

GAIA Education Report

Ecovillage Design Education

Switzerland
2023

Creating a Transformative Culture



Ecovillage Design Education



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About

From January 13th - February 18th 2023, the Ecovillage Design Education Course found its way again to the beautiful community of Schloss Glarisegg, in Steckborn. In the eighth year, 42 people out of 16 countries came together to explore the communal ways of a transformative culture. Focused on social, ecological and economic issues the participants were trained to find more sustainable and common responses to the challenges people are facing in this world. The goal in there was to include the core values of GAIA Education which supported also the framework of the schedule. Besides authentic relating methods, the course included tools as Sociocracy, Scott Peck Community Building and Forum Theatre to find ways to experience directly the ways of living in a community. The participants got trained in Dragon Dreaming, Permaculture, the relationship with money, embodied leadership and had the possibility to work directly with all gained knowledge in project groups. With all this, individuals got empowered to find own and joint ways for a change towards a more peaceful and sustainable world.



Integration and community time during the course

The Location

Schloss Glarisegg is an intentional community located in Steckborn, Switzerland at the Lake of Constance and was founded in 2003. It is nestled between forest and beach and includes a permaculture garden, a seminar center and a free school, as well as a campsite and a guest house. More than 30 adults and more than 20 children are currently forming the community, creating a place of encounter, awareness and consciousness. For this they are using methods like Forum, Possibility Management and Community Building after Scott Peck for internal process and development. During the year it is a place for seminars, workshops and gatherings. Since 2016 the community is hosting the EDE Switzerland and give many people the possibility to already feel how it is, living in an ecovillage.



The community and ecovillage of Schloss Glarisegg from above

The Team

The course was designed by Sonja Vera Schmitt and Jashana Kippert and they once again embedded their knowledge and experience from the past seven years into the program. Both are experienced in fields of holding space, psychotherapy, music, breath work, Environmental Science, Anthropology, Social Ecology, community building and founding, Vipassana Meditations, deep journeys and have selected a committed team of assistants from the EDE Alumni which add cutting edge tools to the EDE package. Together the team co-host the EDE, whole heartedly as all share a vision of global transformation.



Sonja-Vera Schmitt
Glarisegg, Creator & Trainer

Sonja-Vera is one of the founders of Schloss Glarisegg Community and has nurtured its growth for the past since 2003. Most recently she has added Regenerative Entrepreneur to her long list of vocations. Keeping the community running despite many economic challenges has required her creativity and ability to be a village weaver in a much larger empowerment game. While her training as a voice and speech therapist, her love of music and dance and her commitment to encounter processes

were easily applied in the community social life, she had to face the details of long-term planning and construction finance involving larger sums of money. She remains vitally engaged through Vipassana meditation and a genuine love of helping people. She first brought the EDE to Schloss Glarisegg in 2016 and remains a passionate organizer and trainer.



Jashana Kippert
Hawaii, Creator & Trainer

Jashana has always had an intense desire to figure out how humans could live in harmony with the natural world. For this goal, she got degrees in Anthropology and Environmental Science which lead to a Masters in Social Ecology. Having identified Indigenous Wisdom as a base she could not help but to try and stop the war in Guatemala that killed 200,000 Mayan people in the 80's. Having failed that mission, she began exploring intentional communities 'to be part of the solution',

eventually moving to the Findhorn Community in Northern Scotland. She then traveled for Findhorn teaching workshops throughout South America for two years. Returning to the US, she immersed herself in the world of awakening consciousness studying every offer from Holotropic Breathwork with Stan Grof, Vipassana Meditation, Yoga, Skydancing Tantra, 5 Rhythms, Deep Ecology, Contact Dance and sitting with Adyashanti. Preparing for the world to collapse she helped found a reforestation community in Hawaii.



Leonie Unger
Switzerland, Assistant

I love planting seeds and creating fertile soil - in the garden as well as inside us. my wish is to serve a loving and transformative culture by creating spaces and opening doors for connection. exploring the connection to oneself, to our feelings and daring to truly be ourselves in relation to others is a beautiful adventure to me. and then there is all the magic that is created through these connections, the dreams that we can dream together and the seeds we can plant. i wish to support their growing...



