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Design for Sustainability



Final Report

Community Education



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Gaia Education
Ecovillage
Design Education
Programme



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Course Overview

Course Overview (150-300 words):

Avnø Højskole is an integral part of an 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 (September 12 - December 4, 2025), our 10 students 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 5 different designs, including 4 mini-designs after each dimension and the 5-day final ecovillage design.*
- join 5 excursions to various other Danish ecovillages and green projects.*
- meet people from all over the world – the community here is truly international, consisting at the time of the course of eco-enthusiasts belonging to 10-12 different nationalities.*

Various parts of the course were led by 19 facilitators from 8 different countries – most of them are activists from the ecovillage, eco-building, permaculture and other regenerative movements. The main facilitators of the course, Olha Simon, Kristiane Ravn Frost, and Olena Marchenko, 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. During the excursions, we saw how people manage to build communities and live a more regenerative, meaningful, and satisfying life; excursions helped the students substantially in developing their designs. The designs supported the students in using and integrating the knowledge they received.

Avnø's charming nature assisted the transformations of our ComEd participants all along the course. A way to reconnect with our own inner landscape and understand the magnificence of the world around us



lies in directly experiencing nature here, in the protected coastal zone of Avnø Oasis ecovillage.

Participants (50-150 words):

The course was fully completed by 10 students. There were 9 women and 1 man aged mostly between 20 and 25 years old, with a couple of students in their 30s and 40s. 7 students were from Japan, and 3 students from Germany, Canada/the Netherlands, and Switzerland.

The program of the course, to a great degree, followed students' interests that they shared with us through their application forms. Our students' interests this time included: sustainable societies, gender equality, little joys, self-development, slow food, cooking, "richness" in the context of physical and mental well-being, social justice, hosting community gatherings, being in nature, dancing, reading, writing, activism, creating empowering spaces, deep compassionate dialogues, food from different countries, fair trade, NGO, democracy, permaculture, ecovillages, sustainable lifestyles, child education, living in harmony with nature, relationship between poverty and education, how to help people live happily, building sustainable communities, social structures, group dynamics, pedagogy, philosophy, psychology, art and its power, the world's development, climate justice, diverse people, sharing stories, design, creative projects that bring people together, photography, martial arts, yoga, hiking, foraging, gardening, music, filmmaking, painting, woodworking, finding their path, respectful relationships, Danish approach to social care and collaboration, rural development, "hygge" and Danish social welfare, sociocracy, pottery, knitting.

The sessions and excursions of the course were mostly open to all the residents, volunteers, and guests of the Avnø Oasis community. For that reason, some parts of the program were attended by up to 17 participants. Combined with many more people living in and travelling through Avnø Oasis, this exposed our students to a huge diversity of alternative lifestyles.

Course rhythms (50-150 words):

Our standard daily schedule can be seen here: [Daily schedule.docx](#). Every week usually included 5 study days and 2 days off. 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), 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 Danish cities together, and visited other European countries. The ComEd students were part of the Avnø Oasis community during the course, they were well-integrated and actively interacted with most of the Avnø Oasis community members.

Highlights & challenges of each dimension

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.

In this dimension, we went through the following **sessions**: Wheel of Health, Reconnection with nature: Metal/Water/Wood/Fire, Progression & regression of disease, Body/mind connection, The process of healing, Biodanza, Managing difficult emotions, Dimensions of life, Holistic worldview, Bodywork, Menu planning, Practical cooking classes, Digestive system, Wild Herbs, Healthy sweets, Breathing for immunity, Spiritual Science, Neurographics, Somatic exercises, Socially Engaged Spirituality, Purpose discovery, Radical Forgiveness, Intro to Reconnection Gives Direction, Gender & the Environment, Nature therapy, Nordic shamanism & Drumming Journey. Many daily morning circles also included various activities to expand our worldview and delve deeper into ourselves. The students used this knowledge to create and facilitate worldview exchange tools in our community setting. At the end of the course, they also used all the knowledge they got to make designs for their own future.

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. Many students stopped or reduced considerably their intake of coffee, despite drinking 3-4 cups of coffee every day before the course. Also going to another Danish ecovillage Ananda Gaorii and exploring it!

