



Ecovillage Design Education:  
Transformative Learning  
towards sustainable  
communities?

Student Name: Miriam Amend-Straif  
Registration Number: 931115013010

Master Thesis, as part of the Master in Organic Agriculture,  
Wageningen University and Research  
Submitted 20.02.2019

Supervised by: Carla Oonk and Arjen Wals  
Chair Group: Education and Learning Sciences

## Summary

This study starts with a call for a new culture and learning from ecovillages in order to transition society towards a more sustainable path (Chapter I). It introduces Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) courses, which are unique immersive learning experiences, where people from all around the world can live in an ecovillage for a period of four weeks, learn about sustainability topics and become change agents for a new culture (Chapter II). Furthermore, the theory of transformative learning as viewed by Jack Mezirow and Robert Boyd is reviewed as a concept, in which people's way of seeing and being in the world is deeply changed. Differences in conceptualisations are elaborated on and their definitions of "transformative learning" are presented (Chapter III). With this background knowledge, the main focus and the research questions are introduced: *How do people participating in EDE courses change?* and *What factors influence people to change in EDE courses?* To gain insight into the learning experience at EDE courses, a qualitative case study approach was chosen as a methodology for this research. As presented in Chapter IV, in-depth interviews with "current" participants as well as with "past" participants and facilitators of EDE courses were carried out. Additionally, one EDE course was attended as part of the research. Overall, 27 interviewees with participants from six different EDE courses informed this study.

In response to the research questions, the changes which were experienced and the influencing factors which contributed to the experience are laid out in Chapter V. In terms of changes, these are grouped into seven clusters indicating how EDE participants changed: a large amount of changes relate to (1) the Self (personal discovery, inner growth, driving force) and to (2) interaction with others (group work and communication skills). Furthermore, many changes indicate (3) an increased active engagement for creating change. Finding a network of like-minded people (4) and experiencing community life (5) are also important changes. Several changes involve (5) more concrete knowledge (about specific topics and about sustainability at large). And a few people mention "spiritual" experiences (7).

In response to the second research question, six clusters of influencing factors indicate how (transformative) learning experiences were fostered: (1) the context creates opportunities for people to see themselves differently (through quiet time, social interaction and feedback). (2) The exchange of experiences with fellow members of the course and the ecovillage community provides valuable input. (3) The learning style and activities during the organised sessions encourage rich learning. Furthermore, outside the sessions, (4) a playground-like field facilitates the practicing of new behaviour and (5) the group atmosphere allows for intimate connection and feeling safe. Lastly, (6) the communal organisation of the course shows people what it's like to live in community. Altogether, the influencing factors are tied into a "living curriculum" that is co-created by all members of the EDE group, and where diverse layers of learning occur throughout the entire day.

The discussion (Chapter VI) revisits the clusters of change and influencing factors, draws connections between them and parallels findings with literature cases. The notion of an authentic culture and an EDE bubble are introduced that highlight the creation of a special place *inside* the EDE and serve to question how this is maintained *outside* the course environment. Furthermore, the theory of transformative learning is re-introduced and the "transformativeness" of the changes experienced in EDE courses is reflected upon.

After concluding on the findings (Chapter VII), recommendations for EDE courses and for the theory of transformative learning are made (Chapter VIII). At last, reflections on the research process are presented (Chapter IX).

## Table of Contents

Summary.....	1
I. A call for a new culture: learning from ecovillages .....	5
II. Ecovillage Design Education courses .....	7
III. Transformative Learning: theory and practice .....	9
A. What is Transformative Learning? .....	9
1. Psychocritical view .....	10
2. Psychoanalytic view .....	11
3. Transformation: a change in view and being .....	12
B. What factors influence transformative learning? .....	13
1. Characteristics of the learner .....	13
2. Relationships with others.....	14
3. Learning approaches and activities .....	14
4. The setting.....	15
5. Immersion into a transformative space .....	15
C. Researching transformative learning in EDE courses .....	15
IV. Methodological approach.....	16
A. Qualitative approach: case studies and interviews.....	16
B. Case selection and contacting participants .....	16
1. Contacting past participants .....	16
2. Contacting current participants and participating in the EDE.....	17
C. Overview of participants.....	17
D. Interviews .....	18
E. Analysis .....	19
V. Results.....	20
A. How do people participating in EDE courses change? .....	20
1. The Self.....	21
2. Social competencies: interaction with others.....	29
3. Engagement for a sustainable society: spreading the movement .....	34
4. Finding a network .....	36
5. Community experience .....	38
6. Knowledge.....	40
7. Information beyond the mind .....	44
8. Summary of the changes experienced by EDE participants.....	45

B.	What factors influence people to change in EDE courses? .....	46
1.	Opportunity to see oneself differently through the (social) context .....	46
2.	Exchange of experiences.....	48
3.	The learning style and activities .....	50
4.	A playground to experiment and practice .....	52
5.	The atmosphere in the group .....	54
6.	Organising as a community – sharing responsibilities .....	57
7.	Summary of the factors influencing people to change at EDE courses .....	58
VI.	Discussion.....	59
A.	Revisiting the clusters of changes .....	59
1.	Self.....	59
2.	Social .....	60
3.	Active engagement.....	61
4.	Network and community experience .....	61
5.	Knowledge.....	61
6.	Information “beyond the mind” .....	61
7.	Merging of clusters of change .....	62
B.	Diving into the factors influencing the learning.....	63
1.	Seeing oneself from many different perspectives .....	63
2.	Meeting others and learning from their experiences .....	63
3.	Learning style at the EDE.....	63
4.	The importance of the group atmosphere: a safe space .....	64
5.	Taking on responsibilities in the co-living space .....	65
6.	Ideal group size? .....	65
7.	Like-minded vs diverse participants? .....	65
8.	Merging of influencing factors – a living curriculum .....	65
C.	Reflection on changes beyond the web of clusters.....	67
1.	Authentic culture .....	67
2.	Inside vs outside the EDE bubble.....	67
D.	The transformativeness of the changes .....	68
1.	Transformative learning according to Mezirow .....	68
2.	Transformative learning according to Boyd .....	70
3.	Are changes experienced by EDE participants transformative? .....	71
VII.	Conclusion .....	73

VIII.	Recommendations.....	75
A.	Practical recommendations for EDE courses.....	75
B.	Recommendations and contribution to theory on transformative learning.....	77
IX.	Reflections on the research.....	78
A.	Strength of mixed groups .....	78
B.	Representativeness of EDE participants.....	78
C.	Differences due to specific EDEs.....	79
D.	Interviews: stories shared and rapport .....	79
E.	The influence of a developing participant-researcher .....	79
F.	Analysis: reliability of interpretation .....	80
G.	Theoretical interpretation / conceptualisation of findings.....	80
X.	Bibliography .....	81
XI.	Appendix.....	85
A.	Overview of people interviewed.....	85
B.	Consent form (for past participants interviewed via Skype) .....	86
C.	Interview guide for (past) participants.....	88
D.	Interview guide for facilitators .....	90
E.	Diagrams showing links between the clusters of change and the influencing factors.....	91

## I. A call for a new culture: learning from ecovillages

It is widely accepted nowadays that humans have a widespread impact on the environment. It has even been suggested to name the time era in which we live the *Anthropocene*, characterised by the force of anthropogenic alteration of planetary processes (Crutzen, 2006). The advancing threats of climate change, increasing loss of biodiversity and crossing other planetary boundaries (Rockström et al., 2009) are all suggestive of this. It is important to remember that altering the Earth system so radically also means destroying our own human life support system. Although there is international collaboration on tackling these issues, many argue that this is not sufficient. Indeed, many of the causes for this destructive impact are so deeply engrained in our “normal” lifestyles that truly tackling the problem requires more than simple technological improvements or slow shifts in energy sources. Already in 1972, the Limits to Growth report suggested that continued growth on a finite planet is not possible (Meadows, 1972). This goes against the principle of capitalism and therewith shows the depth of problem. Furthermore, since many environmental and social problems are deeply intertwined, these cannot be addressed in singularity and should be tackled with a more holistic approach that focuses on the “whole” issue at large. In line with this, there is a call to move towards a more systematic worldview (Capra, 1996) that recognises the interconnection of all life on this planet. Overall, there is a call for a paradigm shift, to start “seeing” and “doing” things differently, instead of simply improving the current way of doing things (Sterling, 2004).

Recognising this need for a more holistic approach and a radically different way of life, some groups have started building alternative pathways to create more regenerative futures (“Global Ecovillage Network”, n.d.). The ecovillage movement is doing precisely this. An ecovillage is an intentional, traditional or urban community that considers social, cultural, ecological and economical dimensions of sustainability in its design and aims to actively regenerate social and natural environments (“What is an Ecovillage”, n.d.). It can be considered as a living experiment of sustainable communal living that is continuously in the process of learning. Worldwide, about 10,000 ecovillages exist that are part of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) (“About GEN”, n.d.). Every ecovillage is different - it can range from as little as 20 habitants to many thousands, located in different countries and with different core intentions. Sometimes the focus of an ecovillage is on spiritual development, on peace and conflict resolution or an ecological construction. Yet, in all cases, there is a common intention to live a different lifestyle from the “mainstream” one. In such communities, where motivated people with a common dream of a different society live together, there is much potential for innovations (Kunze, 2012). Indeed, these places intend to be a “force for positive societal transformation” (“What is an Ecovillage”, n.d.).

Ecovillages can be sites of inspiration and knowledge exchange for fostering further societal changes and therewith help transition towards more sustainable societies. This should not necessarily involve simply replicating solutions from one place in another context. Instead new forms of sustainable options adapted to local contexts should be developed. The aim should not be to simply build more new ecovillages, instead, as Kosha Joubert (2015) from GEN suggests, we need to transform current villages into ecovillages. More generally, it is important to re-examine the current structures and transition these to truly sustainable ones. This transformation of current systems and society may in fact be much more difficult than creating new ecovillages.

Talking about the transformation of our society, Wals, Tassone, Hampson, & Reams (2015) suggest that “[t]he capacity to ... contribute to socioecological oriented sustainability ... requires a profound transformation of individuals and of the system” (p.9). It “requires changes in people’s hearts and minds” (p.9). This means that, if we argue for a more fundamental redesign as suggested by

Sterling's strongest level of sustainability transition (Sterling, 2004), then also people need to change. The idea here is also in line with the above mentioned paradigm shift, that at "the root of this system failure is our shared worldview" (Sterling, 2004, p.53). It is hence precisely this – our worldview – which needs to be addressed. When talking about changing worldviews, the concept of transformative learning arises – this is a type of learning which results in a deep perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1997).

The question hence arises, how this transformation of our society in line with the paradigm shift described above can take place. How can ecovillages that experiment with holistically sustainable forms of living contribute to building more sustainable societies beyond their ecovillage? Exactly with this aim to increase the outreach impact of ecovillages and further help the vision of creating sustainable societies, Gaia Education was set up (GEESE, 2012). Especially their Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) courses are of interest here; according to Gaia Education, these programs have "transformed lives" and "previous students have become agents of positive culture change in their communities and regional economies" ("EDE Programmes", n.d.). To better understand their impact, EDE courses are the focus of this study.

This study aims to gain insight into the learning that occurs in these EDE courses. It seems that these courses represent an ideal case to learn about education for sustainable societies and transformative learning in combination. The research questions that guide this study are "*How do people participating in EDE courses change?*" and "*What factors influence people to change in EDE courses?*". Insight into what contributes to the courses' transformative impact could contribute to projects on education for sustainability and to the theory and practice of transformative learning. To set the ground for the focus of this study, the next chapter will describe EDE courses in more detail, and thereafter, the theory of transformative learning is reviewed.

## II. Ecovillage Design Education courses

In this chapter, Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) courses, their curriculum and their unique “Living and Learning Pedagogy” will be presented.

Gaia Education can be considered as the “educational arm” of the Global Ecovillage Movement. The organisation was created in 2005 by a group of “Global Ecovillage Educators for a Sustainable Earth” (GEESE). It works in close collaboration with ecovillages all around the world to achieve its mission, which is to “promote thriving communities within planetary boundaries” (“Gaia Education - Mission, Vision & Impact”, n.d.). One of the central courses under the umbrella of Gaia Education are the EDE courses. On its website, Gaia Education advocates that EDE courses have transformed lives. To give an indication, they state:

“Participants become change agents and sustainability designers, taking active roles in transitioning their existing communities, institutions and neighbourhoods, to more sustainable patterns of production and consumption, as well as leading more joyful, more meaningful and healthier lives.” (“EDE Programmes”, n.d.)

The original curriculum for EDE courses was presented in 2005. The curriculum is designed around a 4D mandala framework or “sustainability wheel” which advocates the same holistic approach to sustainability as ecovillages do. In addition to the three commonly used dimensions of sustainability, namely the social, ecological and economic dimensions, it includes the worldview dimension to highlight the importance of value systems in transforming societies (GEESE, 2012). Each of the dimensions includes five learning outcomes, which are indicated in the sustainability wheel in Figure 1. For more details, the curriculum can be consulted online<sup>1</sup>. The idea is that this curriculum guides organisers in designing EDE courses but remains flexible and can be adapted to local needs (GEESE, 2012).



Figure 1: The sustainability wheel with five learning outcomes in each of the four dimensions of sustainability (GEESE, 2012, p.5)

<sup>1</sup> The full EDE curriculum by the Global Ecovillage Educators for a Sustainable Earth (GEESE, 2012) can be found at <https://gaiaeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/EDE-Curriculum-English.pdf>

Educators in ecovillages and enthusiastic Gaia Education alumni can organise these EDE courses. Organisers of the EDE courses often facilitate various learning activities themselves and invite additional educators for certain topic areas. To ensure the quality of the content, the faculty and the site, Gaia Education acts as a certifying organisation (GEESE, 2012).

Beyond the content, the “Living and Learning” pedagogy of the courses is a central requirement. The pedagogy focuses on the unique value of ecovillages as learning environments: by living in an ecovillage during the EDE course, learners are simultaneously living what they are learning. In this way, an immersive experience is created, where holistic and multidimensional learning occurs all around the clock (GEESE, 2012). This is the central aspect of the pedagogy and renders learning effective and potentially deeply transformative. Further important elements are elaborated on next. Firstly, the pedagogy is designed to educate “the whole person” with all the senses. For this, a mixture of interactive group processes, theory, hands-on experience, celebrations, dance and quiet time (meditation, reflection) is suggested. Secondly, learners should take on responsibility for community maintenance by sharing work in the kitchen, garden or in cleaning tasks. Thirdly, building an intentional community and fostering a sense of trust among the learning group is important. Time for sharing and open communication contribute to this. Fourthly, the EDE should reflect ecovillage values: cherish diversity in ages, cultures and abilities, respect different points of view, be non-hierarchical and emphasise that everyone has something to share (GEESE, 2012). Overall, in addition to 8 hours of sleep, the curriculum recommends 4 hours of theory, 4 hours of practical work, 4 hours of personal integration and reflection and 4 hours for meals and casual conversations. Ideally, the course should take place for four weeks in an ecovillage, however it is also possible to spread out the course over multiple shorter meetings throughout the year (GEESE, 2012).

Since its initiation, over 300 EDE courses have been organised in 50 different countries all around the world. Over 17,000 people of different ages and backgrounds have participated in these courses (“EDE Programmes”, n.d.).

### III. Transformative Learning: theory and practice

In this chapter, the literature on transformative learning will be reviewed. In a first part (section A), the theoretical conception of this term will be elaborated on and two perspectives on transformative learning will be presented. In a second part (section B), case studies that have studied transformative learning in sustainability related settings will be reviewed, specifically looking at factors that contribute to transformative learning experiences. A third part (section C) leads back to the research focus of this study.

#### A. What is Transformative Learning?

Transformative learning is most frequently associated with Jack Mezirow, an American scholar who coined this term in 1978 when studying the experience of women returning to college through a reentry program (Taylor, 1998). Also the famous educator Paulo Freire is often referred to as having influenced ideas on transformative learning, his writings on “conscientization”<sup>2</sup> strongly influenced Mezirow’s view (Enkhtur & Yamamoto, 2017). Since the origin of transformative learning theory, the concept has become quite popular in education and has been studied widely (e.g. Taylor & Cranton, 2013). Different scholars have suggested alternative theoretical conceptions of transformative learning, and more generally, the process of transformative learning has been studied and discussed with regard to various settings and orientations, such as health, environment and culture shock. Baumgartner (2001) suggests that the excitement elicited by the term “transformative” might be responsible for its large study. However, although the concept is widely studied, theoretical elaboration remains limited. Indeed, Cranton and Taylor (2012, as referenced in Taylor & Cranton, 2013) have suggested that few theoretical advances have been made since its original conception. Rather so, some theorists have come to warn that the misuse and overuse of the term results in it lacking all meaning (Tisdell 2012, as referenced in Taylor & Laros, 2014). More generally, the extensive use in combination with differences in conceptions results in a “basic conceptual uncertainty and even confusion as to what this term actually includes, covers, and implies” (Illeris, 2014).

