



gaia  
education

Design for Sustainability



# Final Report

Ecovillage Design Education  
Gaia Ashram, Thailand

Jan 15<sup>th</sup> – Feb 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026



gaia  
ede



Gaia Education  
Ecovillage  
Design Education  
Programme



# EDE Final Report: Contents

**Disclaimer: Parts of your report may appear on Gaia Education’s website and social media.**

Course Overview	3
Brief explanation of the background of the organization, host site and facilitators, including the name, dates and place where the program took place. Main highlights, key success factors and other relevant information that happened during the EDE.	
Participants	4
Basic stats including numbers of participants, age range, gender ratio, countries and backgrounds	
Course rhythm	4
A description of the times of daily activities, sessions, free time, social time, interaction with hosts, extra activities; duration of lectures & practical sessions, etc.	
Highlights & challenges of each dimension:	6
Brief summary of each dimension, including highlights, subjects covered, and participant quotes	
Social Dimension	6
Worldview Dimension	7
Economic Dimension	9
Ecological Dimension	11
Design Dimension	13
Design Studio Case Studies	14
Lessons Learned	16
Concise Financial Information	18
Participant Quotes	18



# Course Overview

## Course Overview (up to 200 words):

This Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) course was held at Gaia Ashram - a tropical permaculture farm and learning center based on 6-hectares of land in Udon Thani in the North-East of Thailand. The program was held from January 15<sup>th</sup> - February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026. Gaia Ashram is a 13-year-old community inspired by permaculture design, deep ecology, holistic regeneration and ecovillage design philosophy including the 4 dimensions of Gaia Education's EDE curriculum.

The program attracted 25 participants from 14 countries across 4 continents with a very well-balanced gender ratio of 52% female to 48% male. The youngest participant was under 20 years of age, while the eldest was over 50 years. Geographical and gender diversity apart, the cohort also came from very diverse professional, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. All participants had very high English language proficiency.

The program was delivered by a very well experienced team of 4 female and 3 male facilitators coming from 6 different countries with over 60 years of combined experience in the ecology and community building domains. While some of them actively facilitated all 5 EDE dimensions, a few of them specialized in specific dimensions.

While no two EDE programs are ever the same, the beauty of each EDE lies in the rich diversity that the participants bring to the table. This EDE was no exception and the 32 days spent together trying to simulate community living and building a model eco-village was a classic example of all that could possibly happen in a real-life scenario. Everyone present during this period - the participants, facilitators, Gaia Ashram residents, village neighbors and all other living beings contributed in their own ways to make this learning experience holistic, fulfilling, abundant and memorable.

There were instants where worldviews clashed and opinions were challenged, when cultures merged and ideas diverged, aha moments of understanding, as well as times when new concepts just never clicked. There were emotions and feelings of joy, laughter, pain, and sadness; every bit which contributed to making this experience second to none for everybody, leading to the building of strong bonds, some of which would probably last forever.



### Participants (50-150 words):

Total number of participants: 25

Number of participants who completed the course: 24

Participant Age Range	Number of participants
18-24	1
25-29	1
25-30	5
31-35	5
35-50	10
50-65	3

Average age: 38 years

Female to male gender ratio: 13:12

25 participants from 14 countries across 4 continents were represented:

Belgium, China, Germany, India, Israel, Mexico, Myanmar, Netherlands, Norway, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, UK, US

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

The participants typically spent 6 hours a day attending sessions, which include information sharing, interactive discussions, participating in group or pair activities, playing content related games led by the facilitation team, watching short videos, self-reflection, journaling, enacting different learning scenarios, and applying concepts using systems thinking and design, all of which totaled up to around 170 hours spread across four and half weeks.

Every day, around two hours were dedicated to mindfulness practices, around one and half hours for hands-on practical work, three hours for networking and open space sharing, and three and half hours for meals and rest / personal time. Saturdays were designated as design days where participants spent around 6 hours during the day working on their project case studies, with the last 2 days of the program dedicated to whole system integrated design.