The **facilitators**: Kristiane is a health & lifestyle coach, and she facilitated most sessions of this dimension. Christian offers massage services at our ecovillage, and he taught our students bodywork. Isabel, our previous EDE & Holistic Health Education graduate, facilitated several sessions, connected with her areas of interest. We also received some sessions from volunteers at the Ananda Gaorii ashram.





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.

In this dimension, we went through the following sessions: From Drama to Empowerment, Consent, Living Library, Community-building, Our passions, Trust-building, Full Moon Circle, Conflict resolution, 4 Steps of Non-violent communication, Healthy & authentic relationships, Clay creativity, Governance in communities, Sociocracy basics, Drumming & Collaboration, Structural conflicts, Leadership, Power, Rank, and Privilege, Facilitation of meetings and activities, Successful collaboration, Education in communities, Boundaries, Core values, Co-created Equator & Final Parties, Sharing Circles, and Morning Circles. This dimension also included



the students taking care of some practical tasks they were responsible for, joining our weekly community sharing circles, and self-organized student sharing circles. Our students also facilitated some evening activities and morning circles, and worked on the group dynamics during the project design time. At the end of this dimension, the students made designs of community cultures and presented them to each other.

The **highlight** of the dimension: Going to another Danish ecovillage Munksøgård and exploring it!

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. Helena facilitated the NVC sessions, most sharing and morning circles, and other “social glue” sessions and activities, which substantially deepened the group cohesion and dynamics. Isabel, our previous EDE-graduate, facilitated many soft-skills sessions with an engaging, participatory approach.





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.

In this dimension, we went through the following sessions: Understanding the Present Economy, 8 Forms of Capital, What is Money, Shifting Global Economy to Sustainability, Local & Circular Economy, Ecovillage Economy & Businesses, Community Banks & Local Currencies, 6 Keys to a Sustainable Organization, Empowered Fundraising, Legal and Financial Issues, Social Entrepreneurship, Relationships with money, Living an Abundant Life, Gift economy & Sacred economics. At the end of this dimension, the students made designs of green businesses in groups or on their own.



The **highlights** of the dimension: The design work motivated the students to really ask themselves and clarify what it is they really would like to do in life and how they would like to provide for their living. They faced unclarity, lack of motivation and knowledge. And dealt with them in the process. During the presentations, every student was happy with their designs and proud of their progress. And it was also great to explore the economic system and businesses in Freetown Christiania!

The **facilitators:** Kristiane has a university degree in economics and is one of board members of Vitalitetsfonden. She added some games and group activities to her sessions to make them interactive and experiential. Olha shared the knowledge she received from the Gaia Education GEDS course, her EDE, her ecovillage travels, and the books she read. Lone has been a bookkeeper for Munksøgård ecovillage and for the Danish ecovillage network for many years, she is also a board member of our foundation. She also teaches social entrepreneurship at Roskilde University.



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.

This dimension included the following **sessions:** Food in a rapidly changing world, Holistic Living System, Sustainability, Sustainable Development, Permaculture Ethics & Principles, Green cities & infrastructure, Permaculture in Urban Contexts, Practical Home Gardening & Food Security, Green building & retrofitting, Practical Gardening, Seed banks, Waste management, Nature & Urban Regeneration, Disaster Recovery, Energy Management,

Appropriate Technology, IT in communities, Open Source technology, Water Management, Gardener board game, Forest Gardening, Local Food, What is soil. This dimension also included making and presenting mini-permaculture designs in small groups or solo.

The **highlight** of the dimension: Our students especially enjoyed exploring permaculture, having highly practical sessions, and going to Rikke's house (green building + renovation)!

The **facilitators:** Helena was the main person facilitating the ecological dimension of this EDE, assisted by Lasse, the coordinator of Avno's technical circle. Rikke and Bernhard have extensive experience in green building and they taught our students about that. Emilia, our previous EDE-graduate, shared her passion for recycling, waste management, and several other topics.





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.

We assisted our students in creating their ecovillage designs by offering the following mini-designs before the final ecovillage design: Design Worldview Exchange Tools, Design Community Cultures,



Design Social Cultures, Design Green Businesses, Design Regenerative Projects. Olha observed and supported the mini-groups in all their designs and facilitated the resolution of emerging tensions. During the ecovillage design time, which lasted around 1 week, the students were guided through different steps of ecovillage design, such as sharing their first visions, getting to know each other deeper, brainstorming design elements and working on them, defining the structure of the project, and finally polishing their designs & presentations.

