



gaia  
education

Design for Sustainability



Final Report

# Health, Happiness and Green Living



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Gaia Education  
Ecovillage  
Design Education  
Programme



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# Course Overview

## Course Overview (150-300 words):

*(Brief explanation of the background of the organisation, host site. Diversity of participants and facilitators. Main highlights, key success factors and other relevant information that would describe what happened during the EDE. This text will appear on Gaia Education's website to describe your programme)*

*Avnø Højskole is an integral part of the aspiring ecovillage, Avnø Oasis, which, in addition to the school, has been in the process of developing several other projects including a cohousing community and green entrepreneurship since 2020. This multi-dimensional framework provides a profound learning environment in conscious and active interaction with people who are committed to being part of Earth's regeneration.*

*During this course (January 4 - March 27, 2024), our students from Lithuania, Japan, Belgium had a chance to*

- *become part of and experience the building of a living community with all its challenges and opportunities – this is a learning experience that is not possible to go through in an already-established community.*
- *be involved in designing and implementing minimum 7 different designs including ecovillage and permaculture designs.*
- *meet people from all over the world – the community here is truly international consisting at the time of the course of enthusiasts belonging to 10-12 different nationalities.*

*Various parts of the course were led by 13 facilitators from 5 different countries – many of them are activists from the ecovillage, eco-building, permaculture and other regenerative movements, and internationally recognized specialists in their fields. The main facilitators of the course, Olha and Kristiane, combined Eastern and Western European approaches and knowledge to deliver a more wholesome experience to the participants.*

*The key highlights of the course were the excursions and all the project designs. Together we saw how people manage to build communities and live a more regenerative, meaningful, and satisfying life. The excursions helped the students substantially in developing their designs.*

*Avnø's charming nature assisted the transformations of our HHGL participants all along the course. A way to reconnect with our own inner landscape and understand the magnificence of the world around us lies through directly experiencing, simply being in it here, in the protected coastal zone of Avnø Oasis*



ecovillage.

### Participants (50-150 words):

Basic stats including number of participants, age range, gender ratio, countries, ethnicities, and backgrounds.

*The course was fully completed by 5 students. Some parts, sessions and excursions of the course were attended by up to 15 participants as they were open to the residents, volunteers, and guests of the community. Also, the HHGL course included several mini-courses (PDC, sociocracy, conflict resolution, ceramics, shiatsu) and 5 excursions, and some people came to Avnø to participate in them together with the full HHGL students. As for the 5 full participants, they were all women aged mostly between 19 and 20 years old, while 1 student was in her 40s. 3 students were from Japan, one from Lithuania, and one from Belgium.*

### Course rhythms (50-150 words):

A description of the times of daily activities, sessions, free time, social time, interaction with hosts, rest; how many hours in lectures & practical sessions, etc.

Our standard daily schedule can be seen here: [Daily schedule.docx](#). Every week included at least 5 study days and usually 2 days off, though sometimes when it was more contextually logical we had study days at the weekends and days off on some other days instead. Every day the students were usually offered two 1.5-hour and one 1-hour sessions. The contact time also included daily early morning well-being practices (optional), daily morning circles with the community, daily recap time (0.5 hour before dinner), weekly student sharing circles on Saturdays, and weekly community sharing circles on Sundays, so the approximate total contact time was 250 hours. Almost every day our community members, teachers, or students offered various morning practices and evening programs. During the course, we had 5 excursion trips to other Danish ecovillages and eco-projects. In their free time, the students enjoyed the nature around Avnø, went sightseeing in some Danish cities together and visited other European countries. The HHGL students were part of the Avnø Oasis community during the course, they were well-integrated and actively interacted with many Avnø Oasis community members.



## Highlights & challenges of each dimension

### Social Dimension (150-250 words)

What happened in this dimension? What were the highlights? What subjects were covered? 2-3 participant quotes from the Gaia Education Evaluations or other sources. A sentence on each core faculty/facilitator.