This is a snapshot of the daily schedule:

Time	Activity
5:30 - 6:30 AM	Meditation (Optional)
6:30 - 7:30 AM	Yoga/Tai Chi (Optional)
7:30 - 8:30 AM	Breakfast
8:45 - 9:00 AM	Morning Check-in
9:00 - 10:30 AM	Session 1
10:30 - 10:45 AM	Tea Break
10:45 - 12:30 PM	Session 2
12:30 - 2:00 PM	Lunch & Rest
2:00 - 2:30 PM	Farm chores (recycling / cleaning / composting / kitchen)
2:30 - 4:30 PM	Session 3
4:30 - 4:45 PM	Tea Break
4:45 - 5:30 PM	Session 4 (Practical)
5:45 - 7:00 PM	Dance / Open space offerings (Optional)
7:00 - 8:00 PM	Dinner
8:00 - 9:30 PM	Cultural activities / participant sharing sessions / movie screenings (Mostly Optional)
10:00 PM	Lights out - end of day
Saturdays	Project design day
Sundays	Day off (rest / travel to nearby areas / culinary exchanges)



## Highlights & challenges of each dimension

The EDE kicked off with the Social dimension and was followed by the Worldview dimension, the Economy dimension, and finally the Ecology dimension. The program ended with Whole System Design.

### Social Dimension (80-150 words)

This is the week all the participants just arrived and were beginning to get to know each other, remember names and faces, and also settle down in Gaia Ashram. For some it was settling down to a new time zone and tropical climate zone as well. All these factors put together, they were tasked with trust building activities and their leadership skills were put to a test. This was done by playing games and group activities, which were followed up by debrief sharing sessions and learning harvesting.

The rich diversity of the group was explored from the word go, as the participants listed down skills and offerings they wanted to share with the larger group. Community living guidelines and communication tools were also agreed upon during this week. The group even practiced various decision-making styles and dived into the dynamics of power-play.

Overall, a week of breaking the ice, building bonds, understanding the intensity of the program, and also moments where the first sparks of indifferences started to ignite.

This dimension was led by Thao Kin and Petra Carman and was supported by Kai Sawyer who delivered specific sessions during the module. Sunisa Jamwiset Deiters, the course organizer oversaw the overall delivery and flow.

Participant quote:

“Some of the practices from Social and Worldview dimensions were implemented in my work. For example: NVC, participatory leadership, decision making process, active hope, etc.”

“It exceeded my expectations in terms of connections and learnings about others and boundaries and interactions.”

“The group really felt like a whole which helped quite a lot”



Facilitator quote:

“Participants were exposed to a wide range of perspectives, tools, and experiential learning processes that reflect the spirit of the program. Overall, I believe the course achieved most of its intended learning outcomes.”



## Worldview Dimension (80-150 words)

While this first week was about getting to know each other, this week was about connecting with the inner-self and with nature, practicing mindfulness, unlearning and looking at the world from a different lens.

Participants spent solo time going out into nature, attempting to deepen their nature connection and understand the link between personal and planetary health. They also joined activities to connect with nature using other sensory organs, apart from the eyes.



A major highlight of this week was a roleplay activity about a village under threat from a major corporation, which was followed up by a visit to an actual village in the vicinity who are in a similar situation. This activity allowed for a deeper understanding of different worldviews and moments in real life when they clash.

The week also focused on the cultural diversity of the group, which included a celebratory cultural night.

This dimension was led by Thao Kin and Petra Carman and was supported by Kai Sawyer and Sunisa Jamwiset Deiters, the course organizer, who delivered specific sessions during the module.

Participant quote:

“Sometimes an activity did not always impact me at the time, but the harvesting was always rich.”

“It gave me an opportunity to interact with others who had different worldviews”

Facilitator quote:

“A major achievement was giving a voice to the participants from Myanmar who are going through an unimaginable experience. I think that helped them integrate more, and for the group to hold them a bit better.”

“The visit to the village connected to a roleplay on worldviews show clearly the reality we live in and the different worldviews. This was a major milestone of this dimension”



### **Economic Dimension (80-150 words)**

The technical but tangible nature of the economic dimension clearly underlines the differences in the groups learning preferences. While many were extremely engaged with the energy of the new facilitator who shared economic tools and financial models, contrasted local economies with mainstream concepts of GDP growth, and even shared a documentary film offering live examples of textbook definitions.

The simulation game played with imitation money attempting to mimic the real-world financial system was an eye opener for many. However, the highlight of the week was the sharing by the facilitators on personal financial management and other examples from around the world on gift economy and right livelihood.



The participants even created their own local currency using the 'Needs & Offers' system and literally put it into practice within the community. They also worked on a real-life case study which included making hand-made natural products and then coming up with a plan to market these to their target audience.

This dimension was led by Kai Sawyer and Natalie Limwatana, and was supported by Sunisa Jamwiset Deiters, the course organizer, who delivered specific sessions during the module.

Participant quote:

“For Economic Dimension, I would prefer more activities and more learnings through group exploration, rather than being directly given the information which mostly are available online.”

Facilitator quote:

“I was there only for a week, but it appeared to me to be quite transformational to several participants to see how the worldview manifests in our economic practices.”

“As the world is getting more turbulence, we need this more than ever – learn how to build living communities with humans and more than humans!”