Multiple perspectives on transformative learning exist, with scholars conceptualising the process of transformative learning differently, highlighting differing aspects as crucial or seeing the process as orientated towards specific goals/areas. Taylor (2008) identified seven different lenses of transformative learning<sup>3</sup>. After a review of these lenses, it was decided to focus on two lenses in this study: the psychocritical and psychoanalytical view. They are both widely used and ample literature is available on them, their conceptualisation of the learning process is worked out in detail, and both views are applicable to the study of EDE courses. Starting with Mezirow’s psychocritical view and followed by Boyd’s psychoanalytical view, these two lenses of transformative learning will hence be presented in more detail. Thereafter, re-surfacing to the concept of transformative learning more generally, the importance of changing not only one’s view but also one’s way of being in the world will be elaborated on.

---

<sup>2</sup> Freire saw education as a form of liberation, in which oppressive forces are uncovered and learners develop conscientisation, a critical consciousness (Lange, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> The seven lenses of transformative learning identified by Taylor (2008) are called the psychocritical, psychoanalytic, social emancipatory, psychodevelopmental, neurobiological, cultural-spiritual, race-centric and planetary lenses.

## 1. Psychocritical view

The psychocritical view of transformative learning is that of Mezirow. The main components of his theory include mental schemes (frames of reference, habits of mind and points of view). These are used in a first part to define transformative learning. Thereafter, the importance of critical reflection upon these mind schemes is highlighted. Furthermore, ten steps which are often associated with transformative learning are presented to illustrate how perspective transformations can be achieved.

Mezirow defines transformative learning as “the process of effecting change in a frame of reference” (1997, p.5). Frames of reference are “the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences” (Mezirow, 1997, p.5). They include cognitive, affective and conative components – components relating to knowledge, feelings and intentions. These frames of reference shape the way we see and interact with the world. At the same time, they are originally formed (in pre-adulthood stages of life) by our experiences in and with the world. They are influenced by our parents or other caretakers, by the culture we live in and by the context we are brought up in. Frames of reference are made up of habits of mind and points of view. Habits of mind are the broader “habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting” that are influenced by a certain set of assumptions (Mezirow, 1997, p.5-6). Social norms, moral judgement, religious beliefs, personal preferences and self-concept amongst others can form habits of mind that filter our experiences (Mezirow, 2000). Points of view are more specific, they are the expression of habits of mind. They include beliefs, attitudes, judgements and feelings. They shape our responses and actions in specific situations. Mezirow gives the example of ethnocentrism as a habit of mind. This can for example result in a point of view of a Dutch person to view a Mexican person as inferior and hence automatically act in a manner that discourages interaction with the “other”. Based on these two constructs – habits of mind and points of view – the idea is that a change in a frame of reference can result through a transformation of a habit of mind or multiple transformations of points of view, which eventually lead to a change in the habit of mind (Mezirow, 1997). In this way, transformative learning can be either a sudden event or it can occur more gradually, through the accumulation of small transformative insights (Mezirow, 2000).

Indeed, most definitions of transformative learning more explicitly state that transformations in a result in “more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective” frames of references (Mezirow, 2000, p.7-8). Transformative learning is “the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand and feel about our world” (Mezirow, 1991, as cited in Lange, 2013, p.92). The idea is that frames of references influence us in various manners, they shape the reality in which we live, however we do not usually question them or consider how we may be limited by them. By critical reflection on the assumptions on which our beliefs are based, we can become aware of these mind schemes that influence us. Like this, learners can become more autonomous thinkers and more free individuals since they can start to identify their own values and beliefs instead of automatically acting on non-critically assimilated views of others.

To better understand the process of transformative learning, Mezirow (2000) has identified ten phases of transformation. These phases illustrate frequent aspects that lead to a perspective transformation. These phases can be followed all together, but it is also possible that a perspective transformation occurs if these phases are experienced in a different order or if some phases are “skipped”. The ten phases of transformative learning are presented here below.

The ten phases of transformation by Mezirow (2000) are:

- 1) Experiencing a disorienting dilemma
- 2) Undergoing self-examination (with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame)
- 3) Conducting a deep assessment of personal role assumptions and alienation created by new roles
- 4) Sharing and analysing personal discontent and similar experiences with others
- 5) Exploring options for new ways of thinking, for new roles, relationships and actions
- 6) Planning a course of action
- 7) Acquiring knowledge and skills for action
- 8) Trying new roles and assessing feedback
- 9) Building competence and self-confidence in new roles
- 10) Reintegrating into one's life with a new perspective

Essentially, triggered by a disorientating dilemma or a series of smaller events, a person becomes aware of a "discrepancy between what a person has always assumed to be true and what has just been experienced, heard, or read" (Cranton, 2002, p.66). This can stimulate critical reflection about the self and one's assumptions about the world. A person can become aware of what assumptions are held, where they originate from and what the resulting consequences of these assumptions are. Often, there is an exploration phase, where the person engages in discourse and discusses alternative viewpoints (Cranton, 2002). Eventually, a new perspective is shaped that usually includes more inclusive and better justified assumptions. Lastly, actions and behaviour are often adapted to align with the new perspective.

## 2. Psychoanalytic view

Next, transformative learning as viewed by Robert Boyd is explained. The process of individuation is key here. In the last paragraph, main similarities and differences between the psychocritical and psychoanalytical view of transformative learning are pointed out.

The psychoanalytical view of transformative learning is based on the Jungian concept of individuation and is rooted in depth psychology. In depth psychology, the unconscious mind is very important and is believed to deeply influence the individual's thoughts, feelings and actions (Dirkx, 2000). Individuation is the "process by which individual beings are being formed and differentiated ... having as its goal the development of the individual personality" (Jung, 1921, as cited in Kovan & Dirkx, 2003, p.102-103). It is the process through which a person "comes to a deeper understanding, realisation and appreciation of *who he or she is* apart from the pressures of the social and cultural contexts in which they are inextricably embedded" (Jacobi, 1967, as cited in Dirkx 2006, p.18, my emphasis). This process of individuation involves understanding and reflecting on our inner world, which is composed of various psychic structures (ego, shadow, anima, animus, collective unconsciousness) that make up our larger Self (Boyd, 1991, as referenced in Cranton & Roy, 2003). It involves becoming aware of the structures that are part of our unconscious mind. Through better integration of these different parts, the learner reaches a more whole Self (Lange, 2013) and can become the person who he or she is called to be (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003). Transformative learning is the conscious participation in this journey of individuation (Dirkx, 2000).

Such individuation processes can take place through dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious mind (Dirkx, 2000). Also images play an important role in this process. The term "images" is a poetic descriptions for psychic representations that can arise through dreams, performing arts or interaction with others (Dirkx, 2000, p.3). These images are "representations of our experience that arise spontaneously in awareness" (Dirkx, 2006, p.18). These are often emotion-

laden images that arise in response to certain situations. For example, a student may project her internal unresolved dilemma onto the members of her class and therewith unconsciously influence the dynamics of the group (Boyd, 1991, as summarised in Dirkx, 2006). In this way, "patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting" (Boyd & Myers, 1988, as cited in Talyor, 1998, p.17) can hence become clear and can be resolved.

Both Boyd and Mezirow view transformative learning as a process where an individual becomes more free and independent by becoming conscious of previously unconscious influences shaping one's identity. Yet, whilst Mezirow's focuses on cognitive conflicts in relation to cultural influences, Boyd's view focuses more on conflicts with the psychological structures (Taylor, 1998). Furthermore, whilst the first lens highlights the importance of critical reflection, the latter one sees transformative learning as a more contemplative process, where the person observes and listens deeply to their own inner self (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003).

### **3. Transformation: a change in view and being**

Taking a step back and looking at transformative learning at large, there are a few more general points to note. When talking about change, Sterling draws on Wenger to reiterate that the process of learning always changes who we are, but that it is unique to transformative learning to change us "to an unusual degree" (Sterling, 2004, p.56), influencing deeper levels of knowing. Indeed, Lange highlights that the word "trans-form" means to move across the form, suggesting a change in the form of the being (Lange, 2013). Similarly, Kegan explains that "[transformative] learning puts the form itself at risk of change" (as cited in Baumgartner, 2001, p.16). To give some insight into the definition of transformative learning and more specifically into what actually transforms in this process, Illeris (2014) suggests that it is our identity that changes. He suggests a three-layer model of identity, constituting of a core-, a personality-, and a preference-layer. Whilst the core seldom changes, transformations can occur at the outer levels.

What is further important is that transformative learning includes an ontological change, meaning a change in the person's "being" in the world, in addition to the change in the way the world is seen (Lange, 2004, as referenced in Taylor, 2007). The change in perspective should translate into further changes to realign one's life with this new perspective. Mezirow (2000, p.24) quotes Novak to make this point: "[p]erspective transformation represents not only a total change in life perspective, but an actualisation of that perspective. In other words life is not seen from a new perspective, it is lived from that perspective".

To conclude, another definition of transformative learning is presented, it encompasses key ideas of transformative learning:

Transformative learning is "a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions . . . a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world.

Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race, and gender; our body-awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy". (Morrell & O'Connor, 2002, as cited in Kovan & Dirkx, 2003, p.102)

## **B. What factors influence transformative learning?**

The next section will dive deeper into what influences or triggers transformative learning experiences. All these influences and conditions will be grouped under the term “influencing factors” in this study. To get an insight into these influencing factors, literature on transformative learning in general – and specifically with regard to sustainable living – was reviewed. The main reason for this background research on factors influencing transformative learning was to gain insight into what may contribute to transformative learning at the EDE. This literature review helped guide methodological choices and aspects to pay attention to in this study.

Theoretical publications as well as case studies were reviewed. Six case studies were considered particularly relevant to this study. Out of the six case studies, two cases focus on volunteer tourism in an ecovillage – one in India (Andriopoulou, 2011) and one in Iceland (Prince, 2017), one is about students and volunteers living with low-impact communities in England (Cook & Cutting, 2014), one looks at outdoor education (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011), one is based on Schumacher College in England (Blake, Sterling & Goodson, 2013) and one studies EDE courses in Estonia (Trapido, n.d.). In all cases, learning takes place in a special setting for an intense period. Five studies investigate the occurrence of transformative learning and one (Prince, 2017) the potential for transformative learning.

Key themes which have been found to contribute to transformative learning relate to the characteristics of the learner, the nature of relationships with others, learning approaches and activities and the setting. After elaborating on these themes individually below, the concept of “transformative spaces” that include an interaction of influencing factors will be introduced. This concept will guide us back to the immersion experience in EDE courses and therewith to the focus of this research.

### **1. Characteristics of the learner**

The learner is the subject of the learning and influences all other aspects. The state in which the learner engages in the learning experience and the characteristics which he/she brings will influence its outcome. More empathetic character traits may for example make it easier for someone to consider other perspectives (Taylor & Cranton, 2013). Previous experiences, skills and knowledge can influence the learning process. Indeed, since in transformative learning, the frame of reference which is made up of experiences is transformed, interaction with past experiences is important (Taylor & Laros, 2014). The learner comes with much relevant knowledge which can facilitate or hinder the learning process. Also the intentions and expectations of the learner are important. Intentions to join the program have been found to shape the direction of transformation in the outdoor education program; whilst there was much interaction with nature, the main learning was in terms of personal development (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011). Furthermore, the alignment of the intentions of the learner and the educational institution play a role: if the learner is open and willing to learn, then this may qualify as a certain “readiness” (Blake et al., 2013) and facilitate the process. In cases where learners voluntarily sign up for the experience, they are probably relatively open to the process. The expectations with which learners come can also shape the learning process. With regard to ecovillages and other sustainable communities, visitors are likely to come with certain expectations of life there. If these expectations are different from the experienced reality, such a dissonance may lead to transformative learning. But this may also lead to disappointment if not dealt with correctly: volunteers in the ecovillage in Iceland for example criticized the place since it did not meet their notions of sustainability. Studying this case, Prince (2017) suggests that more “sincere encounters” and open conversations would help both the community members and the visitors to learn from each other and to better understand decisions made; this may even reveal

transformative information. This suggestion leads over to the next theme which is that of the importance of interactions.

## **2. Relationships with others**

Humans are shaped by their relations (Lange, 2015); it hence makes sense that relationships are a key factor influencing the process of transformative learning. Everyone engaged in the learning process, the facilitator, the learner, other course participants and the host community contribute to and influence the experience. Indeed, much of the learning that takes place may be in the form of social learning through the interaction with others. The quality of the interactions between everyone is hence crucial. Many factors can positively influence these interactions and therewith the entire learning experience. Relationships should be authentic (Taylor & Laros, 2014). For this, spending time on getting to know each other is very valuable. The quality of the relationships is also impacted by the group sizes and dynamics (Blake et al., 2013). Furthermore, power imbalances between people should be minimized as much as possible to avoid barriers to learning (Cranton, 1994, as referenced in Baumgartner, 2001). This can be done by a non-hierarchical setting and using first names. Interactions which create a "safe, open, and trusting environment" as advocated by Mezirow (cited in Baumgartner, 2001, p.21) foster the process of transformative learning. In such an environment, people can feel confident and express themselves openly. Altogether, the feeling of being part of a (learning) community has been highlighted in several cases to be very beneficial (Andriopoulou, 2011; Blake et al., 2013; Cook & Cutting, 2014; D'Amato & Krasny, 2011). It can help in creating a safe and nurturing learning environment where people can exchange experiences and talk with like-minded people who are going through a similar (transformative) situation (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011).

## **3. Learning approaches and activities**

In terms of the learning process, there are several approaches and activities which seem to foster transformative learning. Critical reflection is a crucial factor highlighted by Mezirow. However, for such critical reflection to lead to transformative learning, the reflection has to be on the premises and not only on the process or content of the learning (Mezirow, 1991, as referenced in Enkhtur & Yamamoto, 2017). Activities which can encourage critical reflection and transformative insights are dialogue with the self and dialogue with others. Inner dialogue and personal reflection have been highlighted to stimulate transformative learning (Taylor & Laros, 2014); they can aid in the initial phases of transformation (self-examination and assessing personal assumptions). Cranton (2002) suggests that such an inner dialogue and reflection can be stimulated by reflective journaling or meditation. Dialogue with others is also an important aspect which can foster transformative learning (Taylor & Laros, 2014). Dialogue can be described as "an interactive effort to co-create novel ideas and understandings through a balanced process of inquiry, advocacy and reflection" (Bronn and Bronn, 2003, as interpreted in Wals and Schwarzin, 2012, p.16). In fact, the nature of relationships described above forms ideal conditions for such an exchange through dialogue. Furthermore, approaches which involve the "whole person" are very powerful (Taylor & Laros, 2014). Specific activities can help invite aspects of the person which often tend to be suppressed or overlooked. The "emotional self" can for example be involved by explicitly inviting emotions into the class, and the "physical self" can be activated by activities such as deep breathing, role plays, sitting in a circle and walking around (Burns, 2015). More direct involvement of the learner through experiential learning and going into the real world can help in the last phases of transformation (Cranton, 2002), namely in implementing new perspectives into action. Overall, it seems that in terms of pedagogical activities, a certain amount of intensity and challenge (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011) and a diversity in learning pedagogies (Blake et al., 2013) stimulates transformative learning.

#### **4. The setting**

The setting is also an important influence. In the cases studied here, living in a sustainable community often significantly contributed to the learning experience. Experiencing such a different lifestyle is likely to make people think and trigger deeper reflection (Cook & Cutting, 2014). In such, the community itself may represent the disorientating dilemma that triggers transformative learning (Andriopoulou, 2011). Close connection with nature has also been highlighted to influence the learning process (Blake et al., 2013; D'Amato & Krasny, 2011). Also the break-away from normal life, which is made possible by the different setting, contributes to transformative learning (Trapido, n.d.). In such a distanced setting, learners may be able to better think about "norms" and underlying assumptions. Specifically the notion of "places of liminality" has also been used to suggest that such special places represent a fluid ground where learners can go through transformative processes (Lange, 2015).

#### **5. Immersion into a transformative space**

Overall, it is an interaction of factors that affects the learning experience and contributes to the transformative experience. Representative of this, special transformative spaces have been described. Wals et al. (2015) talk about a holding environment, "a kind of container, a space where sufficient challenge and support (Kegan 1994) is present to enable learning and growth. This holding environment allows people to deal with pressing global challenges, to question own values, habits and beliefs that run us as reflexes, to learn from each other by mirroring one's perspective with the one of others, and go beyond those reflexes by experimenting new ways of doing and being" (p.9). And Lange describes a learning sanctuary as a protective space, as a space which enables "deep encounter with self (mind, spirit, and body), social relationships, habits of thinking and living, and the conjoined individual and social myths that constrain human freedom and justice" (Lange, 2009, p.197). It is the intention of the EDE courses to create exactly such a transformative space through their immersion experience. This leads us back to the research aim in this study.