The highlights of the dimension: During the course, our students had an opportunity to develop at least 5 different designs. 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. The students especially appreciated receiving useful group work tools, such as 4Gs – and many of them mentioned that group work for them became much more interesting and comfortable.

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 5 different designs: Design Worldview Exchange Tools, Design Community Cultures, Design Social Cultures, Design Green Businesses, Design Regenerative Projects, Design Ecovillages, Design Your Life. Our idea of the ComEd 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 about completing this big final design or even presenting it on the stage for the whole Avno Oasis community at the end of the course. Both designs were covering all the 4 dimensions quite nicely. After each presentation, the community members and the rest of the ComEd students could give feedback on what they saw.

Presentation one:

[Waku Waku.pdf](#)



https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gpnsyY_tGhrceSaWssBvHfPE6gIN5DwP/view?usp=sharing

Presentation two:

[Harmony Loop.pdf](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CW6dNbIKM8wKN3xC5r5ob-NgVzli3Ioe/view?usp=sharing) <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CW6dNbIKM8wKN3xC5r5ob-NgVzli3Ioe/view?usp=sharing>

Lessons Learned (50-300 words)

What could help future EDE's from your experience? What were your biggest learnings? If a re-certified EDE, also list & respond to lessons learnt from your previous EDE.

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.

Lessons from the previous EDE:

- we should have a more diverse group next time to make the learning process more fun and versatile. **The group was a bit more diverse and bigger this time.**
- the course went well. The experience of having all the previous 3 courses allowed us to enjoy and have almost no challenges during this one
- the Gaia Education report should be written together with the course, then the memories are fresh. **We did it this way this time - it was indeed much easier.**
- coordinating and facilitating many sessions at the same time is tough. Facilitation should be delegated to more people. The workload should be distributed among more people. **For this reason Olha was mainly coordinating, but not so much facilitating this course. It worked well!**
- add more gamification & playfulness into the course. **We did it, the students were happy about it and seemed more engaged and connected.**
- good to have a staff person who is responsible for heartkeeping and is available for talks most of the time. Good to have a team of people who work on the course and have different roles in the team. **In this respect, we did not manage to move much. But somehow there were not so many tricky situations either.**



- make sure that you are having fun while organizing it all. If you're stretching and pressuring yourself, in the end, it doesn't create a pleasant experience for anyone! **Yes, we certainly did it this time, and it worked out really great + benefited our students!**

Lessons learned this time:

From our experience, this is what can help future EDEs most:

- Don't put all tasks on one person: have one coordinator, others who facilitate, a student coordinator, someone for bookkeeping and someone for food and logistics.
- Take the time to analyse people's application forms – their interests, wishes and dreams – and let that shape the programme so it truly works for them.
- We found that giving students room to share their passions in the schedule added enormous liveliness, connection and trust; whatever they bring, in whatever format, becomes a real fuel for the group.
- Design time worked very well for us when each day we had a check-in time in the morning and offered the students concrete tips and guidelines for the students' processes. That structure made the creative work much more robust.
- Three months rather than one (in standard courses) creates more relaxed pacing, deeper connection and better outcomes.
- From our runs, groups under ten people felt too small and the group dynamics suffered, so we would not recommend cohorts smaller than 10.
- Be selective with admissions: don't say yes to everyone who applies unless they are really a good match for you and the program is a good match for them. Interview every candidate, answer their questions and check motivation carefully – the more intentional and motivated the participants, the richer the process will be.
- At the same time, don't aim to control everything or to be perfect; trying to heal every participant's trauma or to answer every question or need is exhausting and often doesn't improve results substantially, but leaves you as organizers drained and frustrated. Allow the process to unfold naturally, observe more, just be calm and present, and resist the pressure to fix every moment.
- A personal coordinator-related learning: check in with yourself before saying yes to another course. I (Olha Simon) nearly cancelled this one two months before because I felt unmotivated; continuing out



of habit or outside need of, for example, your ecovillage, is a poor reason to run something that asks so much of you. Ask yourself honestly each time: is this what my soul is burning to do now? If the answer is no, it's kinder to everyone to pause or redesign in advance, before the process is too far to stop.

