

EDE GLARISEGG 2017

Eco village design education course report



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Introduction

We may think that our daily rituals and the existing ways of living in the cities is the main way to live our lives: today, 54 per cent of the world's population lives in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to increase to 66 per cent by 2050 (United Nations, 2014). Yet there are more and more alternative ways of living spreading around the world. Eco villages are one of them. They have their unique set of principles, their unique organization and design, based on the decisions of the communities which create them. So how do these communities form, develop and survive over time?

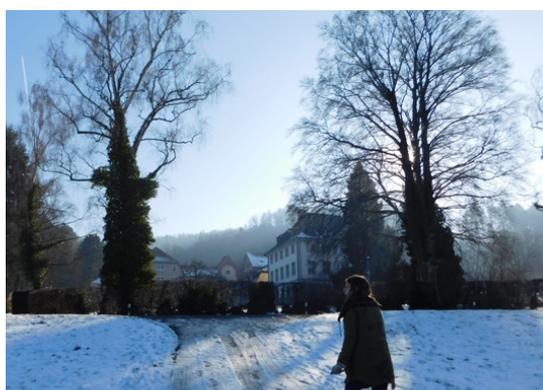
The eco village design course (EDE) is an opportunity to gain knowledge about creating and maintaining eco villages. The course held in Glarisegg, Switzerland 2017 has 47 participants. It lasts one month and has the intention of creating a “transformational culture” together with the participants while focusing on two aspects:

1. Educational: Offering knowledge and tools for personal development and creating & maintaining eco villages.
2. Practical experience: We develop a project during the workshop.

Creating a transformative culture

It is important to mention that during the course we get an impression for ourselves of what it means to be a community. Over the duration of the event we take on different responsibilities: starting with basic communal activities (e.g. communal cooking, cleaning), to organizational and decision making.

It is also important to add that the course is held in Schloss Glarisegg, an eco village of sixty people (forty adults and twenty children) in Switzerland. The community of Schloss Glarisegg participates in some of the open activities (i.e. daily morning circle and some of the educational sessions). Hereby we have the occasion to experience what it means to live in an eco village.



Facilitators

The course is organized by three main facilitators: Elisabeth Schrag, Jashana Kippert and Sonja-Vera Schmitt. The facilitators organized the event and offered many of the workshops during the course. They have years of living experience in eco villages and leading self development processes for individuals and communities. Elisabeth Schrag and Sonja-Vera Schmitt live in the Glarisegg eco village.

The team of assistants is composed of: Anja Herold, Julia Grassinger, Meike Randecker, Nil Aktar, Rouven Lipps and Teodora Radulescu. Most of them have living experience in eco villages and all of them had participated previously in the EDE course. They were responsible with organizing communal activities, logistic details, course content and schedule and the wellbeing of the participants. All of them (with two exceptions: Anja and Meike who were responsible for the kitchen) offered workshops during the course.

Participants

The 47 participants come from international background: Germany, Switzerland, Armenia, Romania, Spain, Portugal, Poland, Turkey, United States, Wales and the Netherlands. Their ages range from 18 to 45 years. The majority of the participants are aged between 25 and 30 years.

Author and methodology

I was a participant of the EDE in Glarisegg 2017 and have a background in scientific writing. The information gathered for this paper is based on notes taken from participant observations of the course, my personal experience and informal discussions with participants. *In order to respect privacy no personal information is shared, only a general overview of the happenings. In special cases where individual information is valuable for the report content (i.e. feedback session at the end of the course), anonymity is kept.*

Because of time limitations (the time for writing the report was approx. 1 day) not all content of the course will be mentioned. The schedule of the course offers a detailed overview of the content (see annex).