### **C. Researching transformative learning in EDE courses**

As stated in the introduction, the focus of this research is on Ecovillage Design Education courses. Based on their Living and Learning pedagogy, as well as Gaia Education's description of past EDE participants, these courses seem to be very transformative. They hence represent an ideal case to study the occurrence and process of transformative learning in relation to sustainability. If EDE courses truly represent such a transformative experience, it is presumable that other sustainability educators and transformative theorists can learn a great deal from them.

Through the study of EDE courses with the guiding lens of transformative learning, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of transformative learning theory in practice. It aims to better understand what transformative learning (in line with sustainability) looks like in practice, how it occurs and how it can be triggered. For this, the two main research questions of this study are:

- How do people participating in EDE courses change?
- What factors influence people to change in EDE courses?

The results chapter will provide answers to these research questions, after which the discussion chapter will, amongst others, dive into the debate of how transformative these changes truly are. Furthermore, an attempt will be made to connect the influencing factors to the experienced changes. Before diving into results and discussion, the methodological approach will be presented in the next chapter.

## IV. Methodological approach

This master thesis is a qualitative research with a case study approach, using interviews to gain insight into *how* and *why* people change at EDE courses. The research methodology that was undertaken for this research is elaborated on in this chapter.<sup>4</sup>

### A. Qualitative approach: case studies and interviews

To obtain an in-depth understanding of EDE courses, inclusive of the perspective of EDE participants, a qualitative approach was considered to be best suited for this study (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). More specifically, the case study approach was chosen. Yin (2009) notes that the case study method can be used when a phenomenon and the context within which the phenomenon takes place are studied. In this research, the phenomenon is (transformative) learning and the context is the EDE.

Since the research questions are focused on personal experiences and require individuals' reflection on their EDE experience, in-depth interviews were chosen as method to obtain information (Hennink et al., 2011). How these interviews were conducted is described in more detail in section D. Furthermore, to gain a better overview and insight into EDE courses, it was decided to attend one of these courses as part of the research. This allowed to observe the EDE experience first-hand, pay attention to influencing factors and more easily approach participants and facilitators.

### B. Case selection and contacting participants

Since the start of EDE courses in 2005, many courses have been organised in different locations worldwide. Although EDE courses follow the same curriculum, there are differences in setting, topics, facilitators, group sizes and so forth. Every course is slightly different. Furthermore, there is a large number of people who have participated in these courses and who have all experienced the EDE slightly differently. Whilst some aspects may influence one participant to deeply reflect and make changes in their life, the very same thing may leave someone else untouched. Every individual who has participated in an EDE course will have their own experience and their own story.

To obtain insight into EDE courses more generally, it was decided to interview participants of various EDE courses. This allowed to get a broader overview of changes and influencing factors. In addition, it was decided that people who participated in EDE courses in different years should contribute to this study. In this way, this research combines the benefits of interviewing participants during/right after the EDE ("current participants") and of contacting participants who finished their course a while ago ("past participants"). Participants who have just completed the EDE could talk about their experience in detail with a fresh memory. And participants who had completed the course a little while ago, had had time to let the experience sink and to possibly implement changes in their life. Interviewing "current" and "past" participants from multiple EDE courses hence allowed to get a broader picture of EDE experiences.

#### 1. Contacting past participants

The Gaia Education website was studied to obtain an overview of EDE courses. From the courses that were archived as past courses, organisers of the courses were contacted via e-mail (if the courses were taught in English and if contact information was available). The organisers were informed of the purpose of this study and asked if they could contact past participants of their EDE

---

<sup>4</sup> Originally, a mixed research approach was planned, using online questionnaires as a first indication to assess how and why EDE participants changed. Questions were adapted from the questionnaire developed by Stuckey, Taylor and Cranton (n.d.). However, due to several drawbacks, the methodological approach was adapted. In general, response rate was very low and the pilot study indicated that the questionnaire was too limiting in the range of (possible) answers.

courses. A sample e-mail was sent to organisers that they could forward to past participants, briefly telling them about the research and asking them if they would be willing to share about their EDE experience through an interview. Participants who were interested to participate contacted me via e-mail. Organisers of EDE courses in Findhorn (UK), Lost Valley (US), Orissa (India), La Cité Écologique (Canada) and Awakening Leadership Training (Thailand) forwarded this request to participants. One of the participants from Findhorn had also participated in an EDE in The Gambia. Additionally, past participants from the EDE in Schloss Glarisegg (Switzerland) (the EDE that was attended as part of this study) were approached during an EDE alumni gathering.

## **2. Contacting current participants and participating in the EDE**

To gain further insight into the EDE and approach current participants for interviews, it was decided to attend the EDE in Schloss Glarisegg (Switzerland) from the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2018 until the 25<sup>th</sup> February 2018. This EDE was chosen since it fit well with the timing and since it had the benefit of having an EDE alumni gathering at the end.

During this EDE, I had the double role of being a full participant and simultaneously looking at the EDE as a researcher. I participated in all activities like all other EDE participants. At the same time, I reflected on activities and conversations and had my research questions constantly in the back of my mind. At the beginning of the course, I briefly introduced my research and invited everyone to approach me with questions and ideas. Whilst I was an overt researcher, I believe that I was seen as a participant just like everyone else. In fact, in conversations throughout the weeks, I noticed that multiple people forgot about me attending the EDE with a research purpose.

At the end of the third week (of four EDE weeks), so when most of the official EDE course was already experienced, I started to remind people about the research and scheduled interview meetings with participants who were willing to share their experience. In addition to the EDE members who volunteered as interview participants, I approached a few more people and asked if they would like to be interviewed. Also facilitators talked about the EDE course from their viewpoint and provided additional insight into the experience.

## **C. Overview of participants**

Overall, 28 people were interviewed; 17 past participants, 9 current participants and 3 facilitators. One person shared the experience as both a past participant and as a facilitator<sup>5</sup>. One of the interviews with a past participant could not be taken up in the analysis<sup>6</sup> since the main changes were attributed to another course that took place simultaneously with the EDE.

An overview of all people interviewed is given in Table 1 in Appendix A. A mixture of real names and pseudonyms is used, depending on the preferences of the interviewee. Interview participants came from many different countries, with nationalities including Brazilian (1), Canadian (3), Catalonian (1), Danish (1), Dutch (2), French (2), Gambian (1), German (5), Greek (2), Italian (1), Norwegian (1), Romanian (1), Spanish (2), and not indicated (2). In terms of the age of participants, this was grouped into different age categories, with 5 participants 21-25 years old, 6 participants 26-30 years old, 7 participants 31-35 years old, 1 participant 41-45 years old, 1 participant 46-50 years old, 1 participant 51-55 years old, and 4 participants who did not indicate their age.

---

<sup>5</sup> Nébesna shared her experience as both a past participant and facilitator of the EDE. In the explanation of people interviewed she is counted in both the "past participants" and "facilitators" group, explaining why the total seems to add up to 29 instead of 28 people.

<sup>6</sup> Mina, who's interview was not included in the analysis, is listed in Table 1 in Appendix A, however her age and nationality are not included in the enumeration.

All “current participants” were from the EDE in Schloss Glarisegg (Switzerland). Most past participants were from the EDE in Schloss Glarisegg and Findhorn (UK). Additionally, one past participant from each of the following EDEs was interviewed: EDE in The Gambia, in Orissa (India), in Lost Valley (US) in La Cité Écologique (Canada). In terms of the EDE, all courses included an immersive experience of at least four weeks. In the case of the EDE in Lost Valley, the course took place over three months, in combination with a Permaculture Design course and more “free time” (without classes) in the community.

The EDE participants that contributed to this study were mostly conscious citizens that were oftentimes active in social and environmental projects. Many participants already had had contact with ecovillages in varying forms, either having visited ecovillages or living in a community themselves. In terms of occupation, some interviewees were students, worked in varying fields, such as education, music, real estate and charity. Various participants integrated their participation in the EDE into a time period where they travelled, explored and volunteered in different places. Reasons for joining the EDE varied: some people had heard about the EDE through housemates or friends. Others found out about the program through the internet and Gaia Education. Whilst some people came to the EDE with no concrete expectations, others intended to learn about sustainability topics, about ecovillages and about social tools. Experiencing community living and searching for like-minded people were stated multiple times as a motivation to participate in the EDE. A few people came to the EDE with concrete personal development intentions, or because they felt that “something needs to change”.

#### **D. Interviews**

Interviews with past participants that were met via e-mail were conducted via Skype. Interviews with current and past participants and facilitators from the EDE in Schloss Glarisegg were conducted in person in a quiet room in the ecovillage buildings. Interviews lasted between 45 and 120 minutes. At the stage of the interview, “current participants” had completed at least three out of the four weeks of the EDE course.

At the beginning of each interview, the research was introduced to interviewees, the interview procedure was clarified, people had the opportunity to ask questions, and then a consent form was signed (see consent form in Appendix B). Here, people were asked if they preferred to stay anonymous (with a pseudonym) or if they wished to have their own name mentioned in the research. Also permission to audio-record was asked for and granted by all interviewees.

All interviews were semi-structured in-depth interviews, focusing on hearing the interviewees’ own story about their EDE experience, what led them to come to this course, how they felt they changed, what they learned and what contributed to their (transformative) learning journey at the EDE. Interview guides for past participants, current participants and facilitators were set up to assist during the interviews (see Appendix C and D for interview guides). The creation of the interview guides was inspired by the literature research on transformative learning and more generally guided by the work of King & Horrocks (2010). The central part of the interview guide includes multiple open questions that were designed to get insight into how people experienced the EDE, and how and why they changed as a result of this course. Furthermore, introductory questions aimed to help past participants to recall their EDE and to build up rapport before diving into the deeper questions. And closing questions asked participants to make suggestions for the EDE and to add anything which they did not have the opportunity to say so far. Although the interview guide was consulted during the interview, the questions were sometimes diverged from to follow the interviewee’s story. Follow up questions were asked to gain further insight.

During the interview, and immediately after, interviewer observations and reflections regarding the interview were noted down and notes were made on the first impression and new insights regarding the research questions.

### **E. Analysis**

All interviews were transcribed upon return from the EDE course. Once transcribed, they were read through again, with the research questions in mind. Thoughts were noted down and first ideas of codes were recorded. After having carried out, re-listened to, transcribed and re-read all the interviews at least once, more thorough and systematic coding work started based on the first coding ideas. The interviews were coded inductively through content analysis: themes of “changes” and themes of “influencing factors” were identified and codes were assigned. All text excerpts referring to specific codes were copied and grouped according to codes in an excel file. The analysis and coding work was guided by the work of Hennink et al. (2011).

Once all interviews were coded, the codes were reviewed, some were merged or split. This work was discussed with one of my supervisors to obtain additional insight into the categorisation of quotes into themes. In the end, the findings were summarised and reported in written text with illustrative quotes, as presented in Chapter V.

## V. Results

In this chapter, the interview results will be presented. These are grouped into two separate parts, in line with the research question. In a first part, interviewees' responses giving insight into the question "*How do people participating in EDE courses change?*" will be presented, and in a second part, the responses relating to the question "*What factors influence people to change in EDE courses?*" will be elaborated on. Within each section, main clusters will be presented that form a thematic group of changes or influencing factors. In most cases, these clusters contain further categories and at times sub-categories to differentiate between different aspects within the cluster. For each category (and subcategory), illustrative quotes are displayed<sup>7</sup> and a short description recaptures the information provided in the interviews. To give an indication of how many people talked about specific categories, indicative words ranging in ascending order, from "a few", "several"/"some"/"various", "multiple", "many" (more than half) to "the majority" will be used.

At the beginning of each new cluster, a box visually presents which categories are discussed. These boxes are later combined into an overview diagram. Whilst the order in which the clusters are presented aims to ensure smooth transitions, there is no particular relevance to this order, and the clusters can also be read separately in another succession.

### A. How do people participating in EDE courses change?

The first results section presents the findings to the question of "*How do people participating in EDE courses change?*". In most cases, the majority of the interview time was dedicated to aspects relating to this question. All interviewees painted a colourful picture of changes experienced relating to their EDE course. From the wide number of self-reported changes, themes of change were highlighted which were categorised into thematic clusters. This categorisation is by no means the only possible representation, however it is intended to guide the reader in picturing the types of changes experienced.

There are seven clusters of change which will be discussed. These are entitled: (1) "Self", (2) "Social competencies – interaction with others", (3) "Engagement for a sustainable society: spreading the movement", (4) "Finding a network", (5) "Community experience", (6) "Knowledge" and (7) "Information beyond the mind". Some of them are much "larger" than others, meaning that more categories and subcategories belong to the cluster and that overall it was more widely present in the interviews.

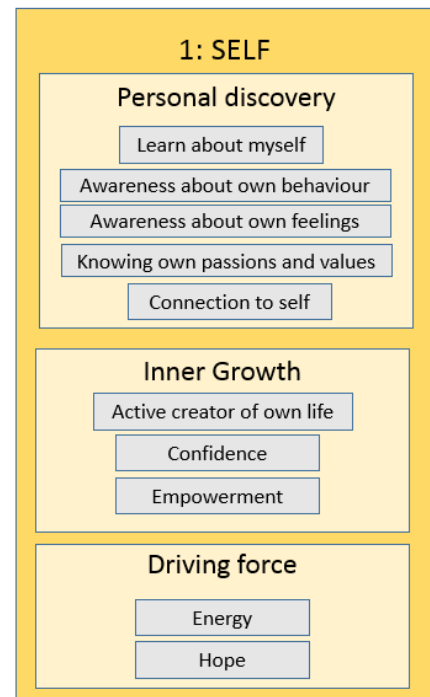
---

<sup>7</sup> Explanation of signs used in the quotes:

- Three little dots ("...") indicate that a small passage (a few words or sentences) is skipped for clear illustration purposes
- Anything written in square brackets ("[text]") is a clarification of the quote
- Words that were not clearly understood during the transcription are written in square brackets with a question mark ("[word?]")
- Capitals indicate that a louder tone of voice was used
- Quotation marks indicate that the interviewee talked in a different tone of voice, quoting someone else or quoting him- or herself

## 1. The Self

The first and largest cluster of change is linked to changes in the Self. Changes with a central focus on the self are grouped into three large categories: personal discovery, inner growth and driving force. The first category of personal discovery includes changes related to self-knowledge and self-perception. Becoming aware of one's inner world is central. The idea is that within the domain of personal discovery, learners become aware of something which is already present within them. In contrast, the second category of inner growth focuses more on changes which represent some inner growth or development. The third category, entitled driving force, is closely linked to inner growth: here there is also an internal development, yet this is more interlinked with the external world. Further elaboration below will give insight into each of these three categories and their sub-categories.



### a) Personal Discovery

The first category of change relating to the self is that of personal discovery. As mentioned previously, the focus here is on becoming aware of what is present within oneself. In general, EDE participants mention learning a lot about themselves during the EDE – this is the first subcategory. The following three subcategories diverge into more concrete areas of the self which participants learn more about: behaviour, feelings, passions and values. A last subcategory is dedicated to a deepened connection to the self which is practiced by some EDE participants.

#### (1) Learning about myself

The first subcategory shows the importance the EDE has for many in terms of learning about themselves.

Denis: *I would say for me the most important thing was learning more about myself more than anything else and I got a lot of that here.*

Quinn: *the EDE that I experienced did a wonderful job of empowering me as a leader who knows themselves*

Nil: *I learnt really a lot about myself ... so this is really something I learnt, just to know myself better, in general.*

Tayla: *I saw some things about myself that maybe I knew but maybe I wasn't aware of that. It was like unconscious. ... so it helps a lot in really this journey of also discovering more about us.*

Julie: *you learn a lot about yourself*

The quotes above are some examples of people expressing that they learnt a lot about themselves during the EDE. Denis highlights that this was the most important learning outcome for him. Quinn and Nil both say that they “know” themselves better now. And Tayla remarks that that she saw things about herself which she was unconscious of before. This all suggests that the things that are learnt about oneself are already existing before, but that they are discovered during the EDE.

## (2) Becoming aware of (and altering) my behaviour

The second subcategory explores how the EDE influenced multiple people to learn about their own behaviour.

Denis: *I think what was really useful for me is to be able to see my patterns more clearly, like things that I tend to do, trying to get something in a certain way, or trying to avoid something.*

Camilla: *so that dynamic I learnt about myself somehow throughout this ... And I do it with lots of different people ... It feels like I'm putting the decisions to other people.*

Vic: *I realised this is one of my main strategies to be comfortable, just avoiding intimacy. And it was really revealing.*

\*

Denis: *that was a really important change for me actually, to realise how much I'm pushing away at the same time as I'm pulling some other people towards me. I kinda told myself yesterday for example that I don't want to do this anymore*

Camilla: *Cannot do that, need to take responsibility.*

Vic: *[I'm] trying to get rid of all my box limitations that I created for myself.*

Looking at the first three quotes which are shown here, Denis talks about "patterns", Camilla about "that dynamic" and Vic about "strategies" which they learnt about themselves. In all cases, this stands for a certain behaviour, oftentimes an automatic way of acting in specific situations. Becoming aware of such habitual behaviour is one form of discovering more about oneself. Furthermore, knowing one's behaviour is an important first step for possible further change: based on this, people can consciously reflect on their way of acting and take steps to adjust this, if desired. In fact, oftentimes this is the case: upon conscious knowledge of their behaviour, people see how this is limiting themselves and holding back on possibilities. Vic calls this "box limitations" (a concept introduced during the EDE). He explains that he has been trying actively to overcome these limitations and alter his behaviour accordingly. Also Denis and Camilla point out that realisations about their own behaviour led them to decide to change this.