Jan van Margen
Estonia, Assistant

In the search for community, I am guided by the question "What are the ways of being together?" How close to ourselves, one another and the living world can we stretch in our ways of being? what are the deeper implications of co-existence and how can we integrate our findings and live the answers to these questions?

My ongoing research includes topics like emotional confrontational and release, transparent communication, intimacy, embodying queernes, movement and voice, wonder and philosophy, non-attachment and love.



Björn Munding
Germany/Switzerland, Assistant

Since my participation in the EDE 2020, I could arrive again more; In myself and in a world that promises a different future than the one I have often encountered. How does change lead to a more loving life and what does it take from me and from a community? This question accompanies me, and I explore it above all inwardly. After studying peace and conflict research, my path leads me more and more into body-oriented trauma work. Through my sensitivity and clarity, I look forward to contributing to create safe spaces in which shared experience towards a transformative culture becomes possible for us.



Anne Richter
Germany, Assistant

The wish of assisting this course comes from a deep place insight myself to witness you beautiful human beings through a journey, that might change your life, as it changed mine in 2021. Transformative culture means for me, meeting each other from a place where we can share all our feelings, being seen in them and experiencing, that showing our vulnerability is no longer a shame, but leads us to feel deeply connected with each other. In tune with my heart, I feel a lot of joy, knowing that soon we gonna start all together a new adventure into the unknown.



Sina A. Boye
Germany/Denmark, Assistant

I discovered for myself, that I, myself, need to become a healing system in order to be able to be part of creating one... which is the greatest mission of my life and what I feel to be here for. The deepest of truths that I found in EDE was that we do need each other. We need each other to touch what cannot be accomplished alone. We need community to be able to heal. And when we heal individually so do we collectively. And as we heal our potential unfolds and so does our love, so does our power...



Amneh Masoud
Germany, Assistant

Being part of this course has been a true perception changer. Witnessing the power of community, the bliss of conflict, our existential need for connection and the healing forces of self-acceptance, has impacted my way of walking on this deeply wounded earth. It gives me hope in the crisis we are facing. The practices i've learned here, I perceive as missing key elements, which could be very helpful for other movements too. This is why i would love to share this experience with you by contributing as a bridge builder, that helps to connect other struggles and realities to this transformative culture.



Rodan Bury

Switzerland, Assistant

I am exploring what it means to be an occupational therapist in our time. Facilitating therapeutic groups to support the transition to an ecological lifestyle, holding non-violent direct action trainings and facilitating people's assemblies all feels connected to me. I love deep listening, sharing, contact, playing, singing and swimming. Diving into 2022's EDE, I found deep connection and belonging. Where I felt stuck and overwhelmed by anger, new paths emerged. Since then, I heed a calling to enable collaboration and empathy at the heart of power through new large-scale democratic structures."



Sebastian Reimann

Germany, Assistant

For a few years now I have been on a journey to create authentic relationships and connections in my life. Being a participant in the EDE 2022 showed me a lot of additional tools for effective and joyful community building and decision making. For me mental wellbeing is the biggest pillar of a healthy community and I am a big enthusiast of embodiment work to express and move emotions in a constructive way.

Further Contributors:

Teodora Radulescu (Dragon Dreaming, Empowered Fundraising)

Roos Derks (Permaculture Design, Sociocracy)

Petra Heid (Ethical Chocolate Factory)

Karin Jana Beck and Matthias Gerber from Stimmvolk (Indigenous Singing)

Mara Heer (Biodanza, Wheel of Consent)

Claudio Berreta (Food Waste)

Annabelle Schapals (Nervous System Regulation, Sociocracy, Forum)

Angela von Rotz (Forum)

The Course

The EDE Switzerland in Schloss Glarisegg is a five-week course for people from different countries to learn more about sustainable social, environmental and economic change. The goal is to gather different perspectives and work together for a positive impact in the world. Ecovillages are at the center of the observation as a possible answer to the crises of the world. But above all, the whole time is about experiencing community in general. Not only on an intellectual level, but especially on a very practical one. The participants are invited from the beginning to participate with their whole being and get empowered for self-responsibility. This becomes especially evident in the fifth week, when a group of participants from previous years are invited to co-create the program with all people from the course.