This paper illustrates the main content of the course, which is structured in 4 main themes:

1. Social
2. Ecologic
3. Worldview
4. Economic

Social

During the social week we experienced what it means for ourselves as a group to be a community by:

- discovering more about our selves,
- community building

In the beginning of the course we started to be aware of what it means to communicate and to work in different sizes of groups: small (about five people), medium (about fifteen people) and big (about forty-fifty people). Our activities and exercises are accompanied by moments of silence, energizing games, workouts and songs. In order to get to know each other better, in the beginning we take part in an exercise where we sit according to three interests:

- Creativity
- Spirituality
- Research

The majority of participants go to the “creativity” and “spirituality” groups of interest, three members choose the “research” category.

Communal tasks



We soon got to take on communal responsibilities, like cooking, cleaning and washing dishes. The method through which we chose which activities we would take on is intuitive. Papers with tasks are set out throughout the room. We wander from paper to paper, check out what it feels like to be doing the task and also take into consideration the other people who gather around the paper, as they would be our task team for the duration of the workshop. After task groups are settled we

celebrate ourselves: each task group goes in its' turn in the middle of the circle and is cheered by the rest of the big group.

Home groups

Besides the daily learning activities, where we meet as the entire group of 47 people, we are also organized in smaller groups (about 10 to 15 people), so-called "home groups". In home groups we meet once a week and share our personal experience, challenges, usually (but not necessary) at emotional level. It is an occasion to be away from the intense activities of the big group and it offers the space and time to express our individual voice.

Discovering more about ourselves (personal development)

The model we started with in order to understand why it is important to do personal development is the one of an iceberg. The tip of the iceberg, or the "seen" part, is how we act, what decisions we take. Under the tip there is a huge unseen mass which is represented by our emotions and feelings. This part strongly influences our decision-making and our relationships.

In order to raise awareness and discover more about the unseen emotional part, we take part in workshops which offer methods for personal development: "transparent communication", "possibility management", "conflict resolution", "deep ecology", "deep democracy", "collective healing/world view", etc.

Because of time constraints it was not possible to go into depth with the different methods. Yet following insights reflect the content of the workshops as shared by facilitators, as well as from my personal experience and discussions with other participants. The workshops focused on:

- Personal development and communication (i.e. transparent communication, possibility management, conflict resolution) and
- Expressing and dealing with strong built up emotions, feelings and attitudes towards society and world events (deep ecology, deep democracy, collective healing, etc.)

Personal development and communication

The facilitators invited us to be aware of our reactive attitude. In communication a reactive attitude does not offer much possibility for other perspectives. Therefore, the workshops were occasions to practice how to broaden our perspective in difficult or conflictual situations and be aware of our reactive part.



Meditation, silence and introspection are presented as methods of healing the reactivity. The “healing” has the effect of being able to be more authentic to ourselves, therefore communicating more clear. A clear and authentic communication can also include sharing of emotions and feelings. In the communication exercises we usually

looked in each others eyes, taking time and patience to speak, and also to listen to our speaking partner. Sometimes we would give feedback to how we felt while listening, other times we would just be witnesses. Overall these exercises offered alternative ways of communication from the usual day-to-day dialogues, which broadened our awareness about ourselves and our dialogue partner.

Expressing and dealing with strong built up emotions and feelings

The “deep ecology” and “deep democracy” workshops were occasions for participants to express feelings, emotions, attitudes towards inequalities, conflicts and challenges happening in the world. More specific: deep ecology dealt with built up emotions regarding the destructive way of handling natural resources by society (therefore also touching upon the theme of ecology) and deep democracy with the unbalanced power distribution between global south and global north. Both workshops have a similar structure. We gather in a circle, walking counterclockwise, and people who felt the need to express strong feelings are invited to go into the middle. Anybody in the middle can express him or herself as he or she wished, while the others continued to walk counterclockwise.

This is a very intense experience for both the people stepping inside the circle as well as for those walking outside. Later it is explained by the facilitators that it is a personal decision for each of us participants: what do we want to do next and what we feel is right for us to do with these emotions and feelings. The questions suggested for finding this out are:

- How do we get up? and
- How do we continue?

