 5. Break & Fill in short Survey about the project (15 min):

- ⇒ Combination of questions about the project & We Lead

### 6. What to do with the results? (30 min)

- ⇒ form groups of five again and think of what to do with the results
  1. What should happen with the results?
  2. Who should know about the results?
  3. What could be a way to share the results with others?
  4. What can you do to share the results?
  5. How can we use the results to construct our ideal nation?
  6. How can we make anything happen?

### 7. How to continue? (15 min)

- ⇒ We Lead: How is We Lead going to use the results & how can you join We Lead.
- ⇒ What are YOU going to do?

### 8 Ending (5 min)

- ⇒ Thank everyone
- ⇒ Hand out certificates
- ⇒ Group picture

**Appendix 9: Posters from workshop 2**