### Ecological Dimension (80-150 words)

The Ecology dimension was the most hands-on within the program where participants stuck their fingers into the mud, understood the soil composition, did natural building and gardening, built a grey water management system, made biochar and even built a rocket stove.

The week welcomed another new facilitator who brought in years of experience in building and maintaining permaculture systems, including water and compost systems, thus closing the entire nutrient cycle loop. They also learned how the animal system at Gaia Ashram integrates with the food system, which the participants found really engaging.

They mapped energy systems across the world and then looked at appropriate technologies that could supplement or even replace some of these mainstream systems.

Playing games to help them understand the soil food web made the rather complicated topic quite a fun and entertaining exercise. In continuation with the light learning style, the group even watched a documentary film which shared live examples from permaculture farms in Japan and the US.

This dimension was led by Kai Sawyer and Benjamin Murray, and was supported by Tom Deiters and Sunisa Jamwiset Deiters, the course organizer, who delivered specific sessions during the module. Thao Kin and Petra Carman assisted with coordination and logistics.

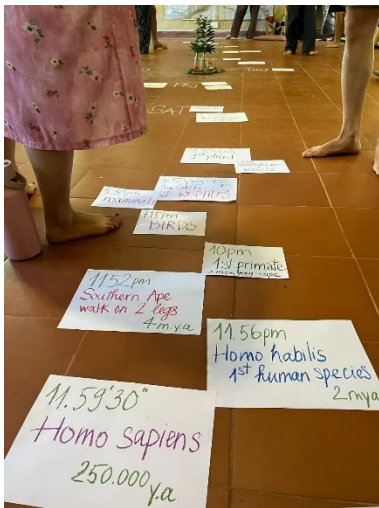
Participant quote:

“I am working on a project in Chaing Mai where I can use mostly the ecological information like compost and permaculture theory”

“It would be more engaged to see some real-life examples in ecology dimension (or all) from participants' countries, it would make us relate more and maybe create more chances for participants to connect with their own reality after leaving the course.”

Facilitator quote:

“I think having hands-on ecology sessions with less thinking interspersed in the week is helpful to give people a break and bond people.”





## Design Studio (80-150 words)

The Whole System Design dimension was the last piece of the puzzle which brought everything together, interweaving connections between all four dimensions.

Participants walked around the Map of Regeneration laid out on the floor, and identified topics that they resonated most with, and also those which they wanted to engage in deeper. This personal reflection exercise allowed them to travel back in time and review their learnings over the past four weeks and chart out their next steps in their individual journeys.

In these last couple of days, they spent most of their time in their design groups and put together their harvests from their design days of the previous weeks. They worked on their final project designs and presented their dream ecovillage projects to the entire group, demonstrating the extent of possibilities out there in the real world.

This dimension also witnessed a live conflict resolution process to address a tricky dynamic of male / female safety concerns and breaching of personal boundaries that had persisted for the majority of the program. This process addressed the elephant in the room and brought about a much-needed closure, leading the way for a deeper healing process.

This dimension was led by all core facilitators who assisted each design team with their respective design case studies.

Participant quote:

“Most of the individual elements were familiar before, but the way this program weaves them together brings the most impact for me.”

Facilitator quote:

“The group through some challenges that made some people felt they were losing trust in the group and in the facilitators. We were able to hold the challenge together and make it a deep learning process.”

“Several milestones stand out for me. One was the quality of the final design project presentations. Despite having reduced time for the design process and facing some internal conflicts within the design groups, participants produced thoughtful and inspiring projects.”



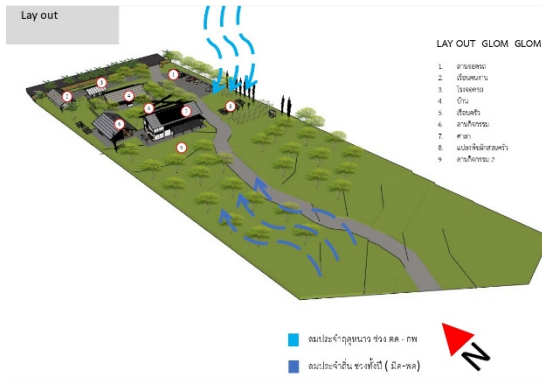
## Design Studio Case Studies

There were 5 real life projects that were selected as part of the final design work assignment and the participants were split equally into project groups with 5 members per team. The projects were diverse in nature and are currently in different stages of implementation.

1. Coco Riaz: – An ocean side community in Costa Alegre, Mexico looking to attract travelers craving authenticity, growth, and meaningful connection by engaging in sustainability and permaculture practices, while integrating the local community. The project is still in the conceptual stage, and the founder is currently seeking funding and community members to move forward.