After the exercise of expressing strong feelings (i.e. of anger, sadness) in “deep ecology” we made a wheel of skills and gifts. The wheel is divided in different themes (i.e. spirituality, handicraft, technology and networking, activism, animal protection). Each of us goes in the center and chooses the themes he or she feels is very attracted to and/or very skilled at.



Community building

Regarding community building and relationships we first learn about the 4 phases through which communities pass, as described by psychiatrist Scott Peck:

- Adaptation: a more superficial phase where people get to know each other.
- Chaos: a tense phase of knowing each other more into depth, also with emotional level.
- Emptiness.
- Celebration.

We learn about different ways of organizing (i.e. sociocracy), sharing (i.e. forum) and decision making (i.e. consent decision) as a community. We soon find out, from examples but also from our own experience that it can be quite challenging to differentiate expressing personal emotions and needs from taking decisions



in the community. This challenge is why in many eco villages (i.e. Glarisegg, Sieben Linden, Senruti, Findhorn, Schweibenalp) there is a lot of support for expression of emotions and feelings and personal development. If the emotions and feelings of involved members is not enough taken into consideration, then communal decision making is a lot more difficult and challenging.

In communities (i.e. Glarisegg) there are two types of meetings, in order to facilitate both themes: sharing of emotions or feelings and decision making. In rare cases (i.e.: in Glarisegg eco village they had to decide who of two people would get to have an apartment) when

discussions are about both themes simultaneously: emotional and decision making, alternative voting methods are adopted for decisions to be taken.

In conclusion, social structures lie at the heart of the communities of eco villages. Because relationships are so strong between community members: they share visions about living, organizing, decision making etc. there is a strong need for authenticity and transparency. Authenticity and transparency runs deeper than communal activities, it covers personal needs, emotions and feelings.

Eco villages and spirituality



Spirituality is considered indispensable in creating social structures in eco villages. As shared by one of the Glarisegg community members: “the community cannot exist without it”. The term “spirituality” does not mean the same as “religion”. In traditional eco villages religious belonging may have importance (i.e. ashrams for Hinduism), while in other eco villages (i.e. Glarisegg, Findhorn, Schweibenalp, Senrüti) it does not. Yet spirituality is considered indispensable in communities, because,

as the co-founder of Senrüti eco village shares, “it brings in a higher wisdom for the whole collective”. It is a way of sensing the connection between us humans and nature, seeing us as “one” and not “separate”.

Our small scale system of governance

In order to learn through our own experience what it is like to make decisions and distribute power we elected two groups of representatives, with six to eight people each: “Pavilion” and “Community Care Council” (a.k.a. CCC). “Pavilion” are the representatives for the decision making and the CCC is responsible for the physical and emotional wellbeing of the whole group.

The two councils organize one “Plenum” during the second week of the course. This is an opportunity for both of the councils to meet with the entire group and discuss issues which involve the development of the course. The themes that are up for discussion are:

- What is our main theme of interest for the course?
- What are our needs for the remaining time (two weeks)?

Through playful exercises, introspection, feeling our body’s reactions we first identify the personal needs we have and secondly what is needed from us in order to satisfy them. Afterwards we each express our needs in a group of four. We decide together in this small group which is the common need that includes our personal wishes. We also think of methods

to put it into practice. Each small group then shares this common need with the two councils and with the whole assembly.

Ecologic

In the ecological week we go through the following themes:

- (Deep ecology)
- Permaculture
- Gardening
- Food

Permaculture

The week begins with an introduction in permaculture. The facilitators share the three ethics and the twelve principles of permaculture. The three ethics of permaculture are: people care, earth care and fair share.

When discussing the twelve principles of permaculture we organize ourselves in twelve teams of three people, and each of us randomly receives one of the principles. After a peer-to-peer discussion in the team of three, each of the groups shares the insights with the rest of the participants.

