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Design for Sustainability



Final Report

EDE

Damanhur

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Italy



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Gaia Education
Ecovillage
Design Education
Programme



EDE Final Report: Contents

Participants:	4
Course rhythms:	4
Highlights & challenges of each dimension	5
Social Dimension.....	5
Economic Dimension	6
Ecological Dimension	6
Worldview Dimension	7
Design Dimension	8
Design Studio Case Studies.....	9
Lessons Learned	9



WE ARE SO HAPPY that this year, we held the 7th EDE in Damanhur, organized by the non-profit organization Damanhur Education APS, in partnership with Gaia Education and the Global Ecovillage Network.

Founded in 1975 in northern Italy, Damanhur is a resilient Federation of Communities with its own constitution, culture, art, music, currency, schools and utilization of science and technology. It has about 600 full-time residents, plus a numerous group of citizens living on their own.

Damanhur is based on the vision of a new model for society based on solidarity, sharing, love and respect for the environment. For over 40 years, Damanhur has developed into a well-organized eco-society in continuous change, though staying true to its foundational principles.

Damanhur also became well known in the world because of building the Temples of Humankind, an underground construction, a unique work of art dedicated to universal spirituality.

The EDE in Damanhur can draw from the experience of a 43-year old community, providing many concrete examples in all four dimensions.

The Social Dimension is the first week in our EDE, and it creates a base of preparation for the whole course, building community right from the start. It has many powerful dynamics and allows the participants to get in touch with themselves and the others. Visiting and meditating in the Temples of Humankind, hands-on straw-bale building, art sessions and a community building experiment in the woods are just some of the highlights. In the Economic Dimension, Damanhur, as the hosting community, demonstrated concrete alternatives and many different aspects of a new economy, as well as how a more just economy can be created in a community inspired by solidarity.

The participants were a very international group of people, 19 people full time, plus one person for two weeks and another one for three weeks. There were people from Taiwan, Brazil, Spain, Hong Kong, Austria, Australia, Palestine, Israel, Italy, Romania, Turkey and the USA. The ages ranged from 21 to 65, and many participants were under 30 or between 30 and 40 years of age.

Most of the facilitators were from Damanhur, and all were experienced EDE teachers with many years of expertise.



Participants:

We had a rather large and very international group of people participating this year, 19 people full time, plus one person for two weeks and another one for three weeks.

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The particularity of this year's EDE was a high level of knowledge about communities. One person was a founder of a 25-year old ecovillage in Spain. Some had grown up in community, and others currently live in community. Another participant was in the process of founding one, and many others had concrete projects to found ecovillages in the near future.

Course rhythms:

In the morning before breakfast, yoga and meditation sessions were offered by the participants, followed by breakfast from 8:00 - 9:00.

The morning session was from 9 - 12:30, lunch at 13:00, break until 15:00.

The afternoon session was from 15:00 - 18:00, dinner at 18:30, break until 20:00. The evening program was from 20:00 - 21:30.

The program varies a lot, but there are some basic patterns. Usually the morning begins with some kind of sharing, followed by a theoretical part. After the theoretical part, there is often the design part, which continues throughout the entire course. The weeks of the four dimensions are different, as the ecological part also has hands-on sessions.

There is art in the worldview dimension, and a community building experiment for the social dimension. There are several moments to contact the hosting community, in addition to the initial visit, such as dinners in a Damanhurian nucleo community, a brunch where Damanhurians are invited to attend, the presentation of the participants' projects in a nucleo. There are several free evenings, every week at least one free afternoon and one completely free day.



Highlights & challenges of each dimension

Social Dimension

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION is the first week in our EDE, and it creates a base of preparation for the entire course, building community right from the start. It has many powerful dynamics and allows the participants to get in touch with themselves and the others. They train and explore leadership, leadership presence, conflict resolution, governance and decision making, as well as learning how to organize an Open Space conference and World Cafe. Many intensive processes allowed the participants to learn about themselves, their strengths and weaknesses, using the others as a mirror. One of the highlights of this Dimension is the community building experience in the woods, which broke the routine and allowed participants to find new perspectives, work on personal growth, and make a huge step forward as a group.

The contact with the hosting community is very important, allowing the participants to get a taste of community life. This is why Damanhurians are invited to share in a Sunday morning brunch, and the participants have dinners in different nucleos (smaller communities from 12-25 people). Another highlight was the final presentation of the participants' projects in a Damanhurian nucleo, where many Damanhurians were invited.

Macaco Tamerice facilitated the Social and Worldview Dimensions, and she co-facilitated the Ecological and Economic Dimensions. Her expertise and skills helped to bring in a new vision and to move through many group and personal processes.