The main hall Terra Nova prepared for a session during the EDE 2023

The Structure

The course has a consistent rhythm for six days of the week. From Monday to Saturday, the daily structure looks as follows:

8:00 Breakfast

8:20 Team Meeting

9:00 Morning Circle

9:30 Morning Session

12:00 Homegroup time
13:00 Lunch break
15:30 Afternoon session
18:30 Dinner
20:00 Evening Session

Each Sunday the participants had the opportunity to take a day off or take part in the open space program, where they could offer and join workshops, sharing circles or activities themselves.

Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner

In the first days of the course, all participants were invited to form groups of eight. This was the so called Homegroup. It created the possibility for them to have a smaller group to connect to. This was foremost to support the social container, that each person could feel safe. But also to provide a frame that allows everyone to participate in preparing the meals for the whole group.

Team Meetings

Since the team was already one week before the start of the EDE in Schloss Glarisegg to get to know each other and to contribute the tasks, the social aspect was really important for them. So, they met every day in the morning to have space for an emotional sharing about everyone's well-being. Afterwards they found time for logistic and organizational topics which were relevant for the upcoming day. One of the assistants was then chosen to be the Day Director, who led the group through the program.

Besides the Morning Meetings the team had also time to meet three times a week for at least two hours, to have more time to discuss and organize topics, but also to strengthen their relationships. There they used all the tools, they also presented to the participants.

Morning Circle

The morning circle is a ritual which the EDE Switzerland took over from the Glarisegg Community. It was always the moment to gather, to give space for a joint song or dance and to greet the day by movement exercises, silence (Pinakarri) and words of wisdom. It follows a clear structure and served the group to also get to know the importance of rituals in community. After this ritual, the group found together in a circle. There everyone was invited to announce important proclamations, which were collected by the Day Director.

Homegroup time

Since the homegroups were not just to work together but to also strengthen social connections within a smaller group. For this, the participants had every day one hour together in the homegroup. There they get invited to use this time for sharings in order to create a safe container for all participants in a smaller peer-group. Along with this, the home group time could also be used to practice new tools such as sociocracy or looping. It was a space to come up with topics to discuss about in a smaller scale, to decide on issues which could brought back to the whole community. As every homegroup was also facilitated by one or two assistants, there was also always time to give feedback to the team, to transform conflicts and to find ways to deal with discomfort.



The team and participants gathering in a circle to prepare for the day

The Sessions

As it is visible in the structural overview, each day was divided in three slots of sessions, were invited facilitators and the team created theoretical and practical inputs. All sessions were directed to the pillars of the GAIA-Education Curriculum which were represented in the social, the economical, the ecological sector and the view towards the world.

World-View

Being in the Eco Village of the Glarisegg Community is in itself a beautiful invitation to get a different view on how to live and be. The way this place is being built, managed and filled with life gives direct beautiful examples of local and sustainable economy, co-housing, spiritual approaches and holistic education. The participants get the chance to meet members of the community for questions and personal impressions. Other than that, the course puts a strong emphasis on resilience and regeneration when facing the world's state.

The Sessions invited for example to look at Sacred Activism and the Work that Reconnects of Joanna Macy, to explore beautiful possibilities on how holistic and compassionate ways of activism can be created. In combination to this, the goal was in all sessions to combine the micro and the macro cosmos. So, the focus was to broaden the view from the individual towards the societal level. Looking on the prevention of burn-out and overpowering, the participants got to learn self- and coregulation techniques together with the knowledge about connection and resilience, which is given by nature and the spiritual world itself. The knowledge about stress and trauma and its

impact on conflict and collective as well as personal growth has become a central part of the curriculum. In this manner, sessions raised the question about responsibility towards oneself but also the world, they invited to look on crisis in the world and their impact on persons and vice versa and on what is needed to be a sustainable leader for a peaceful change in this world. The goal in all sessions was to get to know different ways of looking to the world and to empower the participants to go for the change they want to see in the world.