Include 2-3 pictures.

In this dimension, we went through the following **sessions**: Living Library, Rank and Privilege, Consent, CLIPS, Structural Conflict, Sociocracy & Facilitation, Drama Triangle, Non-Violent Communication, 6 Keys to a Sustainable Organisation, NGOs Around Us, Empowering Leadership, Radical Forgiveness, The Art of Ceramics, Forum, Morning Circles, Sharing Circles, Women's Circles, and others. This dimension also included the students taking care of some practical tasks they were responsible for, joining our weekly community sharing circles, weekly student sharing circles, and women's circles that took place every new moon. Our students also facilitated some sessions and morning circles and worked well on the group dynamics during the project design time.

The **highlight** of the dimension: Going to another Danish ecovillage Hallingelille and exploring it! Students loved Camilla's sessions. Living in the common house and sharing everything brought us closer. The ceramics sessions were also enjoyable and showed different sides of student's personalities.

Some **quotes**:

The **facilitators**: Kristiane guided the students through the basics of sociocracy and facilitation, and for some students, this workshop became the highlight of the whole course. Olha facilitated the NVC sessions, most sharing and morning circles, and other "social glue" sessions and activities which substantially deepened the group cohesion and dynamics. All the students were very happy to visit another ecovillage, Hallingelille, meet Camilla and Hanna and gain a lot of wisdom from their experience-proven sessions on community-building methods.



In Hallingelille



One of the social cultures designs



## Ecological Dimension (150-250 words)

What happened in this dimension? What were the highlights? What topics were covered? what practical activities were performed? 2-3 participant quotes from the Gaia Education Evaluations or other sources. A sentence on each core faculty/facilitator. Any other information that you consider relevant.

Include 2-3 pictures.

In this dimension, we went through a full PDC, which included the following **sessions**: Permaculture Design Course: Permaculture Basics and Principles, Water Management, Soil and Sustainable Food, Social Permaculture and Group Works, Eco-Building and Urban Permaculture, Waste Management, Forest Gardening, Energy Management, Livelihoods, Upcycling of Clothes, etc. This dimension also included designing permaculture designs.

The **highlight** of the dimension: Our students had an opportunity to go through the full PDC course certified by the Danish Permaculture Association in the framework of the EDE course! Many of our students expressed that the PDC course itself, Lou's approach, the excursions to other permaculture projects nearby that they had during it, and the PDC design time were some of the most meaningful experiences of the HHGL course.

Some **quotes**:

The **facilitators**: Charlotte was the main person supporting us in the facilitation of the ecological dimension of this EDE, assisted by Simon, a permaculture designer having a farm nearby and working on a permaculture teacher's diploma. Charlotte masterfully designed the full PDC course and with the uttermost care and professionalism shared her passion about permaculture with our students. Rikke taught the students to upcycle clothes.





In Permatopia



At a Simon's Farm



## Economic Dimension (150-250 words)

What happened in this dimension? What were the highlights? What topics were covered? what practical activities were performed? 2-3 participant quotes from the Gaia Education Evaluations or other sources. A sentence on each core faculty/facilitator. Any other information that you consider relevant.

**Include 2-3 pictures.**

In this dimension, we went through the following **sessions**: Understanding the Present Economy, Shifting the Global Economy to Sustainability, Community Banks and Currencies, Circular Economy, Mapping Our Resources, A Community of Communities, Legal and Financial Issues, Common Working Day, Empowered Fundraising, etc. At the end of this dimension the students made designs of green businesses: they decided to work individually, so we saw 5 different designs.

The **highlights** of the dimension: The design work motivated the students to really ask themselves and clarify what is it they really would like to do in life and how would they like to provide for their living. They faces unclarity, lack of motivation and knowledge. And dealth with them, using the help of the facilitators. During the presentations, every students was happy with their designs.