## (3) Becoming aware of my feelings

Another aspect of themselves which people learn about during the EDE is that of feelings.

Tess: *I never realised that there are different things than only your head and your mind and your intellect. ... I learnt at the EDE, and I also saw it, and I also tried to feel it in my self, that you have feelings and emotions and energies which can also be loose from your mind.*

Camilla: *it's just very cool to see that it's possible to learn. ... to know what you're feeling.*

Mila: *realising, okay fear can't take over, like my feelings can't take over, I'm still there, I don't get lost in my feelings. And it was so amazing to realise, okay this is always there, and finding space for that.*

Mila: *I'm really gladful that I got to know the space to feel all this anger ... I was like, wow, something really big happened within me. And at this moment I only knew something happened, and later on I realised, okay that was kind of opening of a door which was really toughly blocked ... And yeah, that was really wow for me, realising, okay, I'm actually suppressing anger for so long time, and there's so deep emotional thing.*

Tess admits that the concept of feelings was very new to her – at the EDE she learnt that feelings can exist separately from her mind. Also for others, the exploration of feelings at the EDE was also valuable. Camilla for example explains that the EDE helped her be more in touch with her feelings and know what she is actually feeling. Beyond this awareness of one's feelings, certain exercises also encouraged people to dive deeper into their feelings. For a few people this was an important learning point. Mila particularly points this out. On the one hand, she was excited to learn that feelings have a limit and that they "can't take over". On the other hand, she enjoyed experimenting with getting in touch with her feelings very deeply: she says that she got to know the space to feel her anger, something which she had been suppressing since a long time.

#### **(4) Knowing my passions and values**

Another aspect of change that is related to learning about oneself touches more upon discovering one's passions and interests as well as becoming more clear on one's values.

*Hans: so many of the values we are actually taking in and did not really reflect on them or develop those values on our own, but we just get them pushed on us. And having an environment in which these are critically analysed or brought to the surface and discussed is an awesome opportunity to then think "oh yeah right, do I really want that or do I just - did I just take that on because at one point it was pushed on me and I went with it".*

*Quinn: this course where I had to take out my values and look at them, I think allows me to be a more effective researcher and a more flexible designer, because I know where I'm coming from.*

*Amita: I could go deeper in myself and unlock more of my longing, what I wanted to, how I want to contribute and change things in the world ... so I'm feeling very inspired to start doing this work more and seeing how I can facilitate and help people to get more in contact with themselves and with their voice. ... this is something that the course has helped me to be more focused on and be more aware of this longing.*

A few people talk about making their own values more explicit during the EDE. Hans explains that oftentimes we get values "pushed onto us" and don't properly take time to reflect on them. He says that the EDE represented a good opportunity where this reflecting on their own values can happen. Quinn also points out that she analysed her own values in detail at the EDE. To her, knowing her own values is a beneficial trait for being a researcher.

Various people also mention that they have more clarity on their passions and interests because of the EDE. In fact, it is especially the interest in education which multiple people mention to have discovered during the EDE (quotes not shown). Most people just mention their new interests and passions in one sentence. However, Amita describes the process of becoming aware of her passion in more detail. Her quote shows that this passion is something which was already present in her: she says that she could "go deeper in herself". She notes that the EDE helped her to explore her own longing.

#### **(5) Connecting to my Self**

The last subcategory of "personal discovery" is that of connection to the self. Multiple people mention that practicing conscious connection to themselves, especially through meditation, has taken on a more important role for them during and after the EDE.

*Amita: I had a meditation practice but I lost it a little bit, but there [at the EDE] I started again and I've been doing that since I came back as well. And so it's about the connection inside, and staying more true with what I want in life*

Julie: *I have put more focus on meditation. I always wanted to, but yeah, so having a spiritual practice has become an important thing for me.*

Tess: *I definitely now am fully convinced that I wanna do a meditation course to get out of my head and to experience what it will be like*

Inge: *I feel that I am much more connected to my soul or my intuition*

Isabella: *I try to, to have this moment of inner connection with myself and with nature, this is the most important change. ... you must create the space for this connection in your life, and you can't forget that, because if you forget that you are forgetting yourself*

Amita says that during the EDE, she started meditating again and continued this practice afterwards. She explains that meditation is about having an inner connection. Julie has also been meditating more after the EDE, for her this is a spiritual practice which she sees as beneficial to herself. Others who were not previously in touch with meditation have also expressed the wish to start a meditation practice after the EDE. Reasons stated for this are to connect to the present moment, to be in touch with the Self and to get out of the head. Beyond meditation, the EDE has fostered having a connection to oneself in other ways as well: Inge notes that she feels more connected to her soul or intuition, which is one way of looking at her true inner Self. And for Isabella, the most important change in her life after the EDE is that she tries to have a moment of inner connection with herself and nature every day. She is the only one to specifically highlight an increased connection to nature. She remarks that having this connection to nature is part of connecting to and remembering herself.

## **b) Inner Growth**

The second category that is part of the cluster around the Self is summarised under the title of "inner growth". As part of this, there are three main areas of change: firstly, participants feel and act more "in charge of their own life". Secondly, people become more confident during the EDE and thirdly, they feel more empowered to start projects and do things in their surroundings.

### **(1) I'm in charge of my life and I can make changes**

This subcategory visualises how the EDE helped various participants feel more in charge of their life and be a more active creator of their own life, making decisions and following their own view.

Nil: *also feeling more a creator of my life. ... it's this inner world that I discovered mainly in the EDE and also that I can really feel a lot of things, also with others. In that sense I felt that I can create what I want also, because I know how it works. Like, I understand a bit how human works.*

Mila: *I realised it's up to me what I make out of my life. ... I can actually change something, I'm not tied to the victim role, I can decide what I'm going to do. ... And that was like "okay, I am able to live my life ..."*

\*

Isabella: *I suppose, it changed me, because it made me more sure about looking for what I want to do in my life. ... now I am stronger in looking for new ways of acting in my life. I really, I am not sure what I am going to do, but I am trying not to return to my last job, I am looking for a new job.*

Hans: *having more trust now in more consequently following my worldview and my values than I might have done before ... I am in the process of untangling quite a few of the constrictions*

*that I am still in, starting with my job, it includes the relationship that I'm in, it includes the place I am living at, and the work I am doing, the people I'm interacting with. I am in the process of softening these intermingled things up to detangle as much as I can and move into the direction that I want to move.*

*Inge: it's really helping you stay on this track, because it's really kind of a leap into the unknown and it's super scary ... I remember someone told me "leap and the net will unfold", and it's really like this. Like "I know I have to change, and I'm gonna jump and I don't know what's gonna happen". And then the magic can also happen, I really believe magic can happen then.*

The first two quotes here show a clear formulation of participants feeling more in control of shaping their own life: Nil says herself that she feels more like the creator of her own life now. And Mila points out that she can decide what she wants to do and change in her life. Realising that one is the active creator in charge of one's own life is a powerful realisation – it opens a whole new perspective onto one's life and options. Mila contrasts this new perspective to that of “the victim”, who lets things happen to him or herself without taking control or responsibility for the outcomes. More generally, Nil points out that the discovery of this inner world allowed her to feel that she is the creator of her own life. Others, namely Isabella, Hans and Inge point out how the EDE is helping them take an active role in shaping their life. Isabella mentions that she gained strength in terms of looking for new ways of acting in her life. And Hans explains that he now has more trust to follow his own worldview. For both, this strength and trust is related to daring to change things in their life. Both also consider changing their job. Inge also points out that the EDE helps people “stay on this track”. She comments that there are a lot of changes related to embarking on this journey of self-discovery and sustainability. Moving from one's “known life” into this new direction can be like a leap into the unknown. The EDE helped her to trust that when she will invite change into her life, the “net will unfold” and everything will be okay.

## **(2) Confidence**

Another important change among many participants of the EDE is their confidence level.

*Rouven: I mentioned this self-confidence issue, and I would say that in 2016, there was maybe a seed planted ... to change this.*

*Alagie: the main thing that really impact me a lot was self-confidence and self-esteem.*

*Nébesna: so I'm feeling MUCH more confident.*

*Kostas: I feel ... a bit more confident. ... confident with accepting myself more, yeah, personal acceptance.*

*Samantha (facilitator): it does feel like people have more permission to be real and less pressure to be something other than they're not, in order to fit in ... that's at least one of my hopes, to be at home and comfortable in your own skin and know that you're lovable*

Multiple people highlight that their own self-confidence, self-esteem or self-acceptance has grown as a result of the EDE. This theme is also very important for all three facilitators. They all express that they hope that EDE participants find confidence in being who they really are and feel comfortable in their unique self. At the same time, the facilitators also reflect that they do indeed see this as a change in people.

### (3) Empowerment

The third subcategory of inner growth is empowerment, specifically feeling empowered to contribute to change. This is brought up by both facilitators and participants. The first two quotes are from facilitators in response to what they would like for participants to learn during the EDE.

Nébesna (facilitator): *Yeah, the confidence that they can play a role, that they are good enough, that they are beautiful. It's all like the empowerment part, it's the most important thing and yeah as a teacher that's the best part you can have, as a facilitator.*

Samantha (facilitator): *I would love for people to feel really empowered when they left the EDE, empowered in creating a new culture.*

Nébesna says that "the empowerment part" is the most important thing you can give as a facilitator. She also connects this to the aspect of confidence brought up in the previous subcategory. Samantha also says that she would like for participants to feel empowered to create a new culture. The next quotes from participants show that this empowerment is indeed an outcome of the EDE.

Vic: *I feel powerful. I feel that I can do a lot of things in my surroundings*

Camilla: *right now I feel trust in that I can do a lot of stuff - I think I maybe always could done it, but now I believe more that I am able to it.*

Inge: *I came out feeling empowered enough to start a project*

Tayla: *I feel right now at this point, more empowered and more ready to put in practice many things that I've been somehow waiting for, or waiting to find the best moments, the best place.*

Tayla: *we have some very powerful people here that show us that failing is beautiful and failing is part of the process. And we only fail if we do something. That's, to me, just by itself, it's all the courage I needed that somehow was lacking to also start putting some of my dreams in practice.*

Mila: *more courage to just start a project and have a look what comes out of it, courage to fail, not being sure that it works out or whatever and just start it.*

In the quotes above, there is the notion of feeling powerful and believing that one can do a lot of stuff. People mention that they feel empowered to start a project and put things into practice. Mila and Tayla (in her second quote) specifically connect the feeling of empowerment to having the courage to fail. When one has the courage to fail, one is more ready to start implementing things and see where this leads.

### c) Driving Force

The third category relating to changes in the Self is that of obtaining a stronger "driving force", having more energy and hope.

#### (1) Energy

This subcategory is related to various people mentioning that they feel more energetic as a result of the EDE. The enthusiasm and excitement of the EDE experience are also brought up.

Vic: *I'm extremely full of energy*

Nil: *I had the energy of the EDE, very strong*

Julie: *when I came back, I had this fire burning inside me*

Inge: *I felt really super charged by the EDE*

Vic, who just finished the EDE at the time of the interview exclaims that he is full of energy. Others, such as Nil, Julie and Inge, who have done their EDE some time ago, also recall that they felt very energetic after the EDE. Whilst the energy of the EDE might fade a little bit after some time, it does seem that it continues on beyond the course period.

## (2) Hope

A second subcategory belonging to the “driving force” category is that of hope. Hope is an important element of change which emerges from interviews with participants and facilitators.

Nébesna (facilitator) mentions that sharing hope was one big motivation for her to organise the EDE. And, reflecting on how she sees participants change, Samantha says *“maybe I would call it feeling hopeful again, going from feeling isolated to having this collective experience where the inspiration and hope is allowed to be.”*

Multiple participants mention that feeling more hopeful was an important outcome of the EDE for them.

*Isabella: It was a very sad sensation about really we can't do anything. ... And for me the main reason is trying to find my hope again.*

*Isabella: But it's, there are, there are hope in Findhorn, it's that the most important thing and you can feel that. For me that is what happens ... At the end of the course, I was more optimistic about environmental issue, and about the Earth, about our planet. In a way, I think some things I thought it wasn't possible, it could be possible. We work for that.*

*Adrianna: I was feeling very hopeless before coming here, because of my life situation. I was feeling very stuck and hopeless about people and about changes. ... It's been a big change around hope.*

*Tayla: It really gives a lot of hope about the world and what we can do in terms of transforming it and making it better.*

*Nébesna: It gave me a lot of hope in the capacity of our society to move towards the sustainability lifestyle.*

*Nil: maybe something more like "wow, the world is not so fucked, there are really a lot of people who want to go for something different".*

A few people, such as Isabella and Adrianna explain that they were feeling hopeless before the EDE and that searching for hope was one of the main reasons for them to come to this course. For both, this expectation was fulfilled: Isabella says that she was more optimistic after the EDE and Adrianna states that “it’s been a big change around hope” for her. Other participants also mention gaining hope at the EDE. In all cases, the change in hope relates to the possibility of change; especially the notion of “improving” the state of the world arises. Some people, such as Nil, relate their new positive outlook onto the future of the world to the realisation that there are many other people who also want to create change.

## d) Conclusion on the cluster of the Self

This large cluster of change showed that many changes which people ascribe to the EDE relate to the Self. The cluster was split into three categories that covered different aspects of change in the Self. The first area of change is that of personal discovery: participants learn a lot about themselves, become aware of their own behaviour and feelings. Furthermore they clarify their own passions and values at the EDE. All together, they know themselves better and deeper after the EDE. Having

gained an increased connection to themselves, multiple people also decide to continue exploring this, especially through the practice of meditation. A second area of change is that of inner growth: for multiple people, the EDE helps spark the feeling that they are the creator in charge of their life. Along with this, people become more trusting and courageous to make changes in their life. Furthermore, self-confidence is an aspect which increases significantly for people as an outcome of the EDE. Additionally, people feel more empowered to make changes and start projects. Lastly, a third area of change is the driving force felt by people: the EDE leaves people feeling more energetic and more hopeful about changing the world.

## 2. Social competencies: interaction with others

A second large cluster of change revolves around interaction with others. As part of this “social” cluster, there are two large categories of change: “group and project work” and “communication and relationships with other people”. Both categories contain further subcategories and will be discussed separately below.

### a) Group work and project management

The first and smaller of the two categories within the “social” change cluster is that of group and project work. Working together in groups and learning how to collaboratively organise a project is an important part of the EDE: in the sessions, participants learn about project management and ways to effectively work together in a group. Tools such as sociocracy<sup>8</sup> and dragon dreaming<sup>9</sup> are introduced in the course. These tools are practiced during the sessions and applied in small project groups. In some cases, the EDE group is even organised following sociocracy, and decisions are made accordingly. Through this extensive application of the group project tools, the knowledge of how to use these tools in a practical sense can become better integrated in the person. In this way, group work and project management are skills which are developed during the EDE.

The two main subcategories of change relating to group work and project management are “learning the tools to work in groups and on projects” and “developing the skills to work in and with groups”. These two themes are illustrated consecutively below.

#### (1) Learning tools to work in groups and on projects

Many people highlight that the tools which they learnt during the EDE are an important learning outcome for them.

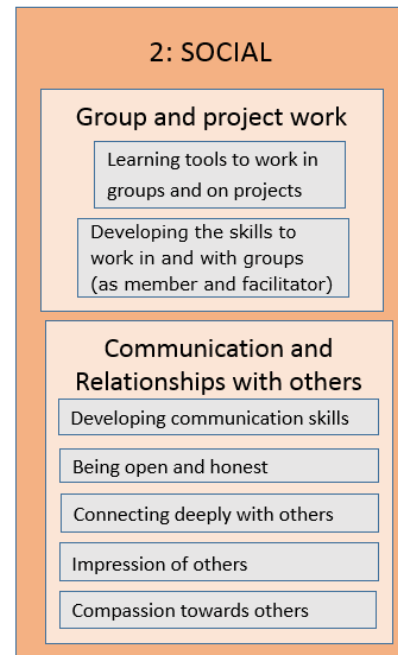
*Thomas: I got to know a lot of these tools, some of them I knew before, some of them I didn't. For me it was really a big load of these tools [to work in groups]*

*Kostas: it's very important to know how to work with people. ... the sociocracy was very interesting, dragon dreaming was also interesting*

*Camilla: these tools and methods, it's what makes it possible to do things with several people. And I haven't had those tools [before]*

*Elena: learning about sociocracy, for me was really revealing and it gave me ideas how we could make our meeting culture better back in the community and more efficient*

*Sebastian: I can pass on the tools which I find valuable and use them for projects to make things happen, like dragon dreaming*



<sup>8</sup> Sociocracy is a horizontal group decision making tool which is based on consent. A group of people (e.g. EDE group) is organised into different sociocratic circles (e.g. several kitchen team circles). Topics which concern the members of the group are discussed in each circle. Representatives of each circle meet in another circle (e.g. organisational circle) and represent the decision taken by the individual circle. Decisions are based on consent; the idea is that a proposal is formulated and agreed upon by everyone, based on the principal that it “good enough for now and safe enough to try”.