2. The Path Within: - A conceptual ecovillage set in the mountains of the Rakhine state in Myanmar, aiming to “de-colonize” and step away from the current mainstream economic system by empowering local villagers with their own local currency and self-sustaining lifestyle to counter the current civil war dividing the country
3. Glom Glom: - A family-owned property located in Nan province in the north of Thailand, surrounded by local farmers engaging in maize monoculture farming which also involves crop burning. The project owner has clear transformation goals and is currently seeking funding to launch eco-tourism and education focused projects to regenerate the land and include local farmers in the project.
4. The Light Weavers: - A family-owned property located in Ubon Ratchathani in the east of Thailand, which currently houses a resort and a cotton weaving project producing artisanal handcrafted textiles. The project owner is looking to develop a small parcel of land located in this site and build an ecovillage, while integrating the local artists and designers by building a training studio.
5. Valley of Grace: - An ecology learning center located in Genadendal, in the Western Cape province of South Africa, aiming to transition the region into an ecovillage. The project owner is focused on building a food forest on a piece of abandoned farming land, while integrating the Khoi indigenous community, and the local church and museum. They are aiming to achieve economic independence with the sale of farm produce and products.



### Lessons Learned (50-150 words)

Leaning back on our learnings from the 2025 EDE program, we concluded that weaving all the topics and elements together is extremely important, given the multiple dimensions under the EDE curriculum. Optimizing learnings from each dimension by cross integration of content across modules and deepening the take-aways from previous dimensions is a major facilitation challenge. This year we paid greater attention to this objective and assigned two core facilitators to focus on weaving the learning threads and keep track on how participants make sense of all the learnings.

Integrating daily practices and scheduling open space sessions where course participants, volunteers, interns and Gaia Ashram resident share skills and knowledge, and participate in farm chores together, helps participants to experience Gaia Ashram's social structures and agreements in a real-life community setting. Participants not only experience the community they are attempting to build among themselves as part of the program, but also experience the community within Gaia Ashram, thus adding another layer of learning.



Having more financial support / abundance to operate the program, more time for the facilitation team to get to know each other in a different capacity than co-teaching, and more spaciousness in the program could help future EDE's. Also, more connection to / integration with the host site volunteers / interns / residents would be beneficial to the overall vibe and flow.

Availability of more time for participants to integrate learnings and experiences, and finding a more effective way for people to process their experiences living in a community along with course content would also help.

Some other improvements to future programs could be creating more of a flow between sessions, transforming the sense of "not enough time", developing more participant-initiated support structures like learning circles, empathy groups, etc., addressing punctuality and absenteeism, better integration of project groups with sessions, finding ways to help people have a stronger sense of community early on in the program, and addressing safety issues more effectively.

The EDE is fundamentally an experiential process. It is not only about intellectual learning but also about feeling what it is like to live, build, and contribute within an ecovillage context. This makes the experience energetic, emotional, and sometimes intense. Many participants are not fully prepared for this level of intensity. If communicated clearly, this could be a powerful catalyst for personal growth, as community living often brings both light and shadow aspects to the surface.

Hosting the EDE within a functioning community is a great privilege, as participants can directly experience daily life in such a setting. At the same time, it can be challenging to balance the different roles and expectations between the EDE participants and other community members.

Continuing to reflect on how to strengthen this relationship in future courses, while also identifying the key concepts and learning threads to be prioritized so they remain clear throughout the program would be an import next step.





[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

### Participant Quotes

“I came to the EDE course at Gaia Ashram with the intention of weaving meaningful connections and integrating new insights into both my work and life. After 32 days of exploring the social, worldview, economic, and ecological dimensions, I can say with full confidence that I left with a complete tapestry. It was such an enjoyable and profound process—gathering materials, understanding the different pieces, arranging the colors and patterns, and weaving all the elements into one cohesive whole.

One month is both long and short when it comes to the many learning activities and reflection circles we carried out throughout the process. But the real learning journey begins the moment we step beyond the course.”



“The past month of intensive EDE (Ecovillage Design Education) has been filled with many moments: gratitude, reflection, sadness, joy, heartbreak, connection, openness, hope... 🙏

👉 In our ongoing exploration of the possibilities of sustainable lifestyles, we are about to embark on a new journey with a seed waiting to sprout 🌱. There is still much to learn ahead, like having just reached the summit, still admiring the beautiful scenery, only to discover another beautiful peak in the distance. We will be fully prepared, with deep trust in the flow of life, and set sail for distant horizons 🚢”