Shumawa from Myanmar giving a presentation on the situation in her country

Social

Since the leaders of the course created and lived in Eco Village Projects, both are very aware about the social dimension of community building. Many projects fail because of the conflicts between the people working together. Emotional wisdom and social tools are often lacking. For this reason, the course included many sessions with a focus on personal development, communication and group process. Many tools were introduced that support a healthy and peaceful way of living in community.

This included Sociocracy 3.0, which was our tool for governance processes. It was commonly used in team meetings, for working tasks in the home group setting and most importantly when inclusive decision had to be made which impacted the whole group. To deal with emotional overwhelming situations the participant got skilled in the Community Building Practice by Scott Peck, The map of the four feelings, Possibility Management, The Loop of Understanding, Transparent Communication, Intimacy Negotiation, Somatic Experience Practices and much more. Every Saturday and also in sessions in between, the team opened a space for reflection, for

feedbacks and for conflict mediation. The methods which were used were Fishbowl, Forum and The Way of Council.

Economy

As well as for other themes, the Eco Village of Schloss Glarisegg could get used as a perfect example on how to deal with finances and thus to create new ways of sustainable living. For this Members of the community offered a session to make their finances transparent to the participants. Apart from that, the EDE itself showed new ways of dealing with the economic challenges. The team offered transparent insights for what the money the participants paid were used. Different sectors had a different amount of money to spent on and participants were also invited to discuss about it.

In the sessions which were prepared from the team and invited moderators, the economical aspect of sustainability and the role of money was looked at closely. Next to looking at the global economy system, the growing gap between rich and poor got explored. The Problem of Food Waste and the Power Imbalances due to big companies found its place in lectures and fruitful discussions. Participants got an insight in examples of Sustainable Management and had the opportunity to get to know principles of economic leadership towards a sustainable way. The sessions on the Economy of the Common Good and Empowered Fundraising offered beautiful new approaches to change the capitalist perspective on growth, success and materialism. Besides that, sessions invited also to explore the very personal relationship to money and its meaning in our culture.



Session on World Economy by Jashana

Ecology

As the course was focused on Ecovillage Design Education, the ecological side of it is a very important sector. Already the landscape with its beautiful creeks, waterfall and the impressive Lake of Constance gave the participants an opportunity to connect with nature all the time. Furthermore, the ecological sustainability got also implemented in the course due to different ways. All the food for the EDE, which is usually vegan, came either from the ecological cooperative Biopartner or from local organic- farms which were not more than 25km far away. So local food producers got supported and resources for transport got reduced as a minimum. To also use other possible towards a more sustainable ecological future, many people went dumpster diving and added due to this specialties to our otherwise very seasonal menu. Due to this and the implementation in sessions the topic of food-waste found its place in different ways in the course. Other possibilities to learn and discuss about regenerative ecological ways were given due to lectures on fairtrade and organic solutions. By looking at Permaculture, the participants also got introduced to a tool for and a view towards a more holistic gardening and social-ecological engagement. By means of this and due to other tools and views, the course offered possibilities to learn about ecological farming, to take care about nature and to see mankind as part of the eco-system and not apart from it.



Practical Work in the Permaculture Garden of Schloss Glarisegg

The Project Groups

Through the applied work on projects that the participants brought with them or brought up together, the EDE Switzerland could also embed the design dimension within the course. At the end of the second week, everyone got prepared to come out with a spark in which way they want to contribute for a change in the world. For this reason the team gathered all project ideas in pitches, where every person was able to see presentations of participants sharing their project dreams. More than 15 ideas came together, whether still a seed or already in action. To find out more about the project ideas and perhaps already start dreaming together, we continued with a World Café. There people could meet like in a market place, share their visions more concrete and find time to deal with questions which already came up. At the end of this process, eight groups had formed.

To apply the knowledge of the course, the projects began with a guided Dragon Dreaming process of finding a common vision and mission as well as defining and organizing actions in a Karabirt. This flowed into self-organized working processes where tools and lessons learnt throughout the course could be found place. The team was available and supported the group when needed. Still the goal was to empower people to deal with their challenges and to come up with a project together. In total, the groups spent at least 15 hours on their projects, and additionally had a time for sharing and casual meetings. The last few course days were all about finishing up the work on the projects. The groups got invited to also face time restrictions, so last decisions needed to be taken, group tensions resolved, presentations wanted to be prepared and rehearsed. Because, on the last day, all groups presented their projects and had a final chance for reflection, appreciation and celebration. Below is a short quote and visual impression of each project group.