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
|  | 1. Observe & interact |  | 7. Design from patterns to details |
|  | 2. Catch & store energy |  | 8. Integrate rather than segregate |
|  | 3. Obtain a yield |  | 9. Use small & slow solutions |
|  | 4. Apply self-regulation & accept feedback |  | 10. Use & value diversity |
|  | 5. Use & value renewable resources & services |  | 11. Use edges & value the marginal |
|  | 6. Produce no waste |  | 12. Creatively use & respond to change |

The facilitators share their experience of working in permaculture gardens of:

- Schloss Glarisegg, Switzerland.
- Aurora Community, Romania.

They present aspects of design, maintenance, use of resources and community involvement.



In the garden of Schloss Glarisegg there are two to three constant gardeners. They use upcycling, raised beds and integrate animals (chickens and ducks). People of the Glarisegg eco village have a contract with the garden and receive baskets of produce. For this they must pay a fee of 30E and offer 3 days of voluntary work. The design is adapted to the needs of the people, although this can be in contrast with the design principles of permaculture (i.e. linear planting is also used because too many mixed vegetables are challenging for people to harvest).

In the garden of Aurora Community the space is divided into two big areas:

- Production
- Experimental

The harvest from both areas is used for feeding 6-12 people per day. Products that are not grown in the garden are either bought from farming neighbors or from the neighboring village. The difference between the two areas is that in the production zone there are fewer species of vegetables and herbs (five to eight) essential for daily nutrition, while in the experimental there are more. In the production zone vegetables are planted linear and/or parallel. In the experimental part more than 18 different types of vegetable and herbs are planted, in different geometrical formations. These complement the production harvest and are useful in testing different plant combinations and planting formations.

Gardening

After the presentation the group takes up working tasks in the garden of Schloss Glarisegg: digging, planting, harvesting. In this way we experience hands on what it means to maintain a permaculture garden.

Food

We are introduced into the global food scene by the facilitators: “there are enough resources for everyone, yet the problem is fair distribution”.

The case of “Banana land” in Guatemala is presented. Political and economical interests of the United States, mostly for vast lands of banana plantations, overruled the wellbeing of local communities and led to the drastic reduction of native forests. The power struggles were accompanied by the war in Guatemala (1960-1996) and the death and disappearance of approx. 20000 people.

The example of Guatemala is given in order to illustrate the unfair distribution of power regarding food resources. We further discuss and do exercises about what personal power, group power and world power means to us.

In conclusion, during the ecologic part of the course, we are introduced to permaculture, maintaining and harvesting locally grown food, the global food scene and power inequalities at personal, community and world scene.

Economic

The economic week starts with a “money exercise”. We each get an equal amount of monopoly money. Afterwards we mix between each other and begin trading. Some of us try to sell to others, others to buy, some create spontaneous “association” merging into bigger projects. At the end of the game we each gather in a circle and position our self according to

the amount of money we have. Some participants are left with almost no money, others have doubled, even tripled their initial amount, many have more or less the amount they started with. We each share what our strategies during the game were. We then put 10% of our personal money in the center. This part of the game represents the state, banking and other types of taxes.

After the “money exercise” we try to identify our personal message regarding money. This means remembering what message we got from our parents, relatives, friends and cultural context. This is important in having a greater awareness about how we handle money in our own lives. For the participants money has very different meanings, i.e.:

- Happiness
- Power
- Being selfish
- Safety
- Hard work
- Scarcity
- Freedom

We watch two documentaries which explain the money system and also offer alternative solutions: “Money and Life” and “Sacred Economics”.

Empowered Fundraising

After a better understanding of financial systems, we exercise how to raise money for our projects. For this we are introduced to “empowered fundraising”, a method developed by John Croft, trainer and consultant for ecologically sustainable community education. We learn that in empowered fundraising the value lies in creating connections (with people, groups, investors etc.).

When asking money in empowered fundraising the focus is on what gift is offered for the world through a project. This is the connection point with potential investors: an invitation to contribute to the realisation of a project which brings value to the world. It is also important to have a clear amount which we ask for. This amount has to be balanced: not so small that the person contributing feels it is meaningless, and not that large that it becomes a personal sacrifice.