Some **quotes**:

The **facilitators**: Kristiane has a university degree in economy and is one of board members of Vitalitetsfonden. She added some games and group activities to her sessions to make them interactive and experiential. and either ran their own. Ditlev runs his own enterprise focused on conflict resolution and sociocracy and was involved in academic research on alternative economies.



In Christiania

**Worldview Dimension (150-250 words)**

What happened in this dimension? What were the highlights? What topics were covered? what



practical activities were performed? 2-3 participant quotes from the Gaia Education Evaluations or other sources. A sentence on each core faculty/facilitator. Any other information that you consider relevant.

**Include 2-3 pictures.**

In this dimension, we went through the following **sessions**: Wheel of Health, The New Paradigm, Spiral Dynamics, Shiatsu, Energy Flow of Food, Dimensions of Life, Food and Identity, Menu Planning, Personal and Planetary Health, Elements of the Reconnection Gives Direction course, Ecovillage Design Cards Mapping, Dragon Dreaming, Reconnection with Nature and Ourselves, HUMAN documentary, 9 Stepping Stones, Basic Yoga, etc. Many daily morning circles also included various activities to expand mindsets and delve deeper into oneself. The students use this knowledge to create designs for their own future, supported by Kristiane.

The **highlights** of the dimension: Our course had a strong focus on personal health and deep self-reflection. As a result, many participants expressed that they now feel more connected with nature and that their general health and well-being has increased considerably. Many students stopped or reduced considerably their intake of coffee despite drinking 3-4 cups of coffee every day before the course. Every meal a question was offered to share and find out more about each other's worldview.

Some **quotes**:

The **facilitators**: Kristiane facilitated the Reconnection Gives Direction course and coached the students on their way to more enjoyable lives. Philippe and Olha offered various morning practices and Shiatsu. Olha facilitated Women's and sharing circles, she also added some worldview-oriented topics into morning circles.



Shiatsu class



Cooking class



## Design Studio (100-250 words)

What happened in the Design Studio? What were the highlights? What topics were covered? what practical activities were performed? 2-3 participant quotes from the Gaia Education Evaluations or other sources. A sentence on each core faculty/facilitator. Any other information that you consider relevant.

**Include 2-3 pictures.**

We assisted our students in creating their ecovillage designs by offering the following **sessions**: Dragon Dreaming, 9 Stepping Stones, Ecovillage Design Cards, Designing the Design. Kristiane and Olha also observed and supported the mini-groups in all their designs and facilitated the resolution of the appearing tensions.

The **highlights** of the dimension: During the course, our students had an opportunity to develop at least 7 different designs: NGO design, community activities design&facilitation, social culture design, personal future design, permaculture design, design of their ceramic creations and upcycled clothing, green businesses design and the final ecovillage design. Not to mention all the various mini-designs that they created as parts of some sessions! The students were continuously training their ability to dream and create rather than just copy and paste the standard societal templates of how good life “should look”. Working in different design groups and also alone was a profound experience, though quite demanding in terms of mental and emotional capacity. We were glad to observe how much personal development the students gained through making the designs and cooperating with the group or working on their own, clarifying their visions and working styles.

**Some quotes:**

The **facilitators**: Lou was facilitating the work of the students on their permaculture projects. Kristiane and Olha helped the students understand what kind of an ecovillage they’re dreaming of creating and how to make it sustainable and viable – although tired after all the weeks spent together studying, all the students were immersed in the process and produced terrific designs! Other mini designs were facilitated either by Olha or Kristiane.





Ceramics



One of the permaculture designs



## Design Studio Case Studies

Brief description of the case studies developed during the programme if applicable.

During the course, our students had an opportunity to develop at least 7 different designs: NGO design, community activities design&facilitation, social culture design, personal future design, permaculture design, design of their ceramic creations, economic systems design and the final ecovillage design. Our idea of the HHGL course was to proceed from mini-designs to more comprehensive designs. As for their ecovillage designs, the final and the most complex designs out of everything that they were offered to design during the course, the students decided to form 2 groups and tried to make their designs as wholesome and regenerative as possible. The participants had around a week to create their designs and therefore both presentations were amazing to watch and listen to. Many students admitted that because of participating in mini-designs, they did not feel afraid or worried completing this big final design or even presenting it on the stage during the Open Weekend celebration at the end of the course.