From Olha Simon (the coordinator): My biggest learnings were: delegation, clear roles, regular communication and evaluation moments between organisers and students, and fair payment or other energy exchange for organisers make everything smoother, more fun and sustainable. Nourishing the organisers matters as much as nourishing students – organiser burnout undermines the whole course. In order to have enough personal time to recharge, I allowed myself to not be with the students every study day - I was often away for a couple of days, doing other things or resting.



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



We don't have detailed plans from most participants. The majority did not come with an intention to create ecovillages immediately; their main aim was to learn about Danish culture and sustainability, community life, and to experience a højskole-style course rather than launch a community straight away -- mostly because many participants were Japanese women under 30 on gap years or between/during university, and this is why they apply to similar højskole programs in Denmark. A few plan further study or to join the GEDS program. Many left clearer about their wishes and dreams in life and more confident to follow them. Up to three people gained practical inspiration they expect to apply to community projects they are already involved with back home.

Participant Quotes

Send 3-4 participant quotes from the Gaia Education Evaluations or other sources, please include names and photos (send the photos as separate .jpeg files and properly captioned/named) - please make sure that the people in the photos have given their permission to be included.

Yuki Hashimoto

"My three months at Avnø were deeply meaningful to me. Through the EDE course, I was able to explore a wide range of topics based on the four dimensions. At times the course leaned more toward theory, so it might feel a bit insufficient for those who seek highly practical learning or who already have a strong basic understanding of ecovillage design. However, the course also offered unique insights, excursions, and connections with external lecturers that can only be experienced through Avnø's EDE program, so overall I found it very fulfilling.

Living inside this community itself became a powerful learning experience in community-building. I learned about conflict resolution, decision-making, healthy boundaries, and being authentic—skills that are essential for living together with people who have different backgrounds and perspectives. These learnings were incredibly valuable and will stay with me moving forward."



Asako Wakai

“This course was a really meaningful experience for me. Living and learning together in Denmark gave me the chance to meet many different people and hear perspectives I had never encountered before. I enjoyed the group work a lot. Sometimes it was challenging to bring many ideas together, but that made the learning even richer. Our final community design project was especially fun because we could use everything we had learned, both in the design and in the group process.

Throughout the course, I learned about ecovillages, permaculture, sociocracy, and many ideas related to community education. These new perspectives helped broaden the way I see the world. The atmosphere was relaxed and warm, where everyone respected each person’s own pace while still staying connected.

I would recommend this course to anyone interested in communities or ecovillages, and also to people who enjoy exploring, meeting others, and spending time in nature. It was a gentle but enriching experience.”





Konoka Mizutani

"I appreciate the Community Education course. This course provided me lots of opportunities to consider about myself deeply, to make projects by myself, to get rid of self-limiting thinking patterns, to expand my knowledge through exciting excursions, and lots more!! It was good that I could learn many new perspectives, but sometimes I felt bored during the classes. I'd like some classes to be opportunities where students can think about things deeply and create something new, rather than just defining things.

I became more optimistic and expanded my worldview thanks to the diverse environment in Avnø. To be honest, the ratio of Japanese people was too large, so I want more people of different nationalities to come!

Overall, it was a truly valuable experience for me to live and learn together with so many students, volunteers, and teachers for three months💕

Thank you very much for giving me precious memories!"





Rei Marumoto

“From Holistic Worldview to community building, sustainable and green economic cycles, and permaculture, I gained rich learning from teachers specialized in each field. I found the permaculture field particularly interesting and felt it was more practical. When we finalized the eco-village design as a group, the output was very good. I was in charge of the ecological field and was able to utilize my own interests. I was able to truly make these things my own.”



Ryoko Okada

“In this program, I learned effective ways to articulate my thoughts and emotions when collaborating with others, as well as how to engage in decision-making processes that foster a genuine sense of shared understanding and agreement.

Living in a communal environment also enabled me to understand how to respect and accommodate diverse individual lifestyles.

Since collective decision-making requires considerable time and energy, I came to recognize the importance of maintaining sufficient mental space and emotional balance.

This course provided me with practical, experience-based learning and meaningful opportunities for personal reflection.”