Formica Coriandolo co-facilitated the Social and Worldview Dimension with art, warmth and energy.

“The highlight was the ability to foster a community in EDE.”
Hema





Economic Dimension

THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION explored micro-macro economy, explained the nature of money in a world that is troubled by an unfair global financial system, and gave some suggestions for possible alternatives. This Dimension also showed the importance of complementary currencies and local economy and looked at how these aspects are related to a different economic approach. The Blue Economy could be one of these new ways of looking at economy, and also the elaborations about the concept of richness and the factors that contribute to richness offered new insights.

Damanhur, as the hosting community, demonstrated concrete alternatives and many different aspects of a new economy, and how a more just economy can be created in a community inspired by solidarity. Some very concrete economic tools like the balance point and a business plan were explored too, as there were many people who wanted to start a community from scratch.

Lemming Cactus managed the Economic Dimension with professional expertise and know-how.

***“Many examples from actual experience in
Economy: especially Damanhur.”
Haytham***



Ecological Dimension

In the ECOLOGICAL DIMENSION, the participants learned about alternative energy, photo-voltaic and heat pumps, appropriate technology, growing organic food, water and wastewater treatments, green building and retrofitting. The highlight of this session was the hands-on experience of building and plastering a straw-bale house. Learning to design with permaculture principles offered the possibility to not only learn through theory and design, but also to do it on a practical level. Also, visiting places in the hosting community where different technologies had been already been successfully implemented showed the practical application of the theory.

The participants had lots of fun and enjoyed learning by doing. They were curious to understand about alternative ways of building a house, and they loved learning how to get the right mixture of earth and sand for the plaster, how to divide a straw bale, and getting dirty with clay.



Nicola Savio facilitated the permaculture program, awakening an interest in permaculture design and best practices, and he showcased a permaculture farm.

Inti China led the sessions about alternative building and the hands-on straw-bale building, with professional experience and much fun.

“Sensitivity, wisdom and techniques to connect with nature. Linked social responsibility to preserve and maintain quality of life.”

Silvia



Worlview Dimension

THE WORLDVIEW DIMENSION started with the experience of visiting the Temples of Humankind, and it ended with a meditation in the Temples, which was a highlight of this Dimension. This year, working with Spiral Dynamics was also very much appreciated, as it allowed participants to get a glimpse into the evolution of humankind and the different phases of development, both on the level of society and the personal level. A beautiful sharing about worldviews was enriching for all. Another highlight was two half-days of art-making, calling forth creativity and expression through sculpture and painting, as an individual and as a group. There was also a detailed introduction to Sociocracy with some exercises that showed how an empty centered organization can work.

A session about health and the Damanhurian theory about different personalities showed a connection between our health and personalities.

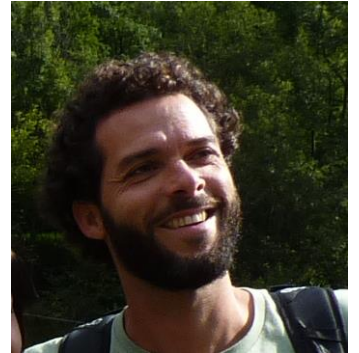
The morning connecting with nature from Deep Ecology and Damanhur was another highlight of this Dimension. A brainstorming about outreach and concrete examples helped in the design of future projects.

Macaco Tamerice led most of the Worldview sessions from Spiral Dynamics, personal transformation and connection with nature, to moving toward an understanding of collective intelligence.

Formica Coriandolo co-facilitated and held the art workshop with sensitivity and support, bringing out the artist that lies in everyone and understanding the meaning of creating art together.



“Listening to nature.”
Philip



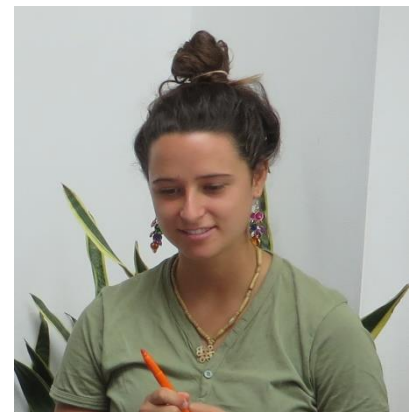
Design Dimension

THE DESIGN DIMENSION applied different designing methods. In the beginning, Dragon Dreaming was used to identify four projects that were designed in different ways throughout the entire course.

The projects that emerged were all related to real projects. One of the projects was to create a blueprint for ecovillages that will be applied in Ireland and Israel/Palestine soon. Another project was a creative process about how to build the most wonderful ecovillage imaginable, while the third project is about building a theater community near a city in Taiwan, and the fourth project is about building a place near an already existing ecovillage to foster ecology training and new ways of thinking for children. This project also foresees a strong connection with alternative travel agencies. In addition to Dragon Dreaming, Permaculture Design was a very important tool in the process and was used in all the projects. They were also designed in an organic way, weaving the theoretical information of the different sessions into the emerging projects.