One of the groups decided to create an ecovillage focused on green entrepreneurship and innovation. The location fro the project implied connecting a part of it that lives in the countryside and a part that is situated in the city. The students worked well on their group dynamics and overcame several struggles, finally preparing a thought-through and bold presentation. You can find the presentation of their CIRCLE project here: [HHGL3 CIRCLE.pdf](#)

As for the second group, they decided to focus on relaxation and flow, calling their project “Flow-Connect”. The presentation was made with the help of various objects and posters, and also included an interactive game with the participants. The students of this group worked very well with the timeline of the project, describing what’s going to happen during every next year.



Flow-Connect



Flow-Connect



## Lessons Learned (50-300 words)

What could help future EDE's from your experience? What were your biggest learnings?

Describe your EDE in terms of the know-how and learning obtained, the stories and inspiration that happen to the participants and the organisers during the EDE or a good summary of a project or activity carried out during the program. Take into consideration that this will be circulated among the Gaia Education's community, so they wish to learn, get inspired and be empowered by your program and your participant's experiences. (200 - 400 words). Include 1 or 2 pictures.

We were gathering and documenting feedback from various sources, including students, facilitators, organizers, and the ecovillage community. Feedback was obtained through both written and oral means, and the process was ongoing to ensure continuous improvement of our processes, considering the close-knit living situation.

### Main Takeaways:

- We should set up a great promotion to get more participants and more diversity for the course and to be able to pay our teachers better wages
- have more time in between the courses. this time we only had 1,5 months, that's not enough to recharge ourselves. next courses are planned so there are 3 months in between.
- to improve the quality of our economic dimension. to change the contents of some sessions, to add more time for it and to invite new facilitators of this dimension.
- to get one more main facilitator to be able to hold the group dynamics better and complement each other energetically
- we saw this time that the students really mirror very much what's going on in the main facilitators and in the community. so now we are even more attentive to the group processes, individual processes and tensions of any kind
- the process of taking pictures and videos should be organized differently, because this time very few were made
- Shooting video testimonials is also an opportunity of self-development for our students
- daily morning circles that we started having during this course helped us a lot make the students and the community closer and resolve tensions
- next time we'd like to ask the students to design at the beginning of the course how their final celebration will look – as a social activity design. this time the celebration was planned by the organizers and it seemed that the students did not feel their ownership of the event.
- we would like to add a session on taboos and cultural differences, to look even closer at them. this



is especially relevant as we have students coming from outside of Europe.

- organize the materials and documents on our Google drive so that they are easily accessible and understandable to new members of our team
- as some students had issues with communicating in English, next time we'll organize a 2-week intensive thematic English course right before the HHGL and we will include some optional English sessions during the HHGL
- have more sessions outside
- we will make it possible for people to join separate dimensions of the course, so we will offer the separate dimensions on our website as separate courses
- improve the process of calculating the final expenses of our students and making the refunds to their accounts faster
- faster transfers of wages to our teachers
- we managed to design a system of students helping with the daily duties that works well and everyone is happy. we will continue using it.



Summary of projects/activities participants intend to engage in, inspired by their attendance in the course (50 - 150 words):

We consider it too early to tell what the results of their participation are going to be. Now the experience and the knowledge is still quite raw in them, so time is needed to see in which projects the students will use this experience. However, some cases are already emerging. One of the participants will teach some of the economic dimension sessions during the next course. Maybe she will also be one of our main facilitators, she's considering that. Another student spent quite some time during the course developing her ideas about her business back in Japan, using the inspiration gained. One more student went to volunteer for 2 months in a permaculture-oriented ecovillage.