Finding the partners for the project groups

Creating Creative Writing Workshop Series

Manuel, Alice, Toni, Sina

This group found grant opportunities to create and offer workshops. They came up with the idea and realization of creating safe and inclusive space using art and writing to inspire people for change and transformation. The first steps were made by sharing images of beauty to weave a tapestry of collective wisdom. Creative Writing but also Music and Dance were tools they used to express their visions not only in looking forward but also in working with each other. So processes and development were not only guided by the rational mind and thus also holistic, as the project aimed to unfold in general.

Belonging in Mythology

Jonas, Marianna, Sybille, Avena, Mikk, Maiia, Madleina

This group came already up with mythology of creating stories of falling in love. So they suggested to fall in love with them to begin with. Most challenges they faced were the tensions between Dreamers and Doers. The group explored the demons and challenged themselves to fall in love with their dragons. So, Dragon Dreaming helped them a lot to make it through with coming up with their idea. The people created a workshop that will take place in Open Space Days of the Growing Together Days. They learned to trust the process and allow the chaos to unfold in order to harvest its gift. Further plans to create a story web within a pilot project came true since it could be tested already within the last week of the course.

Building an Ecovillage

Sofia, Miriam, Atina, Kess, Matthias, Lucie, Cem

The members of this group wanted from the beginning to dive in deeper in the possibility of building their own ecovillage. Therefore they started by investigating the structure to defining the legal and financial frame for it. It was a wildly different group that found connection despite their differences. From committed vegans to meat loving hunters they navigated the tensions and managed to see each other through their philosophical barriers. Singing and embodied practices far away from mindset helped them a lot to find their connection. Finally they also came up with an own song, which the whole group was singing along the last days of the course.

Creating an Empowering Educational Program Designed by Nature.

Silvia, Idy, Ursa, Shushu, Jonas, Patrick, Leonie

The group of this project decided on not using the word Ecovillage in order to catch more mainstream people. Their aim was to make the program adaptable to the various cultures. Since this was a high value they used the four elements to be comprehensive and responsive to nature. They included Heart, Head and Hand through experiences and routines they already gained through their lifetime. They used spirals, seeds and lot of more inspiration from nature. Within

the realization of their project, the group wants to work with collective needs, to see every day as a new circle and new cycle. All were eager to always include time for integration and discussion of the changing needs of the group. They focused on more co-creative and interactive modules and want to replace normal presentations with co-learning elements. Finally, they came up with a 21 - day course structure for their project. A broad structure can include many different elements. Furthermore, the group already explored funding opportunities for the realization of this through Erasmus+ utilizing their four different countries represented. Again, they expressed the focus on the exploration of values for co-creation and experiential learning with a need for integration.

The Community Quest

Emmy, Julia, Constantin

The three of this project group were working on designing a process to live into a community building process. With this they wanted to help people on the path to community. Their structure came up by starting with a spark of someone who wants community and then defining the boundaries so that the call one make brings in the people who match to this spark. Talking about money is an obvious step which they see all need to cross. So, they focused also already on the financial aspect of the project. To be process oriented they wanted to see phases as part of the journey. The guiding principles and design includes the convergence and divergence of the group searching for community. To become also practical they planned a workshop for the Growing Together Days to test a pilot project journey.

Sustainability Plan for Bern

Becky, Kootyin, Milo, David, Christophe

This group focused on going into direct action. For this they orientated on a real scenario in case of a sustainable plan for the city of Bern. Their aim was to redesign the city incorporating everything about permaculture and green city design. They planned possibilities for community gardens, eliminating the asphalt, growing green walls on the city center, allowing a free public transportation, transforming the water systems in a sustainable way including ponds for fish. Other ideas came up to start large scale composting and to reduce waste by processing with ponds along with aquaponics. In the end the group could gather and plan many ideas which can be applied for Bern but could be adaptable to different cities. With this outcome the group met more than their expectations, made them feel happy and made fortune visions to look into future of urban places.