We do a practical exercise in pairs for anchoring the information shared. One person sits facing an imaginary potential investor and asks for funding for a real-life project or need, while the other person watches and gives feedback at the end. When asking for the money we focus on answering three questions in the following order:

1. Why? - what is our motivation.
2. How? – how do we plan on realising our project.
3. What? – what are we going to do.

Before going into the discussion with our imaginary potential investor we have a moment of silence and centring ourselves. When speaking we include the imagined person in the discussion, creating a connection with him (i.e. common values, common dreams, projects



etc.). After asking the money we leave a moment of silence, leaving room for the imagined person to consider his or her answer. The feedback we receive afterwards from our exercise partner is useful for having extra insights about the way we acted and expressed our request.

Alternative banking and economy

At the end of the economic week we are introduced to guest-speakers who share projects and knowledge about alternative banking and economy.

One of the projects presented is “1bank4all”, a start-up project for creating a global alternative bank. Their vision is creating a social, ethical and ecological bank. The aim of the founders is to support people and organisations who create educational, humanitarian, health, medical research and ecological projects in the world. Another aim is to alleviate high international fees of transfer between the global south and the global north.

Guest speaker Christian Felber, the initiator of the ethical alternative bank in Austria, shares the principles of an alternative economic model: “economy for the common good”. This model inverts mainstream economy models of profit-based success and competition towards common good and cooperation. By creating a “common good balance sheet” with indicators of human dignity, sustainability and solidarity, companies can contribute to an economy which supports human society and the ecosphere.

Financial plan for our projects

A practical exercise is also offered by facilitators. We have the opportunity to evaluate the financial situation of our project. Together with our project group we consider what is the needed investment amount and what will be the profit. This is helpful for structuring and making our projects more concrete. Many of the participants wish to have more time to go more into detail with the financial plan.

In the economic week we:

- Are introduced to mainstream global economy models,
- Discover what money means to us and how we use it,
- Get to know tools for fundraising,

- Have contact with guest-speakers who present projects for alternative banking and economy.
- Do an applied financial plan for our projects.

Worldview

In the last week of the course we take part in lectures and workshops about: post-colonialism, theory of integral spiral dynamics, the political role of eco villages.

A practical exercise offered for a better understanding of our worldview as well as our role in a community is the “flocking” exercise. We get to experience what it means to be a community leader, or a community member in different situations: smaller groups (4), medium sized groups (approx. 10) and big groups (more than 10 people).

While music is played the different groups are each led in movement by the person in front. The role of the “movement leader” is changed and given over to someone else when he or she turns (90, 180 or 270 degrees), therefore someone else appears to be in front. This change of roles creates a lot of reflection for all participants and an increase of awareness about what the different roles and situation mean for us.

Although lectures and workshops were purposely offered for the theme of “worldview”, it is important to mention that also the information and experiences offered during the previous weeks regarding the themes (social, ecologic, economic) build up experience and knowledge for an alternative worldview.



Projects

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, simultaneously with the educative part of the course we also have the practical experience of developing a project based on our individual skills and the knowledge we gain from the course.

The method of “dragon dreaming” is introduced by the facilitators. There are four phases of this method, and they can be applied at any stage, to any team-project:

1. Dreaming
2. Planning
3. Doing
4. Celebrating

The “dragon dreaming” is an iterative method, it repeats it-self. Inside each “big” phase there are the same four smaller phases. We go into detail with the first one, the “dreaming”. To exemplify, four people go in the middle, take a big sheet of paper and start “dreaming” together. They put the title of the dream in the middle. A talking stick is used and each of them sais out loud how the dream feels and looks like. Another person writes down. During the process the four participants talk about the dream as if it already happened. At the end,

when all people have shared their vision, the completed sheet of paper is read out loud with a lot of enthusiasm by one of the participants.

Most of the project groups use this method for their projects.

The projects are:

1. Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) re-investment in alternative banks.
2. A touristic and community based camping.
3. Istanbul rooftop garden.
4. Sustainable textile use.
5. Creating alternative and performance spaces in cities.
6. Transition Town Trogen.