<sup>9</sup> Dragon Dreaming is a project-design process for the realisation of collaborative and sustainable projects.

Some people, like Thomas, mention in general that they learnt some tools which they did not know before. Others, such as Kostas and Camilla highlight the value of these tools in aiding to know how to work with multiple people. Elena also sees how sociocracy as a method can help organise group meetings in her own community. And Sebastian talks about applying and sharing the tools which he found useful.

## **(2) Developing the skills to work in and with groups**

In addition to learning concrete tools to aid with group work situations, many people mention that their ability to work in and with groups has developed during the EDE.

*Alagie: so they [the villagers participating in the EDE] were quite aware of that [how to work with other people in a group]*

*Quinn: my ability to work in a team has grown a lot.*

*Mila: it builded a lot of trust for myself that I'm capable to work within groups and also to work efficient and keeping the focus*

*Inge: our first week was all about facilitation skills and it really gave you the feeling that you could teach any topic.*

*Amita: it has to do with how to be in learning process and how to facilitate processes. ... and how to influence how the group process is going*

*Vic: I really feel that I am much more able to lead groups and these kind of processes.*

Several people such as Alagie and Quinn point out that the EDE was helpful in developing their competence in working with other people. Some, such as Mila specifically highlights that the EDE experience helped them to gain trust that they can work with groups and that this can in fact be fun and effective. Various people, such as Inge, Amita and Vic mention the aspect of facilitating groups and processes as an important skill which they developed. Competence and confidence in both the role of member and facilitator of a group are developed.

## **b) Communication and relationships with other people**

The second category belonging within the "social" cluster of change is that of communicating and relating to other people. During the EDE, communication and relationships with others play an important role both inside and outside of the sessions. In fact, establishing different relationships is central to the culture put forward during the EDE. One part of this new type of relationships is developing one's own communication skills. This is done through learning about communication methods such as transparent communication, nonviolent communication and conflict resolution during the sessions. Similar to the group work tools, these communication methods are practiced during the sessions and also applied in interactions outside the official sessions. This allows participants to integrate these methods on a practical level. A second part of this different type of relationships encouraged at the EDE is more generally the character of being open and honest and also communicating one's inner realities, including needs and feelings. Opening up and showing one's inner self in this way in turn also encourages more authentic relationships. A third part of this different type of relationships revolves around the perception of and attitude towards others. Participants learn that often their first impressions of others are not representative of the truth and participants develop a more compassionate attitude towards others.

The diversity of themes relating to this category of developing one's relationship with others will be presented below with interview quotes on the subcategories "developing communication skills", "being open and honest" and forming "deep connections", and "impression of other people" as well as "compassion towards others".

## **(1) Developing communication skills**

Many people mention that, their communication skills developed during the EDE and that they paid more attention to their own use of words during and after the course. Specific communication methods are learnt and referred to. More generally, learning how to really listen to another person is also mentioned as a change. Another aspect relating to improving one's communication skills is being able to express discomfort and handle uncomfortable situations.

*Kostas: it was very interesting for me to see how clear is what I communicate. ... now I'm trying to develop more and more better communication, these kind of things*

*Quinn: be really constructive with my language was also one of the key learning elements that I think happened here*

*Sebastian: deep listening to other people and really paying attention to what I am saying, so being honest, being compassionate with my words. That's important for me to really pay attention of what I'm saying and that people get my message, so that they understand what I wanna say and tell them*

*Rouven: I was of course including [the communication methods] in my conversation. Anyway hitchhiking with friends and talking with them in a different way or talking to the people who take us in a different way or listening in different way.*

*Thomas: I normally don't say to the person I'm talking to "let's do now deep listening" but I just use the tools without naming them and without telling my partner*

*Christos: when it's like uncomfortable situations, I can handle it for sure better than before ... so when we have a conflict and I'm angry, I hold it not back, I don't scream it now in front of my parents but I mention it.*

*Adrianna: that changed for me a lot, to be able to ... express uncomfort*

When it comes to developing one's communication skills, there is a notion of clarity and constructiveness aimed for, as can be seen in the quotes of Kostas, Sebastian and Quinn. People who have already finished the EDE also confirm that they indeed include the new methods of communication in their life afterwards. Rouven notes that he is talking "in a different way" with people, and Thomas explains that he uses the methods without explicitly indicating this to his conversation partner. In this way, participants' communication skills are developed and informed by new ideas on how to communicate well. In addition to better expressing oneself, paying attention to the other and listening attentively are also developed. Furthermore, participants learn to better handle and solve conflicts and uncomfortable situations. Christos and Adrianna for example both highlight this as a useful learning outcome of the EDE.

## **(2) Being open and honest**

Often mentioned in relation with developing communication skills is also a high level of honesty. People learn to communicate openly and to share what is truly "inside" them, including feelings and personal thoughts which may "normally" be kept hidden or expressed in less direct manners. This idea of being more open is mentioned a few times as a change (and this is also an aspect which comes back as an influencing factor).

*Denis: so this is all kinda new for me this experience of being more direct and honest ...*

*... the main kind of things I learn is that usually it's more kind of my stuff, it's my stories that I have and my assumptions, but I also don't have to deal with it on my own. And it's a lot easier ... when I show myself. ... I can show it [my pattern and fear], I don't have to hold it back, because then I really struggle being with it on my own. ...*

Christos: *I was super authentic and honest when I'm with people and direct. And I see that it comes super better. And I live better with it.*

Adrianna: *if someone is not feeling well [in our project group], or if something is irritating someone, that person says that, and that makes everything easier.*

For a few people, such as Denis, the EDE is an opportunity to learn to be more open, honest and direct. This is an attitude which is more generally encouraged and practiced. This attitude includes showing oneself, mentioning one's fears, one's struggles, and one's irritations. All three quotes shown here indicate that such open and direct behaviour makes things easier: when all feelings and thoughts are openly expressed, they can be dealt with jointly and the situation can move forward. This is not only true for "personal" situations but also with regard to group work: Camilla (not shown in quotes) explains that being open and honest about one's feelings when meeting in the project group brings people closer together and results in more effective meetings.

### (3) Connecting deeply with others

Another small subcategory of "communication and relationships with other people" is that of deep connections: a few people mention that having deeper connections with others is something which they learnt to create and appreciate during the EDE. On the one hand, this is encouraged by some activities at the EDE, such as sharing in pairs and looking each other in the eyes for a long time, and on the other hand, this is also sometimes mentioned in relation to having more open and honest communications.

Vic: *I created myself as a really independent person and okay, "I don't need - I need deeper connection, but not a lot of them"*

*... be open all the time for having deep connections ... this is maybe the biggest, most powerful thing that I'm learning. ... so I realised that going deep, even though its only ... looking at others eyes, it's so much more powerful and fulfilling and makes sense*

Quinn: *just the intimacy I think was the main learning point for me*

In the example shown above, Vic explains that the EDE helped him discover the value and beauty of connecting deeply with others. Whilst he previously thought of himself as an independent person who doesn't need many deep connections, being exposed to many exercises that encouraged deep connections showed him that many good things can come out of such interactions. He says that having deep connections is more fulfilling and "makes sense". Also others, such as Quinn value learning about and experiencing the intimacy during the EDE and meeting others on a deeper and more personal level.

### (4) Impression of other people

One aspect which multiple people mention as a learning element is their perception of others. A few people mention that, throughout the EDE, they have become less judgemental and several people realised that judgements and assumptions they have about others are not the truth.

Rouven: *if I judge someone else, that's my own story of how I see the other person,*

Vic: *you realise really fast that all your stories that you create about the people, they're just completely bullshit. ... fast you realise that all the stories they are just projecting bullshit that makes no sense. So I am more aware about this also.*

Nil: *And then just seeing, "oh, but maybe it's [the judgement is] about me". And this was one of the main thing, just realising this.*

There is the notion that judgments about other people are coming from oneself, as one's own "story" or "projection". In fact, participants learn that judgements they have about others are not only not true, but that in fact these judgements reveal something about themselves. Having learnt

this concept and experienced that judgements about others are only one's own projections further encourages a positive relationship with others.

#### **(5) Compassion towards others**

Lastly, a small subcategory of change is that of more generally treating others with compassion and respect. A few people mention that this attitude towards others was strengthened for them during the EDE.

*Thomas: I also learned kind of, to stay in connection and to stay in love and respect even though I totally disagree with you at some points perhaps.*

*Tess: and I think that's so important to stay connected and to be compassionate to those with other beliefs or other thought systems ... I think it's very important for a sustainable peaceful world. ... I already thought about it, but now I think it's much much more, it's like a key aspect.*

Both Thomas and Tess highlight the importance of maintaining a kind connection to others, especially also towards people that they disagree with. In many situations, such as when living together in community or when working on a project with people with different views, maintaining a compassionate attitude towards the others facilitates smoother interaction and is overall beneficial.

#### **c) Conclusion on the social cluster**

In conclusion, this large cluster shows that during the EDE, participants develop their ability to work in groups and on projects. Tools encouraging effective project management and group meeting are highly appreciated by participants. Furthermore, aided by learning new communication concepts, participants develop their communication skills (expressing oneself clearly, listening attentively and handling conflicts). Influenced by the EDE, some participants become more open, honest and direct and discover that this makes many situations much easier. Also connecting deeply with others is a learning element and an aspect of which the value is discovered during the EDE. Participants learn that their first impressions of other people are not always true and that judgements can rather so be self-projections from which they can learn about themselves. Lastly, having a compassionate attitude is re-discovered as a crucial element in interaction with all others, including those of differing opinion.

### 3. Engagement for a sustainable society: spreading the movement

A third cluster of change revolves around an increased engagement for a sustainable society. There are three categories which arose in relation to demonstrating this engagement. These three categories are called "I need to take responsibility", "active involvement in projects" and "inspiring others".



#### a) I need to take responsibility

When it comes to engagement for sustainability, starting with oneself is an important first step. A few people mention this realisation - that they need to take responsibility themselves - as an outcome of the course.

This means taking an active role in stirring the changes in the desired direction and living more sustainably oneself.

*Inge: the first thing that comes to mind is also this sense of "you can't keep on waiting to take action". Like, it's really really important that we do something now. Like, I'm here now, I need to follow through and I can't just go to this course and go back to my old life. I need to take responsibility as well.*

*Nébesna: what I've learnt more in my whole journey and including the course, is that if we want change to happen, we need to take our share of responsibility*

*Julie: so it has confirmed me in my views a lot and enabled me to, also to take the courage to go out of it and really live it. ... and also the inspiration to really really get into it and really do something in whatever way, yeah just live it.*

Inge pinpoints the urgency to take responsibility and to act "now". Nébesna reiterates that dreaming about changing the world is not sufficient, we need to get up ourselves and take active part in creating the desired change. For Julie, the importance of aligning her own life with her worldview and values is increased. For all three, the EDE helped to show that if they want things to change, they also need to work for this in their own life.

#### b) Active involvement in projects

Another change mentioned by many people relates to active involvement in various types of projects. Some people note in general that they want to get more involved in projects and groups. Other people mention specific projects which they (plan to) initiate or carry on with afterwards. Oftentimes, it is also project ideas which were initiated during the project work groups at the EDE which are implemented afterwards. Projects range from starting communities to outreach projects and activism. Some people also mention that they would like to share aspects which they learnt during the EDE.

*Mila: I really wanna do projects and not only to dream about those*

*Kostas: I feel also keen on getting involved in projects and starting something*

*Vic: we present this project to work on this community and it's already there, the beginning, the sparkle. And it's not just a sparkle, there's some heavy basic things. So yeah definitely, I'm really connected and want to continue with that.*

*Alagie: But then after the course, everybody was inspired and they begin to see the bigger picture of, of the village, and trying to find inputs to get start-ups and start creating their own social enterprises and individual businesses. ... So, myself I was able to [set up a?] corporation and to have time to do so many stuffs. Instead of - [to do?] the healthy cooking for most of the*

women here, because they cook openly and a lot of smoke also get in the cooking with so many health issues. ... right now the corporation [on building stoves for healthy cooking] is working well, we are having our business, and I'm quite happy to be able come up with a project like that from the course.

Thomas: *I get the feeling, in the year after the EDE, I was going more outside. I was two times at the Ende Gelände and these things of activism and started [joined a local environmental group] the local group], stuff like that.*

There is a strong desire to "get active" and join projects, as for example illustrated by Mila and Kostas. Furthermore, concrete project starts are made during the EDE already, such as in Vic's case. Also for Alagie, the EDE helped him to get inspired, to realise that he can organise projects himself and to set up his own corporation. And Thomas notes that he has become more active in terms of activism and supporting local groups.

In a way, this involvement in projects is one possible manifestation of the "need to take responsibility". In some cases, projects are more orientated towards realising one's own dreams (e.g. community) and in other cases they are more related to outreach and influencing the society at large.

### **c) Inspiring others**

Some people mention that inspiring others and showing that things can be done differently is an outcome of the EDE. In fact, various of the projects that arise from the EDE are related to outreach activities and wanting to share ideas and inspire others. However, also more generally, there is the notion that EDE participants inspire others in their surroundings after the course.

Hans: *everyone who has visited that [the EDE] should - and I guess WILL more or less try to promote these ideas and set examples and get others enthusiastic about these topics.*

Tayla: *I hope that in a small doses, we can show our other friends, our people outside, that we can do different. I feel like we really got this message here really strong that we can do things differently, we can. So I hope we inspire after we leave here*

Sebastian: *the people that go to the EDE they bring it out and on their own way, they live it in their life circle and their surroundings and can there inspire their people.*

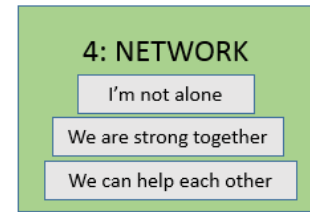
Hans and Tayla both bring up the notion that after finishing the EDE, participants can and probably will inspire by sharing concepts from the course. Furthermore, various people who have already finished the EDE, including Sebastian, in fact note that this is the case and that they do bring the inspiration from the EDE out into their world.

### **d) Conclusion on the cluster of engagement**

This cluster has shown various manners in which participants become ambassadors of change: the EDE helps people realise the need to take an active role to contribute to change themselves. Further, it inspires many people to get involved in diverse projects and share their insights and knowledge in their surroundings. In this way, the EDE reaches further than merely the participants themselves. People who have attended the EDE do contribute to creating and spreading a new culture and showing alternatives.

#### 4. Finding a network

A fourth cluster is related to encountering like-minded people and becoming part of a network of change agents. Three categories of change relate to this: realising that one is not alone, realising there exists a large and strong group of people engaged for a similar world, and becoming part of a supportive network of change agents. Related to these groups, Elisabeth, a facilitator of the EDE in Schloss Glarisegg also talks about the importance of the network.



Elisabeth (facilitator): *I think the ideal final outcome I see is this networking, realising for everybody who participates "I'm not alone, whenever I'm feeling I don't know how to go on, there are lots of other sisters and brothers spread over the whole world, I could go in connection ... to share what is within me. I'm never alone, there are others going the same path".*

##### a) I'm not alone – there's more people like me

The first category that is part of the "network" cluster is the realisation for multiple people that they are not alone. When asked originally about reasons for coming to the EDE and about their expectations, multiple people state that they wanted to meet like-minded people who are on a similar path as them. They explain that it can be lonely sometimes when thinking about the state of the world and when it feels like one is walking on the "alternative" path on all alone.

Anna: *I've been doing a lot of research on my own. And the fact that I speak English, I was reading books and listening to things from English speaking countries and really enjoying, but at the same time feeling kind of lonely in this. So I was hoping that going to Findhorn I would find more keen souls there, you know.*

Rouven: *for me it was more to get the impression that I'm not alone on my journey.*

For both Anna and Rouven, this wish to meet others who are on the same journey was fulfilled. In general, multiple people say that something which changed for them because of the EDE is the knowledge that they are not alone on their path and that there are many more people in the world with similar dreams.