Community Culture

Elina, Rahel Maria, Christina, Jonas, Mathias, Helena, Birgit

In this group the people wanted to bring the principles of nature into Community Building Processes. They named it by creating a Healthy Social Soil for Community to Grow Organically. The core question was direct towards the meaning, what Community Culture entails. Foremost, their own team processes guided them to find out more suitable answers on this quest. Their aim was not just to philosophical talk about community but also to embody and practice it together, in order to be able to find suitable responses on this question. In the end, the group did not only

stay on the experiencing level. They also developed a tool box with methods of community building and a training program for facilitators to spread and nourish community culture on different levels of society.

Cultural Heritage Community and Ecovillage in Crete, Greece

Olgaki, Nikolaos

Since both members of this project grew up in Greece and want to live their again, their joint vision was embedded in creating a settled community and ecovillage in Crete, Greece. By means of that, they focused on preserving of the traditional culture of the island and its folk. Not in a national manner but in the sense of using the wisdom of being closer in touch with nature, which can be found in ancient heritage. Due to the Dragon Dreaming Process, they had the possibility to widen their lenses for utopian visions. To bring it to the ground they first came up with a business plan and were already looking for funds and ways of financing the project. Besides that, both were also eager to find a place in the island of Crete, where a community could settle in order to create an ecovillage. Since they always kept in mind to combine the regeneration of social, cultural, ecological and economical elements, the group set up a solid foundation to work more on, so that their dream can become true for them and others.



Participants presenting their projects



Looking at the relationship to money in an embodied approach

The Evaluation

The Ecovillage Design Education Course 2023 at Glarisegg Castle can once again be considered a complete success. This is reflected on the one hand by the fact that more than 40 people from different cultural backgrounds accepted the invitation. On the other hand, most of the participants left the course with very positive feedback.

As in previous years, the focus of the course was again on creating a transformative culture. In doing so, the leaders Jashana Kippert and Sonja Vera Schmitt again wove together the four pillars of economic, ecological, social and world perspectives and drew on their experience and expertise. The first two weeks were mainly dedicated to the social spectrum, as this can be understood as the key to successful community life. After two years dominated by Covid, the team and participants were once again looking forward to different experiences in coming together. Nevertheless, the issue around health and well-being was taken very seriously and importantly. Positive aspects of the lessons learned from the pandemic were well integrated. Unfortunately, one participant had to drop out directly on the second day because a person in her close environment suffered a serious illness. Another participant had to leave the course for a week due to health reasons, but he felt such a desire to return to the community that he once again made his way from Estonia to Switzerland. After the second week, one participant left because he was not satisfied with the course content until then. Later it turned out that he was also very challenged by relationships.

The relationship level is and was again essential in this EDE course and so participants were also included in decision-making processes, in designing spaces and in participation from the very beginning. This enabled a high degree of participation and empowerment, but also brought up conflicts. These were also explicitly invited, as they represent an important learning field. In weekly feedback rounds and ongoing discussions and processes in which the team acted as mediators, it was always possible to work through these conflicts. Thus, during the week of the course, it even happened that participants were able to take the lead for course content and contributed their expertise. The field of all-leaders and collective leadership was always included and makes the course unique.

The participants learned how to deal with external and internal conflicts and were increasingly trained to transfer this knowledge to the world. In this way, bridges to ecological, economic and generally to worldly disbalances could be well built. In the last three weeks, many participants were able to apply what they had learned in the social field directly to their work for a more ecologically and economically sustainable world. Above all, the last week showed the individual and collective steps of development when the group invited former course participants and the group doubled from 50 to 100 people. It was breathtaking to see how much leadership emerged, how much responsibility was borne, and how the coming together of so many people was made vibrant and peaceful.

Even after the course, the connections live on and many participants were able to make valuable contacts. Thus, in addition to the knowledge of how to create Ecovillages, they foremost were able to take away community in a different form from the course. It is beautiful to see how the network from the EDE Glarisegg continues to spin and carry love into the world.



Participants, alumni and the team of the EDE Switzerland 2023 in Schloss Glarisegg dressed up for the closing party

“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way.
On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”

Arundhati Roy