We work in teams of six to twelve people, for approx. 30 hours. During the development of the projects the DAPL team organizes a peaceful demonstration in Zürich in order to reach more people.



The sustainable textile team organizes a surprise performance for the EDE group to raise awareness about how current textile companies produce clothes.

In our project groups we focus:

- On our team process and applying the different tools we learn for dealing with decision-making and personal development.
- On achieving the aims of the project considering criteria from the EDE.

At the end of the course teams present their results and receive feedback from the other participants as well as from some of the 2016 EDE participants, who participate as guests.

Afterwards the guest participants from the 2016 EDE share the present situation of their projects.

Discussion and conclusion

At the end of the course we have a feedback session. This is a valuable input about how participants experienced this course and for the future facilitation of the EDE course in Glarisegg.

Course highlights (feedback session)

Participants have a strong positive opinion regarding:

- Personal development
- Social relations and
- Worldview.

Personal development

Emotions and feelings that were hidden or suppressed by people come up (e.g. anger) and this creates a lot of release for them. Many state they now feel like they have a lot more energy in their life, that they are more joyful, and that they can recognize their own potential. Although many participants have a challenging emotional experience, they feel safe to “open up”, because they see that others have internal struggles also. These challenges are seen as a common point for creating strong relations.

Social relations

The “home groups” are a great occasion to express, to feel “accepted as we are”. One of the participants says that the emotional sharing in the home groups was “unique in his life”, he feels “no effort and no judgment”. Another participant (an older man) shares that seeing “the capacities of young people makes [him] happy for the future”. “We created a family, and the common responsibilities were taken up so easy” is the statement of one of the participants, which represents the opinion of many others.

The experience was holistic for another participant, she shares that she “came home emotionally, socially and professionally”.

Worldview

The focus of the course content on building a “transformative culture” was appreciated by many of the participants. Cultivating love, gratefulness, thankfulness, compassion are skills which participants feel they can easier now master. During the one month where we lived together, these skills have supported us in opening up to people and made it possible to live communally.

Suggested improvements (feedback session)

The social and worldview theme were very appreciated by participants and central to this EDE, yet this left less time for other themes. Participants shared future improvement tips for the EDE:

- More individual time
- More practical, outdoors activities
- More possibilities for self-organizing
- More applied and empirical knowledge

More individual time

Communal duties are a great opportunity for creating relations, yet it was difficult to oversee if they were taken up equally by all participants. Because of this some of the participants were dissatisfied that they had to work overtime, taking up tasks of others. A suggestion for the future is to have a better system for verifying if people actually take up the communal responsibilities they set out to do. Many other participants felt that the general schedule of the course was packed and therefore this left little time for rest and individual needs.

More practical, outdoors activities

Many of the participants wish to be part of more outdoors, hands-on activities. Because there are many opportunities at Schloss Glarisegg, suggestions are: activities in the forest, in the garden, by the lake etc.

More possibilities for self-organizing

More opportunities for self-organizing as big group (plenum) and also as smaller groups are suggested improvements by some of the participants. This is considered especially important for initiating ideas inside the group and having the opportunity to co-create and fully develop the group potential. A few participants suggested that the content of many of the workshops from the course could be applied directly to our (bigger or smaller work groups). In this way the degree of applied knowledge would grow.

More applied and empirical knowledge

More applied knowledge is requested by many of the participants, as it is considered an easy way to retain and put to use notions and concepts. Some participants also wish for more empirical knowledge: more examples of already realized eco villages and more practical knowledge for design (i.e. building).

In conclusion the EDE course was very rich in developing self improvement and social skills and in creating an alternative worldview. Most of the time and energy were invested by facilitators and the group for creating a community amongst ourselves. This offered a unique opportunity to experience a short and very intense experience, similar to the one of living in an eco village. A more balanced distribution of individual and communal time, a firmer

integration of applied knowledge, “hands-on” activities and more opportunities for self-organization can contribute to the course quality.