Adrianna: *that is bringing me a lot of power in myself to reaffirm myself, yeah, and really believe that I'm not crazy. Like now there's more people like me and there's more people interested in the same topics. ... Being here in this group with like-minded people is like, yeah, taking all this passion into real, like, yes, I'm not crazy, there's more people in this level and with this some ideas. And I'm not alone.*

Quinn: *it's valuable for me to have had these small pockets of experience, these bubbles that I can remind myself of when I am alone in suburbia and say "it's okay babe, you're not alone, there's [tribes?] there, you're okay"*

Inge: *it feels that way, like, okay, when I'm tired or I feel I've lost myself, I know I can go to this, to an ecovillage or some kind of project that has this feel and find my people and recharge and go back into the world. I really like that description. Like it's real relief, "ah okay, there's people like me".*

For Adrianna, meeting like-minded people allowed her to reaffirm herself and her beliefs. As she suggests, when one does not have that many people with similar passions and interests in one's life, this can result in a feeling of being alone and maybe even start doubting oneself. In turn, meeting so many like-minded people in the EDE can create a very powerful feeling. Inge and Quinn also highlight the importance of taking this feeling with them, as a reminder when one is once again in an environment where there are less like-minded people around. They suggest that there are "bubbles"

such as the EDE, where they can meet their people or their "tribe". Knowing that these places exist and being able to dive into them every once in a while helps continue on their path.

### **b) There are many active people – we are strong together**

Another category, closely linked with the previous one is feeling more powerful due to the realisation that there are many people working on changing the world and setting up alternative projects.

*Tess: that gives me an empowered or a good feeling, that there are many more people who really wanna do something.*

*Nil: I see that there are more people doing this and in that sense I felt empowered as a group also, of transformative culture*

*Isabella: you feel, some people is doing the similar things as you, it's, you are part of the community of people who are doing similar things, in a sense you are strong*

*Anna: the web of connection to all these people and communities in the world, who are working to protect the environment, to protect and enhance our planet, it's powerful.*

For multiple people, such as for Tess, seeing that there are many people (other EDE participants) who want to change the world creates a feeling of being empowered and strong. Nil and Isabella also talk about feeling more powerful and strong as a result of meeting other EDE participants; they see themselves as part of the EDE group and see that, as a group, they are strong together. For Anna, this strength reaches further into the network of ecovillages and community members all around the world, to which she feels connected.

### **c) We can help each other**

A third category is that through this network, individuals can help and supported each other. A few people mention the value of having this network through which information and interesting initiatives can be shared, connections can be established and people can reach out to others who can help them with their projects.

*Sebastian: It's the network. The network of all the people who are part of the EDE family and as well of the people they know. So after the EDE, I got to know other people in other networks, so connected to people from the EDE. So really got this network which is very very valuable, yeah which will help me for the future, will help them, will help everybody, is there for being used, just to do something good.*

For Sebastian, the EDE network acted as a place from which he got to know further networks and other people. The EDE group consist of many change agents who are nested in other networks as well. By coming together in a network of EDE participants, this allows to make connections and more easily reach out to other circles.

### **d) Conclusion on the network cluster**

In this cluster, three categories relating to meeting like-minded people and becoming part of an EDE network have been presented. Seeing like-minded people at the EDE takes away the feeling of being alone on one's path and shows that with many active people together, the group is strong and powerful. Furthermore, the connections which are formed can be helpful beyond the EDE, where ideas can be exchanged and projects can be collaborated on. To encourage such exchange and to stay in touch, several EDE groups have mailing lists or websites where members can reach out to each other. In the case of the EDE in Schloss Glarisegg, reunions of EDE alumni are regularly organised.

## 5. Community experience

The next cluster is that of “community”. In contrast to the network cluster, where the focus is on the benefits of and changes resulting from meeting like-minded people (and becoming part of a network of change agents), the cluster of community focuses on the aspect of living together in community. Two categories are part of this cluster: firstly “experiencing community life” and herewith discovering what community life entails and secondly a change in “interest in community life” which is probably an outcome of the community experience.



### a) Experiencing community life

Community life is a big part of the EDE. During the course, participants live in an ecovillage and form a community with the members of the EDE. People live and learn together and often share tasks such as cooking and cleaning. In this way, they can get a sense of what it means to live in community. This is indeed an important part of the experience for many people.

*Tess: OH OH big thing: due to the EDE I first experienced community life.*

*Anna: It's very different to actually experience what it means to live in an ecovillage.*

*Inge: it's kind of a unique opportunity to live in a community, to self-organise and do the actual community or processes.*

*Thomas: it's about what it is really like to live as a community*

*Kostas: it's a very interesting process I think that has impact on people's lives, on people's understanding of how - what does it mean to be community, to be more close to each other*

*Isabella: that is very greater to do a course in which you are living together. Because it's about, it's not only about environmental issues, it's about the issues people have when are living together, about conflicts and all these things, and then you're trying that you're learning about that.*

*Hans: So all of these areas that I wanted to test myself, does that fly with me or does it not, checked out pretty positive through that experiment of living there, in that environment for three months, so that was very confirming and insuring for me.*

For some people, such as for Tess, the EDE is the first contact with community life. Several others also point out that the EDE is a great opportunity to experience community life. Thomas points out that the EDE is about what it's “really” like to live in a community. It can be a very different thing to read or hear about an ecovillage when compared to actually experiencing life there first-hand. There are several aspects relating to community life which people point out: Inge talks about self-organising and doing social processes and Kostas highlights the aspect of “being close to each other”. Isabella's quote also makes clear that the proximity not only brings deep connections but also conflicts which need to be solved. Others (quotes not shown) also point out the importance of personal development for community life. By living in community for the time of the EDE, participants can get a feeling of all the aspects that come with this lifestyle. In fact, some people specifically came to the EDE to see what it's like to live in community. Hans for example says that he wanted to test how he would fit into this lifestyle. The community experience reassured him that this is indeed a possible path for himself.

### b) Interest in community life

The second category of change relating to the community cluster is that after the EDE experience, the interest and the importance of communities was strengthened for multiple people.

Denis: *I was discovering just how much community living means for me, how much I want to be surrounded with people and not live on my own*

Camilla: *I don't want to live in an apartment in the city anymore. I knew that from before as well, but now it's like definite I'm not gonna do that*

Paul: *yeah, I think it made more certain my will to get into an ecocommunity.*

Christos: *when I did the EDE, it was this super strong wish to join a community.*

Quinn: *the love and belief in community which is a value for me was taken over the moon*

Alagie: *I have different ambition now, you know, I want to develop my place, my own, my own community, you know.*

Many people coming to the EDE are already curious about community life. However, as a result of the EDE, the desire to live in community is further increased. Many people, including Denis, Camilla, Paul and Christos realise that they don't want to live in the conventional way, that they want to be surrounded by people and possibly join or found an ecovillage. For Quinn, the importance of communities was also strengthened, yet she does not specifically state that she wants to live in a community herself. Rather so, being engaged in a master in landscape architecture, she sees the value of communities for her research projects.

The case of Alagie is slightly different: he is from a village in The Gambia that is transforming into an ecovillage. He says that whilst he was previously considering moving away, he now intends to stay in his community. For him, the belief in community also got confirmed.

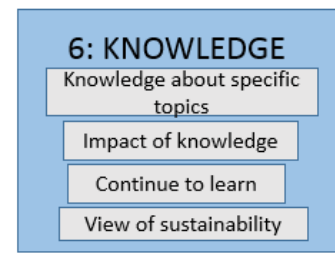
Whilst some people joining the EDE are already living in ecovillages and others dream of joining an ecovillage, it is important to point out that this is not the only path. In fact, Amita explains that in her EDE, some people who were determined to live in an ecovillage saw that this is not the only way to living this lifestyle and experiencing community. She says: *"I think when we came many people had the vision they want to start an ecovillage, but when we finished, not so many people, because they saw it can work everywhere, in all kinds of communities and relations it can work. And it's needed everywhere in the world also. So it's not just for building ecovillages, that's one part of it. But wherever you are living, you can start working with this, create communities and sustainability."*

### **c) Conclusion on the community cluster**

This cluster has highlighted the importance of the community experience as an aspect of change for EDE participants: on the one hand, the experience of living in a temporary community and getting a feeling of what this involves is considered to be an enriching and valuable experience through which participants can learn about this lifestyle. More specifically, the interest and value of communities was increased for multiple people. Whilst some people want to join an ecovillage, others realise that "community" can also be created in other places.

## 6. Knowledge

The next themes which will be discussed cluster around the topic of knowledge. The EDE curriculum contains information about the four dimensions of Gaia Education's sustainability wheel: the ecological, economic, social and worldview dimension. Whilst the latter two present themselves, amongst others, in terms of social skills discussed previously, the topics of ecology and economy are more heavy in terms of theoretical knowledge. This section will discuss elements



which participants highlighted in terms of gaining knowledge in the field of sustainability. In addition to obtaining more concrete knowledge (which will be presented in one category), this information resulted in a further impact on some people, such as reconsidering behaviour and decisions. This will be laid out in another category. Furthermore, a third category shows how the EDE triggered some participants to continue learning about various EDE-related topics after the course. Lastly, the EDE was also helpful for some in terms of getting new insights on how to view and approach sustainability as a concept at large.

### a) Knowledge about specific topics

This first category assembles quotes from participants that talked about gaining new information and theoretical knowledge at the EDE.

*Alagie: [the] third week, as I said would be ecological aspects. How to make wetlands, you know, ponds for ecovillages, and the gardening part of an ecovillage and there is energy, sustainable energy designs and things like that. ... I have a lot of information ... from the course*

*Elena: all the knowledge that we got, and for example the sessions that we had that contained a lot of information, but which I felt was very valuable for me, ... and this does give me more insight in some things actually, like for example all the global economy*

*Inge: the economic system, gave me some insight on "okay, this is how we're doing it, this is why it's never gonna work of course" and interesting ideas on how we can do it differently like a negative interest and all that kind of stuff ... I definitely had a few "aha" moments, like "omg, this is why the economy really sucks"*

*Amita: I was not at all interested in the economy, but that was the most interesting for me. So that was an interesting realisation. To understand how the economy and relationships are connected and to understand how deep economy is, how deep a subject it is, it was really interesting.*

\*

*Tayla: I've learned a lot, but just thinking about more strict academical way, I think I learned a very little amount.*

*Rouven: I did learn something about permaculture ... or food waste, but many things I also knew already.*

During the interview, Alagie describes in detail the aspects which he learnt during his four week EDE course. For him, a lot of this information was new, and he says that he now has a lot of information. Others also point out specific information about ecological construction, permaculture and the economy which they learnt from the EDE. Elena highlights that all this information is very "valuable" for her. Especially the economic system stands out as a topic, of which multiple participants broadened their understanding. Elena and Inge both point out that the sessions about the economic

system “gave them insight” and helped them understand better how things work. Inge says she had some “aha moments”, which point to a deeper realisation. Both the current global economy with its relations and implications as well as alternatives were discussed during the EDE. For Amita, it was also interesting to see how “deep” the economy is. Whilst she was previously not very interested in this topic, she found herself very interested about the broad impact of the economy which was discussed in her EDE.

Whilst theoretical knowledge and new information was an important part of the EDE for multiple people, many participants also point out that this learning aspect remained more limited for them, especially when compared to the other clusters of change. As such, Tayla finds that in a “strict academical way” she learnt very little. And Rouven explains, that whilst he did learn a few things, he was already knowledgeable about many of the topics.

### **b) Impact of knowledge**

In a few cases, participants also give examples of how new insights and knowledge about sustainability topics translate into follow-up reflections and decisions for their own life.

*Nil: for other topics, like economy, ... I wanted to change all my accounts and I started to research and I was a bit like in a thunderstorm with this.*

*Elena: I really really loved this food waste topic. And we watched this movie yesterday evening. This is another example of, yeah of course I knew we don't want to waste food, but seeing all this, and really getting deeper into it, it's really valuable and I feel more conscious, like seeing all of it. It feels like knowing is not enough, if you really see it, and it was really this movie ... I really found it really striking to see all that, explained and showing how it works, it's really sickening. It really gave me a more, a deeper sort of connection to the topic. And I felt "wow, I don't want to waste anymore food". And we have to do something about it. I'm not sure how that will manifest. At least, I don't want to leave anything on my plate and I want to be really really careful about that. I'm not sure if it's just this or if it was just the last kick that it maybe took for me to reflect on it more and change even more things which maybe still can be changed and I am indulging in maybe, like exotic fruits.*

Nil points out that new knowledge about the economy led her to further explore this topic and alternative options on her own. She makes a comparison to a thunderstorm, indicating how such new realisations can be intense and cause significant turmoil.

For Elena it was the topic of food waste which had a deeper effect. She explains that watching a movie about food waste triggered her to reflect even more on this topic. It seems that the visual effect of the movie, seeing all of the food waste on screen, gave her an inner stir. Although the movie had a powerful effect, she reflects that it was possibly “just the last kick” in a series of previous insights relating to the topic. She decides that she wants to be more attentive to not causing any food waste herself. Furthermore, the (revived) connection to this topic also led her to think even further about the effect of the food we eat.

### **c) Continue to learn**

The next category shows how the EDE triggered multiple people to continue learning new things and studying certain topics, such as alternative economies, in more detail after the course.

*Elena: I really felt the curiosity about all these things and to really learn more now on a theoretical level about that*

Nébesna: *That's probably something I already had, but it's really like lightened up that little light inside of me that was like, okay I always want to be continuing studying and seeing what's happening*

Anna: *and I'm studying more, I'm back to studying, different things, trying to understand how to make a bigger impact*

Thomas: *the time in the EDE led me even more to think about how things work and don't work in ecological and economic ways in our world. And to question these things and to search for solutions which I think are more sustainable and better for the common good, whole world.*

Thomas: *what surely came after and kind of because the EDE was that I learned more about the ... economy in the whole*

Rouven: *especially economics. there I did quite a lot of research in the last two years since my EDE and this was kind of my starting point that I got more interested in that.*

For some people, such as for Elena and Nébesna, the curiosity and enthusiasm for learning got re-sparked at the EDE. Others mention that they have actually continued on this learning journey after the EDE: Anna and Thomas have both continued investigations on their own after the EDE. Both also make this sound like a search to figure out how to change the world for the better, looking for "solutions" and thinking about how to have a "bigger impact". Again, the topic of the economy stands out particularly here. Both Thomas and Rouven mention learning more about this topic after their EDE.

#### **d) View of sustainability**

Beyond factual knowledge, the course influenced some people in their view on sustainability. It confirmed the importance of a holistic, systematic and integrated view of sustainability and it showed the importance of the social aspect and "fun" for sustainability transformations.

Anna: *one other thing as well, the integration of the modules, having a 360 degree view on sustainability, that was certainly something - I already felt that was necessary, I had done some works in that direction before, but seeing it so integrated like that was important, really, supported my idea that there can be no sustainability without a systemic view, an integrated systemic view. That's the only way that sustainability really can be approached.*

Hans: *I think the key elements as I see them in both classes, the permaculture as well as the EDE ... was enforcing and iterating and demonstrating the interconnectedness of all different aspects in life in general. The social aspects, the economical aspects, there is an impact on the economical side with whatever you do and how you do it. ... Besides economy, ecology is certainly a key item as well, it was continuously apparent how on an ecological perspective, it is all tied together, how each individual piece is a part of the whole and how the whole impacts each individual component of it. So this interconnectedness was really becoming very obvious in so many places.*

\*

Anna: *[a phrase] that I brought home that became basic of my thinking in terms of sustainability, and I got it from there: "if it's not fun, it's not sustainable" ... because if it's fun, it doesn't require any extra energy. It just goes, you know. So anything that promotes wellbeing and a shared wellbeing and celebration of life, it's sustainable on its own terms in a way.*

Nébesna: *the sentence "if it's not fun, it's not sustainable" it's like, it's really imprinted in my mind now*

The first two quotes from Anna and Hans show the importance of the systemic view for sustainability. Whilst this view was not radically new for either one, it got confirmed and reinforced for them through the course. They highlight how the EDE helped them truly see the integration and interconnectedness of all aspects. Another common element which influenced a few people in their way of thinking about sustainability is the phrase "If it's not fun, it's not sustainable". This also relates to the working approach of sustainability projects – if projects are fun, they happen a lot easier; if they are not enjoyable, it takes more energy to carry them out.

#### **e) Conclusion on the knowledge cluster**

This section has shown four categories of change relating to the broader cluster of knowledge. Firstly, gaining new information is seen as an important learning element of the EDE. Especially with regard to the economic system, participants' understanding was broadened and widened. However, some people also note that theoretical sessions were not very detailed or deep and that they did not learn many new things in this regard. A few cases demonstrate how gaining new insights can trigger people to reconsider their personal impact, such as in terms of food waste. In general, the EDE caused several people to continue learning and exploring topics. Furthermore, the course reconfirmed the importance of seeing and approaching sustainability in its full breadth, with a systematic view.

## 7. Information beyond the mind

A last and relatively small cluster of change relates to experiences beyond the rational mind, which could be considered as spiritual. There are only few people who referred to this, hence no separate categories exist in this cluster. The illustrative quotes are shown below.