The design processes were highlighted in the presentation at the end of the course, and it became clear how much the different groups had elaborated, presenting their projects to the others in many creative ways. All the main facilitators were part of the design processes.

“I liked how the design group time was spread out throughout the weeks, so we could integrate what we learned about the different aspects of community building into our projects.”
Jessica





Design Studio Case Studies

The projects that emerged were all related to real projects:

1. One of the projects was to create a blueprint for ecovillages that will be applied in Ireland and Israel/Palestine soon.
2. Another project was a creative process about how to build the most wonderful ecovillage imaginable.
3. The third project is about building a theater community near a city in Taiwan.
4. The fourth project is about building a place near an already existing ecovillage to foster ecology training and new ways of thinking for children. This project also foresees a strong connection with alternative travel agencies.

Lessons Learned

The most important thing we learned this year is that there is still too much, even though we created one completely free day, several free half days and evenings. The completely free day was very appreciated and still the participants felt that it was not enough.

We also learned that a bigger group is much easier to work with than a small group, such as last year, because many processes already happen among the participants in an organic way.

I think the most important and transforming experience in our EDE was the building of community during the month. The group moved through processes that brought the people ever closer. On the one hand, it brought deeper understanding and empathy, and it also allowed conflicts and personal difficulties to emerge and be resolved.

A young girl came to the course with her mother right after examinations for her Bachelors degree and was exhausted. She also had such terrible headaches that we almost brought her to the hospital. The only reason we did not do so was because she very often had these attacks before and had already done all the different medical examinations to exclude something serious. Another young woman found out after one week that she was pregnant, and we brought her to the hospital to assure that everything was okay. All this, plus the fact that there were two people over 65 acted as catalysts for many group processes.



The group integrated and took care of the people in difficulty, which created a strong bond among the participants. For example, the group organized a very moving welcoming ceremony for the new soul in arrival, and they reserved the most comfortable places for the elders, etc.

The course is structured in such a way that a temporary Eco village is created step by step, and this offers a very strong, often life-changing experience. The participants also receive useful knowledge and many tools which they can apply for their projects in the future.

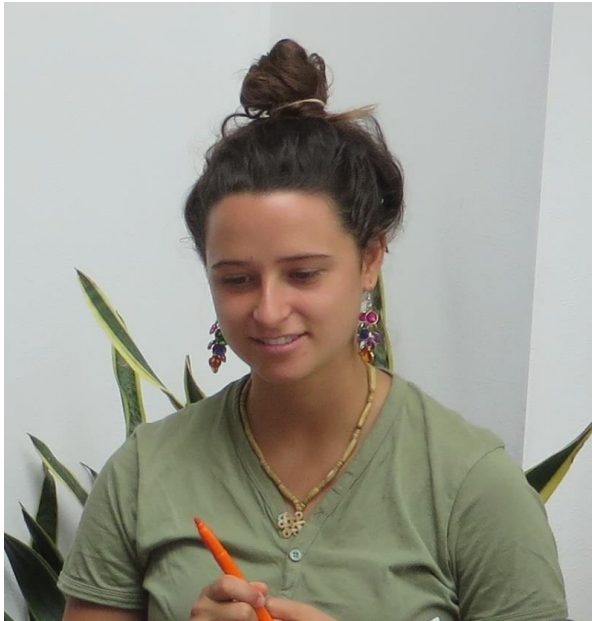
A minimum of two fully free days. Brunch on Sunday was really important for regeneration, so perhaps two brunches. A whole day at the waterfall in Fondo, with time to eat at the restaurant would also be much appreciated. So generally, a bit more free time!

It would be really helpful to have more free time in between for both relaxation of the brain and for digestion of information. It would also be good to include more time to work on design projects. I like the weaving in of the four different dimensions in the program, to get a good balance. It might be helpful to mix some economic sessions and visits in the third and the fourth week, so it is not very heavy and hectic in the last week.





Participant Quotes



"Macaco is a wonderful, strong, fun, dynamic leader. The group size of 21 was perfect for exercises, and the diversity in people's backgrounds and ages helped me to learn a lot. Damanhur is a really unique and impressive society that has inspired me to believe that so much more is possible than I had previously thought. I really appreciate being invited to Damanhur's community games, theater, and dinners at the nucleos. The frequency of food and snacks was much appreciated. Also the fact that we were responsible for some cleaning shifts."

Jessica

The strengths of this program were the variety of themes in a complete, new vision, linked with experiences and community background.

Fiorenza

