Report EDE Damanhur 2013

This year's EDE was Damanhur's third EDE, organized by the Non-profit Association "Damanhur Education", in partnership with "Gaia Education" and the "Global Ecovillage Network". Founded in 1975, Damanhur is an eco-society of about 1000 citizens: a federation of communities and eco-villages with their own social and political structure in continual evolution in the north of Italy in the foothills of the Alps, 40km from Turin.

The EDE started with17 truly international participants: Ireland-Norway, Germany, Australia, Sweden, USA-Hawaii, France, Great Britain, Brazil-Portugal, Austria, Swiss, Denmark and Holland. Several people were actually rooted in two or more countries. One participant had to quit the course after one week for personal reasons, but will to finish the course next year.

The age ranged from 18 to 63, three people in their twenties, many in their thirties, some in their forties, some in the fifties and one over 60.

The gender proportion was almost balanced, nine men and seven women .

The main facilitators were Kosha Joubert and Macaco Tamerice for the social dimension and world view, Martin Stengel for the ecological one and Lemming Cactus for the economy part. Macaco was co-facilitating the ecological and economic dimensions. Several Damanhurian facilitators were present in specific sessions:

Inti China lead the strawbale building with Martin, Formica Corniolo held the art workshop, Daina Albicocca talked about health, Husky Vaniglia and Stambecco Pesco about politics, the integration with the bioregion, and economy and solidarity, Naiade Coriandolo took care of the local food session.

This year the EDE was held mainly in a Damanhurian nucleo, that was already used during the first EDE for a part of the program. This helped building a family feeling and support from the beginning of the course.

Several participants had already experiences of life in community and former EDEs and attended this EDE in order to achieve more tools and experiences and/or to help them create ecovillages on their own. Others were already working in the field of green business, with Universities or in NGOs. The strong motivation to achieve new knowledge that could be applied, to experience the power of community, participated in creating a fast and creative learning atmosphere.

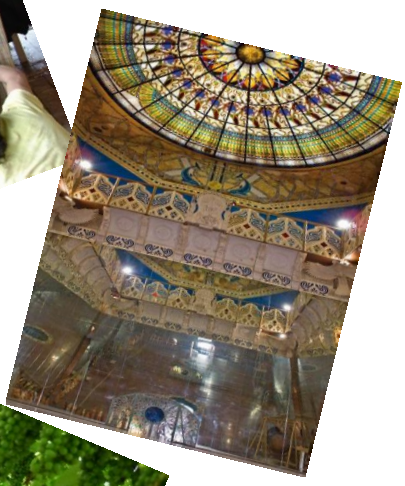
The highly appreciated Italian food provided by two inspired cooks increased the "happiness" of the group.

The weather was lovely almost all the time and allowed the participants to profit from the natural swimming pool right outside the course room, in the garden of the nucleo.

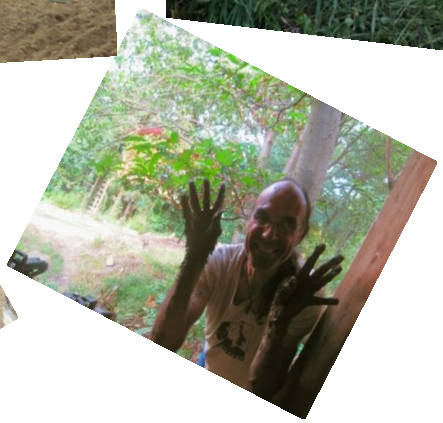
Design: Design had a special place during the whole course. Participants designed four different projects looking at them from many different angles. Dragon Dreaming helped create a concrete plan to bring the projects into reality, which were further developed through permaculture design, and worked upon from the economic point of view, also creating complementary currencies, and from a political one, embedding the projects into their bioregions.

The Social Dimension was very strong and helped the participants to dive into the power of community. Many different group building exercises especially for leadership and personal development supported by more global tools like World Café and Open Space helped the group feel like a community since almost the start. This group was a particularly "experienced" one, with already quite some knowledge and trainings about social tools in their personal baggage, which spead-up many processes. A very exiting community building experience was a two day community experiment in the woods, which helped the group to go beyond the balance they had found until then, to create a new one, and made them grow both personally and as a group. Another highlight was a process for personal growth and reciprocal support developed in Damanhur. Also visiting some damanhurian nucleos (smaller communites of 15-25 people) and experiencing how life feels like in a big community that has existed for 39 years strengthened the experience of community.