7: INFORMATION  
"beyond the mind"

*Mila: I was so surprised I could know things about a person I just have met .... so for me, in this moment was kind of magical, I didn't really have a clue. And during [another exercise] ... I was so surprised, because I did this with [Claudia (pseudonym)], and I could tell her about herself and she told me about myself, things which were for both of us really true, and we haven't talked anyhow before. And it was for me like "what the hell, where does this come from". And also [another time], ... when I could let my mind go, things arose which I have never thought about, and I was like, "oh where does this come from", it's not from my mind what I've learnt or have been using most of my life*

*Florence: I'd be able to read her body face to face in a subtle way, and I didn't know she had a miscarriage before Findhorn, and so, on my own body, I felt the miscarriage she had lived through. So by mimetism, we call this, reading by mimetism. Now I'm more practiced in this.*

*Inge: yeah, I really think you're opening up to magic. Like this whole transition, it's kind of like a spiritual experience in some way. ... .. when you let go of certain ideas and make choices in your life that are like "okay, I'm in service to something bigger" I think that it happens through magic. ... when you are service then there is some magic supporting you in what you're doing.*

At the EDE, various exercises invite participants to trust their sensations and unconscious mind whilst trying to quiet the mind's influence. This often involves two people sitting opposite to each other and holding eye contact. One example of this is that whilst one person is telling a story, the other responds with the whole body, sharing how the words of the other "landed" in one's body, what bodily sensations they triggered as well as what was heard. Both Mila and Florence refer to such an exercise. Mila says that when she could let her mind go, she knew things about her partner in the exercise. She says herself that she was surprised and wonders where this information comes from. She refers to this as a magical moment. Florence, who has much experience with Buddhist practices and spiritual connection, has broadened her experience in connecting to another person: she recalls an exercise during which she was able to read her partner's body by mimetism and learn about her miscarriage by feeling it in her own body. More generally, Inge states that the EDE and the personal journey around this is a spiritual experience, where she and others "open up to magic". The idea is that if you are in service to something bigger – a larger cause beyond individual interest – then the energy of this bigger cause is supporting you.

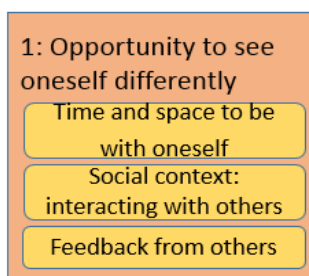
## 8. Summary of the changes experienced by EDE participants

This part has presented the large number of changes which were mentioned by participants of various EDE courses. A first cluster has portrayed many changes which relate to the Self. Here, three categories distinguish among further subcategories of changes. During the EDE, many participants undergo personal discovery by learning about themselves, their passions and values and by becoming more aware of their (habitual) behaviour and feelings. Through this and follow up meditation practices, participants feel more deeply connected to themselves. Beyond personal discovery, where the focus is on becoming aware of oneself, there is an element of inner growth. This means that during the EDE, people become more self-confident and more empowered to start a project or change something in their surroundings. Some people come to the realisation that they can be the active creator of their own life and become more daring to alter aspects in their own life, such as their professional choices. Also the driving force that influences the likelihood of participants to co-create a more sustainable society is positively influenced: the EDE experience gives people hope about the future of the world and fills them with energy and enthusiasm. A second cluster of changes shows the importance of social competencies and experiences at the EDE. People learn useful methods to work in project groups and develop group working skills. Furthermore, various aspects regarding communication and interaction with others are developed: people learn new communication methods and try being more open and honest. Forming deep and close connections is also a learning element for some. Being in close contact with many people, participants also realise that judgement about others are not representative of reality and are only projections from themselves. The importance of treating other people with compassion is also re-emphasised. A third cluster of changes shows that the EDE inspires participants to become more engaged in creating change in their environment: for several people, the realisation that they need to take responsibility themselves becomes more apparent. Many participants (plan to) continue projects which started during the EDE or become involved in other projects. Some set up communities, others get involved in setting up local organisations and yet others contribute to outreach activities. There is also the notion that people can be ambassadors for change and inspire friends and neighbours with all the new insights gained during this EDE experience. A fourth cluster indicates that encountering many like-minded people and fellow change-agents is very important. Individuals get confirmation that they are not alone in their endeavour. They get strength by seeing that many people are trying to live an "alternative" lifestyle. Through this network which is created, participants can further support each other and stay in contact. In a way, this network is a continuation of the community which is formed during the EDE. Indeed, experiencing community life is another important change for multiple participants which is represented in a fifth cluster. People can try out living in community here, and through this, the interest in this lifestyle grows among various people. Beyond experiences and competencies, there are also changes relating to more concrete knowledge. These are represented in a sixth cluster. Some people learn new information about certain topics, including permaculture and the economic system. Based on new insights, follow-up changes are sometimes thought about, such as reducing one's own food waste. Furthermore, the sessions inspire people to continue learning. And, in addition to specific information, having a systematic view and seeing interconnections when it comes to sustainability is further confirmed during the EDE. Lastly, as shown in the seventh cluster, various participants mention experiences where they could access information which was not possible to explain with the rational mind. There is hence a large array of changes experienced by participants of EDE courses.

## B. What factors influence people to change in EDE courses?

The second results section presents the findings to the question of “*What factors influence people to change in the EDE courses?*”. Sometimes, participants could name specific influencing factors which influenced them to change. And other times, the influencing factors are clear from the nature of the changes: for example, learning group work tools is clearly influenced by sessions on group work. However, in many cases where the “reason” for the change is not so evident, interviewees speculated which aspects influenced their learning and which aspects made the whole EDE experience special for them. The combination and intertwined nature of these influencing factors also seems crucial. Often, it might be a combination of influencing factors which cause a certain change to take place. And furthermore, the influencing factors are also interacting between themselves. This demonstrates that the influencing factors are rather a network than a neat list. Again, just like for the findings of the first research question, the categorisation presented here is hence only one possible representation of the data, which seemed logical for to this research. Influencing factors are grouped into six clusters. These focus on: (1) “opportunities to see oneself differently”, (2) “exchange of experiences”, (3) “the learning style and activities”, (4) the fact that the EDE is “a playground to experiment and practice”, (5) “the atmosphere in the group” and on (6) “organising as a community – sharing responsibilities”.

### 1. Opportunity to see oneself differently through the (social) context



The first cluster of influence relates to the opportunity for participants to see themselves differently at the EDE. Various aspects influence how people can see themselves differently here: firstly, there is time and space to focus more on oneself, secondly, the social context where people are constantly surrounded by and interacting with others causes one to see oneself in many situations. And thirdly, receiving feedback from others and hearing how others see oneself can be a further incentive for self-reflection.

#### a) Time and space to be with one self

The EDE is a period of four weeks or longer during which participants are away from their normal life. They are in a setting where work on oneself is encouraged. The EDE hence creates time and space for participants to observe and reflect on themselves. A few participants point this out.

*Christos: here also it's like a monastery to make meditations and get time to spend time for yourself.*

*Amita: there is space for you to connect with yourself*

*Kostas: I think we were in a place where it's supposed to be a safe space for this, [for observing yourself more]. So we're here for that. Something, it's not easy to happen in the normal outside that easily. And I think it's a process, it's considered as a training, so people have the possibility here to look themselves in the mirror kind of thing.*

Christos points out that for him, the EDE was a place where he got time to spend with himself. Amita adds that connection to the self is encouraged during the exercises. And Kostas remarks that the EDE is a place where it's easier to observe yourself than in the “outside”.

#### b) The social context: interacting with others

Another aspect which creates the opportunity for participants to see themselves differently at the EDE is that there are many diverse situations with different people.

Denis: *I feel like the most useful lessons for me were mostly outside the sessions, ... just my interactions with people*

Elena: *especially in a social context, when you are surrounded by so many people all the time, it's a good context to see these things [that I do in myself in my relations with people]*

Nil: *so for me the EDE is great because there are so many different opportunities to see how you are and how the group, what the group dynamic is doing on you*

Several people note that it is in interaction with other people that they learn a lot about themselves. Denis says that these situations were the most useful for him. Elena explains that it is in the social context, in interaction with people, that she can observe herself and learn about her habitual behaviour patterns. And Nil notes that there are many different constellations during the EDE (both inside and outside of the official sessions) which allow to observe oneself and notice how one feels based on different social circumstances.

### **c) Feedback – hearing how others see you**

A third aspect which influences how one sees oneself is hearing how others see oneself. This is also a common aspect of the EDE which influenced various people.

Tess: *I got some really interesting feedbacks, or which really made me think about myself.*

Tayla: *maybe people that look at you with different lenses can see things that are completely different from what you believed your whole life, from what you thought your whole life. And this, I'm talking more about this mirroring experience, when people were just giving us this very valuable feedback. ... so then it makes you, this mirroring experiences, the feedbacks, having these people that are always in front of you just showing what you are.*

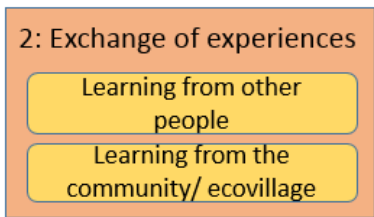
Rouven: *the best about it was actually to have a feedback meeting afterwards on how it worked and who saw me how and ... how was I perceived by the others in guiding this meeting*

Tess says that she got feedback about herself from other people which made her think about herself, because she saw truth in their comments. Tayla points out that other members of the EDE can see herself through "a different lens" when compared to her friends and family who know her. She finds it very valuable to hear how others see herself. And Rouven notes that also with regard to specific roles and tasks, he much appreciated receiving feedback.

### **d) Conclusion on the influence: opportunity to see oneself differently**

Overall, there are ample opportunities at the EDE to see oneself in a new light. The extended period of time in a special place away from home allows people to look at themselves differently. Being in a social context, where one is interacting with different group constellations is a useful setting, in which one can learn about oneself. Furthermore, talking with others and receiving feedback on how see oneself is highly appreciated.

## 2. Exchange of experiences



Another group of influencing factors relates to sharing experiences and learning from others. On the one hand, many people come to the EDE who have embarked on a similar path to oneself. Everyone (participants and facilitators), has many experiences and much knowledge which can be very interesting and insightful to others. On the other hand, it is specifically the experience of the community that people appreciate.

### a) Learning from other people

Multiple people mention that at the EDE, the exchange of experiences and stories with others is a valuable learning input.

*Tayla: there are so many people sharing so many things, even when it's lunch time, even when it's dinner time.*

*Sebastian: because of the people who are in the course, who are leading the course, who are part of the course ... sharing their experience*

*Elena: I really value the meetings with people and I really value sharing. Like even if it's something that is not within the sessions. But just sharing and just forming relationships and sharing our experiences.*

*Denis: to meet people who have a lot of experience in something, like building communities. just hearing the experience of people was really useful to get a better picture of what is out there.*

*Julie: basically by all the inspiring people I met there, especially the teachers. And they all had very inspiring stories I think . ... I thought every teacher in this course was so inspiring by his personality, by his background, it was really amazing.*

Tayla depicts the situation that at all times, people are sharing their view, their knowledge and experience – there is always something to learn. Others also specifically highlight the value of meeting people and hearing about their experience. Especially when these experiences relate to one's own interest, this can bring oneself further and help "get a better picture of what is out there" and what is possible. Julie highlights that the stories the facilitators tell from their life are very inspiring.

### b) Learning from the community

Several people also specifically appreciate the insight they get into the community of the ecovillage in which the EDE takes place.

*Julie: we were very well involved into the community ... and you got a really good insight into the community and into their [problems?], also into their history, which was very exciting.*

*Anna: It's very different to actually experience what it means to live in an ecovillage. Like that one [Findhorn], it's structured, it's big, it's been there for many years, it has lots of experience, its own history of experimentation and failure and successes. It was very meaningful to do that there and see what was important for that community.*

*Paul: because you have the common meals on the lunch time, the shared meals, it's really good to meet a lot of people of the community. So I could speak with a 4 year old that would ask me*

*"are you still a child?". ... so speaking with the kids, speaking with the adults, speaking about the history of the community when they started, which were the big ... challenges*

*Hans: so it was very reassuring - that word again - and comforting, a comforting experience to see that it is possible to actually implement on a practical side what sounds nice theoretically on a piece of paper.*

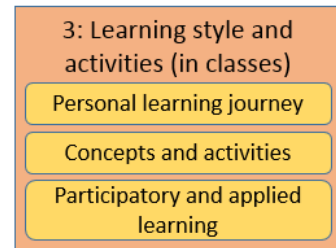
EDE participants such as Julie, Anna and Paul appreciate learning about the community and its development, including the history and challenges. This also provides a better insight into everything that community life means. For Hans, it was also important to see with his own eyes how things work in the community.

### **c) Conclusion on the influence: exchange of experiences**

This cluster of influences relating to learning through experiences shows that EDE participants appreciate hearing the stories of experienced people; this can be inspiring, provide knowledge input and show what options exist. Furthermore, the experience of the community and the phases through which the ecovillage developed is very rich information for EDE members. Having the opportunity to get a closer view of the ecovillage influences the learning experience.

### 3. The learning style and activities

A third cluster of influencing factors revolves around the learning style. Firstly, the role of the facilitators in guiding EDE participants through their own learning journey is highlighted. Secondly, many people refer to specific exercises and activities which guided their learning. And thirdly, the participatory and applied nature of the learning is emphasised.



#### a) Facilitators encourage participants to go on their own learning journey

One aspect which is brought up by a few people as an influencing factor is that facilitators of the EDE “hold space” for participants to embark on their own learning journey.

*Amita: they were not trying to teach us something, they were trying to get us to get in contact with our own source of knowledge.*

*Nébesna: the facilitator is HOLDING the space FOR the students to do their journey of LEARNING*

Amita describes that facilitators were getting the participants in touch with their own knowledge. She suggests that facilitators are not trying to deliver specific knowledge. Also Nébesna explains that facilitators are merely “holding the space” and hence creating the opportunity for students to learn. This shows a strong focus on active individual participation and co-creation of the own learning process.

#### b) Concepts and activities

Although the previous category shows that there is space for students’ own learning, there is still much input from the facilitators in terms of presenting new concepts and suggesting various activities. Many people refer to specific exercises which influenced their learning. Activities on different ways of communicating, on feelings and emotions and on working with one’s past were remembered as impactful (not shown in quotes since these are mainly named in short statements and usually not elaborated on). Multiple people also mention that there was a strong focus on inner work and personal development.

*Alagie: these exercises will of course help you to go deep into yourself*

*Tayla: looking back at the previous weeks, I can really see that the focus was on our own process of transforming ourselves*

*Inge: I feel like, the emphasis is a lot on social tools and community tools, like how we work with each other, and it really brings up processes for people more. ... yeah, inner processes like emotions, and personal insights. We give a lot of space for it.*

Alagie explains that various exercises helped to go deeper into oneself, and Tayla reflects that the sessions focused strongly on changing oneself. Inge also comments that when working with tools, this often brings up internal processes for people.

#### c) Participatory and applied learning

When referring to the learning at the EDE during the official sessions, multiple participants emphasise that the learning style is very participatory and applied.

*Nil: I think I heard it before, as a theory. But then it was really, we practiced it in the sessions.*

*Kostas: what I liked here was that some things happened in a nice experiential way, for example sociocracy. I liked that we were part of the process and it wasn’t that just theory.*

*Anna: we met and discussed how to apply the module or whatever we learned in that week into the specific project*

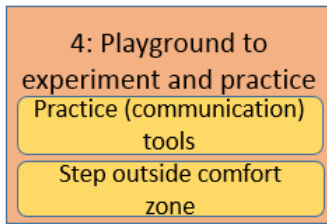
*Thomas: in the project groups, we tried to use the tools, like sociocracy*

Nil remembers that practicing the theory helped her to truly understand it. And Kostas remarks that practicing and working with the theories and concepts is useful. He adds that he likes that in this way, participants are part of the process. Furthermore, the group project work is highlighted by some people, such as Anna and Thomas. Here, the concepts are integrated and the tools are practiced. This makes the learning more concrete and gives participants the opportunity to work with and apply what they have learnt.

#### **d) Conclusion on the influence: learning style and activities**

Overall, the learning style and activities during the EDE encourage many different changes. The notion of holding space for participants' own learning journey is one influencing factor. Furthermore, exercises provide new insights into communication methods and personal development. By encouraging participatory learning and working with the concepts, the learning style further allows learning to be processed deeply.

#### 4. A playground to experiment and practice



The next cluster of influence relates to the learning opportunities beyond the organised sessions. As mentioned in the previous cluster above, classes are participatory and the application and integration of new concepts and methods is encouraged. However, this notion of practicing and trying out new things reaches far beyond the organised sessions. Living together in a temporary course community creates room to experiment together. For Samantha,

one of the facilitators, this aspect is an important part of the EDE.

Samantha (facilitator): *the idea that it's a playground, we do, we have a safe time for a month to experiment, and it's such a precious gift. Even if you were in the halls of academia, you cannot take as many risks as you can here. There's consequences that we don't have here. And also, we're constantly saying "please try, fail, try and fail, fail here, really get the feeling of that".*

She suggests that participants are encouraged to experiment, to try and fail. She also notes that the EDE is a safe time for this. The notion of safety will be taken up again in the following cluster on the group atmosphere. This cluster will focus on the possibility to experiment and practice at the EDE. A first category focuses on the fact that methods relating to communication and social processes can be integrated into the daily life at the course. A second category presents the idea that the EDE is a place where participants can more generally experiment with themselves and "step outside of their comfort zone".