The World View Dimension was naturally embedded in Damanhur with a visit and meditation in the Temples of Humankind - a deep experience for many - an introduction to Spiral Dynamics, which was appreciated on one hand, but also created interesting discussions - exercises to connect with nature from Deep Ecology and Damanhur, a morning spent on observing our world from a holistic point of view, and an evening sharing amongst the participants about different world views. A highlight was two half days and a bit, spent finding out how art can awaken and express parts of ourselves, through sculpturing, painting and building a wall sculpture together. Beside a deep experience, it was also much fun for the group. This year a very appreciated session about the use of social networks was added.



The Ecology Dimension allowed the participants to learn about alternative energy, how to grow organic food, water and waste water treatments, green building and retrofitting. It was particularly interesting for the group to see the concrete application inside the community. Permaculture design gave new perspectives to the four projects of the participants, who were able to further implement them. Hands-on experiences building and plastering a strawbale house, and working in the garden, seeing many different permaculture principles applied, made the ecology session concrete. The hands-on days were very appreciated balancing the emotional and mind work of the rest of the course.



T*he Economy Section* talked about hard facts around money in a world that is troubled by a global, unfair financial system, but also showed that new economic solutions are possible. Green economy and Blue economy were compared and systems built on solidarity and sharing were analyzed using the hosting community as a concrete model to show many different aspects of a new economy. Small groups worked on the economic development of the four projects, adding an important dimension. This year there was a particularly strong interest in the economic section. Last but not least the groups worked on complementary currencies for their projects.

Outcomes:

- Two future ecovillages, one in Brittany in the the north of France, another one on a Danish island.
- A new EDE in France.
- A project for the transition of several municipalities in Sweden to "Eco-Municipalities".
- The collaboration with GEN to find new solutions in the North-South theme.
- A new business that wants to create replicable ecovillage models.

What went well:

- The group started to melt together from the beginning and went with depth and harmony through many processes
- This year, design was used with many different methods, from Dragon Dreaming to Permaculture, to group work to develop the four projects.
- Many new social tools and games were learned.
- The meditations in the Temples of Humankind added a deep spiritual dimension.
- The community building experience in the woods helped the group to understand the possibilities and power of community.
- A field trip in the town of Vidracco showed how a community can integrate with the bioregion.
- The evenings in the nucleos allowed the host community and the EDE community share and come close.
- The art workshop let the people express their talents individually and together with the others.
- The sessions for leadership strengthened the participants.
- Beautiful environment with a natural swimming pool and great food added relax and well-being.
- Great content and an inspiring learning adventure.
- Hands-on days added a practical dimension, that allowed the participants to understand, what a group can accomplish.
- The intercultural exchange between people from many different countries.
- Contacting nature gave strong experiences of inner transformation to many.
- Important tools for conflict resolution and leadership.
- Many songs from the world were shared and even composed in real time.

Weaknesses:

- Limited Internet access.
- Too little free time because of tight schedule.
- The economy session improved a lot, but still needs more graphs in English.

❖❖Quotes:❖❖

I really appreciated being hosted within the community and getting a glimpse into all the dimensions of community life. Participating in the EDE in Damanhur was a memorable experience.

Great to have an interesting community like Damanhur as its location! Amazing instructors!

I loved the strong emphasis on social and worldview dimensions and the fact, that all facilitators have great expertise in their subject matter and long lived experience of community life.

Diversity, depth, innovative ways of learning!

This program had excellent facilitators; the environment was very inspiring and relevant. The biggest strengths I found was the experiential element of learning. For example we spent a lot of time going through group processes both in the class room and in the "Game of Life". There was also a good balance of types of learning activities so for example we weren't in the classroom learning theory all week. Instead we had classes of theory back to back with art or classes outside.

The curriculum and being in Damanhur to see it first hand was amazing.

I was surprised by the group processes and the range of topics.

I liked to see the practical life in a successful community, the time to meet the inhabitants and to practice and observe the real day today life.

Living together with a group of other students in a functioning eco-village was wonderful. Therefore you get a very real understanding of how the community works and you create long-lasting ties with the other students.

The course gave a great overview of what has to be concerned building up an eco-village.

I have learnt more about the real life challenges of community life and gained an appreciation for the qualities and actions that help a community be be become successful, particularly solidarity. Also the significance of legal and financial systems…

I greatly developed my understanding of the social element and group processes.

I have another perspective, more skills, and enhanced interest to keep learning. I appreciate even more that diversity of approach is healthy and constructive. Not every community needs to follow the same formula. It is better if they don't.

My understanding of sustainable community has evolved hugely, also of the challenges and realities. Also the ways in which communities could become more resilient.

The importance of leadership in creating a common vision has become very clear, so has the importance of learning in a living environment.

I will bring a lot of the things back to my community and try to implement.

I will incorporate parts of the curriculum in my teachings. Dragon Dreaming will probably be the first I use, but I also expect to use parts of the social and economic dimensions soon.