##### a) Practice (communication) tools

The EDE offers the unique opportunity to integrate the learning – especially the learning concerning communication and social processes – into real life situations that arise during the weeks of living together. Multiple participants refer to the value of the format of the course, where they can truly practice the tools and deeply integrate them.

Adrianna: *for me the strength and the value of this course is the group, and how we practice the tools together*

Adrianna: *here it's easier because we are doing all these workshops and I know people are gonna be kind of more open.*

Adrianna: *we couldn't understand each other and we were building up the tension, and I was like "common, I need to use the tools here, it's the perfect place, and I'm sure she will be open".*

Isabella: *the most important thing was the holistic treatment of the issues. You are living in a community, you have problem with your partner, you must solve it. You are living in a sustainable community and then, all the contents we are working, we are living it*

Rouven: *it really gives like four weeks really give the time not only to understand the concept but to experience it and to repeat, to practice and to get feedback.*

Adrianna explains that for her, the strength of the EDE is the group. She points out that practicing the tools is easier here, because she knows people will be "open". There is a lower threshold because all participants are at the course to learn, and everyone is familiar with the communication methods. In contrast to the "outside world", she will hence not get strange looks for applying certain approaches. Adrianna and Isabella refer to moments where they applied the communication tools which were discussed in the sessions. In this way, the living and learning pedagogy is fully applied:

Isabella confirms that “we are living it” and Rouven explains how the EDE allows participants to actually experience and integrate the tools.

### **b) Opportunity to step outside of the comfort zone**

Besides specifically practicing the tools which were discussed during the sessions, multiple people mention more generally that the EDE is the perfect opportunity to step out of their comfort zone and experiment with different behaviour.

*Denis: I never really considered that where I wanted to be, that I, I never dared to imagine that I could actually go there. I think here that was for the first time, I dared and I made steps ... the environment here being very appropriate or welcoming for that kind of exploration.*

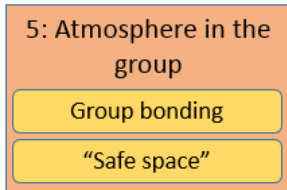
*Vic: here it's like massive experience and information and light and the perfect place to step out of my comfort zone and try out things.*

Vic comments that the EDE was the “perfect place” to step out of his comfort zone and try out different behaviour, and Denis elaborates that the EDE was “very appropriate and welcoming” for exploring new behaviour. It is here that he had the courage to step into the person that he wants to be.

### **c) Conclusion on the influence: a playground to experiment**

This cluster has illustrated that the EDE is a place which allows for a lot of exploration, related to course concepts and methods and to one's own ideas. Trying out new things is encouraged and there seems to be a lower threshold to practice new behaviour during the EDE than in the “outside world”. In this way, the EDE is a safe playground for experiential learning.

## 5. The atmosphere in the group



A cluster of influencing factors which appears as very central to the EDE is the atmosphere which is developed in the group. On the one hand, the intimate group bonding and loving atmosphere in the EDE is highlighted. And on the other hand, the notion of a “safe space” arises. Several components stand out as important elements contributing to this safe space: the idea that people can be truly themselves, the fact that it’s possible to express everything and communicate honestly, and the acceptance of feelings.

### a) Group bonding

Various people remark on the bond and connection they experienced with their EDE group.

*Anna: what I really really enjoyed was the moments of celebration and of singing and dancing and celebrating. I think that was really bonding for the group.*

*Julie: you could just feel the love, and the funny thing was, we have really developed a very good group in the end of the course.*

*Inge : it was just a lovely group bonding, and we were a small group*

*Quinn: with 12 people, the number of things you can cover and the intimacy you can achieve is very different.*

\*

*Elena: I still think that it's [the group?] still not really glued together. So there are groups and there are friendships and there are relationships forming, and that's really amazing. ... But in the entire group, in the group as a whole, it's like sometimes I feel something is missing and I don't know what but something is missing for me*

Anna recalls moments which helped the group bond together. And others, such as Inge and Julie comment that they enjoyed the warm and loving bonding with their group. Especially in EDE groups that were very small (around 12 people), participants mention that this allowed for group bonding. Quinn points out that having a small group of people makes it easier to reach such a level of intimate bonding with the group. In fact, a few people who were part of larger EDE groups comment that the bonding of the whole group was not very strong. Elena for example reflects that in her EDE, the whole group was not closely glued together. Nevertheless, just like others who missed a closer connection to their larger EDE group, Elena comments that she had other close connections. Smaller subgroups of the EDE (homegroups and family groups) are highlighted as a meeting place where they could experience a stronger group connection.

### b) Safe space

The notion of having a safe space in the EDE is mentioned by many participants and by all three facilitators. It is also a concept which is often referred to during the course. This safe space is described as a space where you can be truly yourself and are accepted as you are, where open and honest communication is practiced and where deep inner feelings are acknowledged. It is a space where everyone is encouraged to be “real”, without having any “masks” on.

Elisabeth, a facilitator, elaborates on the creation of this safe space.

*Elisabeth (facilitator): we try to create a space of safety ... a container who allows to be who you really are; which means we work into this field of maybe really unknown part where we touch our feelings, our emotions, where we touch our inner beings. And in the moment where this is possible, there is a change, and this is visible in the faces. Everybody got softer. ...*

*I think we create this space together. There are so many aspects to creating this space. There is this aspect of having fun together, so we are singing, we are dancing, we are laughing, we have our energisers, we are playing. There is a lot on a kind of surface thing which builds up this trust. And then this allows to go a little deeper. ... and this is what we do. We are going deeper and deeper and deeper and allowing more and more to come up and really be the one I am, without any masks anymore, which takes so much effort to hold them.*

Elisabeth explains that the EDE is a space where you can be your real self and where deep inner processes are included. This space is continuously built up further through activities which foster trust. The more participants explore together - on the one hand the "surface things" but also the things touching "unknown parts" - the more this creates a safe space to go even deeper together. Like the other facilitators, she relates this possibility to be real with a change in participants, which is visible in their faces.

Also participants comment extensively on this safe space.

Multiple people refer to the possibility to be "real" and that this creates a nice learning environment.

*Kostas: it gives the opportunity for people to be themselves. And this creates a very nice space for learning.*

*Christos: a place that you can be like a human, you know. Without judging, without saying that you need to make this and this that you are a man or like a good guy. And it was like a neutral ground. It feels so different, so peaceful here.*

*Inge: something else I'm thinking about ... is this feeling of really being accepted as you are.*

Being "themselves", "human" or "as you are" is highlighted as a special aspect about the EDE which influences the group and learning atmosphere. For Christos, the absence of judgments and expectations at the EDE contributes to creating a place where he can be himself. Similarly, Inge brings up the notion of full acceptance.

Furthermore, many people highlight that one aspect which is special about the EDE is that it is very normal to be open and honest with each other, as well as the fact that it is more common to deeply share with other people. The quotes below illustrate this.

*Tayla: this is usually a level of honesty that we don't have in our daily lives*

*Rouven: many exercises and activities have been part of the curriculum which gave me the possibility to experience myself in contact with someone else. ... this kind of creates an experimental field for any kind of contact inside the sessions and also outside. And it creates - and somehow everything together creates a field which for me felt very very safe to express whatever there is present. And that everything is okay.*

*Vic: it's beautiful this space that we created in where everything is possible and where we can talk about almost everything.*

Tayla contrasts the EDE to her "daily life", where the level of honesty is different. Rouven and Vic further comment that in this space which is created during the EDE, "everything is possible and okay" to express. Rouven notes that many of the exercises and activities that are part of the sessions also contribute to setting up the ground for creating this space.

In particular also the importance that is placed on feelings during the EDE is pointed out as relevant by a few people.

Christos: *It [the homegroup – a subgroup of the EDE] was for me one of the most important stuff that I experienced here. And that I can say myself my emotions and how I feel now, but really from my heart and not what they expect from me. ... I'm a level that I can speak things out that I'm not able to do it with my family or even with myself.*

Denis: *I think the biggest difference is for me between my regular life ... and the EDE here, is just this acceptance of feelings, like putting enough importance to feelings,*

Rouven: *all the feelings are okay. If I'm afraid or if I feel sadness, that's okay*

Participants highlight the importance of the acceptance of feelings during the EDE. This acknowledgement of feelings is part of being real and touching upon “our inner beings”, as expressed by Elisabeth in the beginning of this category.

### **c) Conclusion on the influence: the atmosphere in the group**

The group of the EDE is composed of fellow learners with whom participants live and learn together for an extended period of time. The atmosphere which is created in this group and among its members is very crucial for the learning process and the overall wellbeing. One aspect which several participants refer to is a loving and intimate group connection. Interestingly, this seems to be linked to the group size of the EDE: it is participants of smaller EDE groups who highlight this. In contrast, a few people of larger EDEs specifically mention the absence of a strong connection with the group. Here, such connections are found in other relationships and smaller subgroups. Next to the feeling of connection with the group, how one feels accepted in the group is important. Many people (mainly from larger EDE groups) elaborate on the “safe space” which is created at the EDE. Here, the possibility to be real, show feelings and honestly express whatever is present within oneself is highlighted as special. These characteristics make up the “safe space” at the EDE and are often contrasted to the “outside world”. This atmosphere also creates an important common ground which allows for deep exploration to take place.

## 6. Organising as a community – sharing responsibilities

### 6: Organising as a community - sharing responsibilities

A last cluster influencing change at the EDE is the organisation of the course as a community. Especially participants of the EDE in Schloss Glarisegg point out that the course members organised as a community. The importance of the co-organisation of the cleaning and cooking as well as taking decisions in a communal way is emphasised. This shows that the EDE is not like a usual seminar: participants are not just “consuming” activities but are actively contributing to creating the space and experience. Taking initiative and responsibility and being able to contribute are important elements of the course style.

*Inge: It's kind of a unique opportunity to live in a community, to self-organise and do the actual community or processes.*

*Rouven: it can be quite empowering, even though for me it was not the first time, ... to have here a big kitchen and to cook for 60-70 people for example*

*Tayla: I feel like we really got this message here really strong that we can do things differently, we can. ... we've been exposed to it for a month ... so I think our working groups work amazingly, and our organisation with having the central organisation voting sociocratically, and I really think this is a micro-cosmos of what we can build outside here.*

Inge points out that the EDE is a unique opportunity to self-organise as a community and experience what this entails. Responsibilities, such as cooking meals for the EDE group, are not only tasks which need to be completed, but they also represent a further learning opportunity: Rouven for example highlights that this can be empowering. Tayla talks about how this joint organisation of the course contributes to the message which the EDE delivers: for her, having experienced this “different” organisation is also a demonstration of how society can be organised differently.

## 7. Summary of the factors influencing people to change at EDE courses

The second part of the results has discussed multiple important factors which shape the learning experience at the EDE and which contribute to changes experienced by participants. Firstly, one cluster of influences portrays how the EDE is a great opportunity for participants to see themselves differently: on the one hand, being at the EDE means taking time and space for oneself. On the other hand, one is in an intense social environment, where many interactions with other people occur. This gives the opportunity to see oneself in contact with different people. Additionally, other people can share how they perceive you, which is a valuable insight and possibly brings up further points of personal reflection. Secondly, another cluster of influences shows that stories and experiences from other members and from the facilitators of the course, as well as experiences from the ecovillage community are highly appreciated. Thirdly, the style of the organised sessions positively fosters learning. Facilitators encourage participants to go on their own learning journey, instead of telling them “the right way” like an expert. Interesting concepts on communication and group work are introduced and activities encourage diverse learning experiences, such as going deep into oneself. Altogether, sessions are highly participatory, and new ideas are often applied and hence further integrated. Beyond classes, a similar learning style is maintained. As presented in a fourth cluster of influences, the EDE is a place which allows participants to experiment: new communication methods can be practiced in real life situations and personal limitations can be tackled by stepping outside of one’s comfort zone. The group atmosphere, which is presented in a fifth cluster is also very important. In small EDE courses, participants highlight a strong group bonding. And participants of larger EDEs emphasise the “safe space” which is created in the EDE: here, people can be their real self, express feelings and share deeply and honestly. Lastly, a sixth cluster presents the influence of organising the EDE group as a community, where decisions are taken together and cleaning and cooking responsibilities are taken up by participants.

## VI. Discussion

In this chapter, the findings of this study on transformative learning in Ecovillage Design Education courses will be revisited with the research questions and literature insights in mind. Firstly, the changes experienced by EDE participants will be compared to the findings of the literature cases presented in the literature review. Specific influencing factors are connected to corresponding changes, when such indications are present. To portray the interconnections between changes and influencing factors more clearly, these links are illustrated in the form of a visual overview (see Appendix E), using the boxes already introduced in the results chapter. Secondly, the factors influencing the learning experience at the EDE are reviewed and paralleled to literature findings. The influencing factors are described, and suggestions are made as to why they lead to changes and contribute to intense learning opportunities. This second part is ideal for people wanting to facilitate transformative learning journeys; the influencing factors highlighted here can be used to guide the set-up of such courses. Thirdly, the emerging theme of “authenticity” will be discussed, followed by the question of the persistence of changes outside the EDE environment. Fourthly, the literature lens of transformative learning will be put on: following Mezirow’s psychocritical view and Boyd’s psychoanalytical view, we will investigate how the experiences from the EDE belong to transformative learning. After looking at the theories, a more general statement about the “transformativeness” of the changes experienced is put forward.

### A. Revisiting the clusters of changes

In this first part of the discussion, I will come back to the main changes presented in the results. These will be compared to the changes discussed in the literature cases that studied transformative learning in similar settings. Furthermore, it will be illustrated how the different changes are intertwined and which factors of change are linked to them. For this, references are made to the diagrams in Appendix E; see Figure 2 for arrows *a* to *o* and Figure 3 for arrows *p* to *z* (and *cc*).

#### 1. Self

In this study, changes in the self are very dominant and elaborated on in detail, they are a key change for EDE participants. The importance of this topic reminds of the study of D’Amato & Krasny (2011) who found that participants of an outdoor education programme saw personal development as a key learning outcome. Whilst other research has mentioned aspects of changes in the self, the detailed account and distinction between specific developments or changes in the self is unique to this study. In fact, most subcategories of change named in this study can be paralleled to a finding in one of the reviewed literature studies, but no other study distinguishes as many categories of change pertaining to the self.

Both EDE participants (this study) and volunteers in the Indian ecovillage of Auroville (Andriopoulou, 2011) highlight that they learnt a lot about themselves during the experience. In both cases, participants also gained understanding of their own values. Gaining confidence in oneself is also a common outcome of experiences in outdoor education (D’Amato & Krasny, 2011), volunteering in ecovillages (Andriopoulou, 2011) and participating in EDE courses (this study). In another study of Estonian EDEs, participants even highlight that they felt encouraged to realise their ambitions (Trapido, n.d.), which can be compared to the theme of feeling “creator of one’s own life” in this study. An increased feeling of empowerment to start projects has been found not only among EDE participants (in this study) but also among members of an agricultural course in an ecovillage (Reddy, 2010). When it comes to the driving force of hope and energy which EDE participants experienced, this has also been mentioned in similar settings: one volunteer in the study by Andriopoulou (2011) pointed out gaining hope in the ecovillage. And participants of a Lange’s

sustainability course talked about gaining energy and excitement (Lange, 2009). When looking at the categories of change relating to the Self which are found in this study, only the notion of being more aware of one's own feelings and having an increased connection to oneself have not been highlighted in the studied literature cases.

When talking about these changes in the Self, participants suggest various links to what caused them. In general, personal discovery is influenced by the opportunity to see oneself differently (*arrow a*): it is in interaction with others, that people learn a lot about themselves and their behaviour. Receiving specific feedback can also be a trigger to think more about oneself. In exchange with others, members of the EDE and the ecovillage, one can unravel deeper passions and find confirmation in one's values (*arrow b*). Specific activities that work with feelings or invite personal reflection also trigger personal discovery (*arrow c*). Discovery of one's inner world can further lead over to feeling more of an active creator of one's own life (*arrow d*). And the feeling of empowerment is associated with many other aspects: increased knowledge about specific topics (*arrow e*), concepts and activities from the sessions (*arrow f*), hearing other people's experience (*arrow g*), finding a network of change agents (*arrow h*) and taking on responsibilities in the EDE community (*arrow i*). Lastly, meeting the network of like-minded people is a big contributor to the increase in hope and energy (*arrow j*).

It is interesting to note that there are so many changes around the Self in a course on ecovillage design. In fact, whilst some people especially came for this focus on personal development, it was a surprise for others. Overall, working on exploring and transforming oneself is highly appreciated. Some participants note the importance of working on oneself when living in community and when it comes to implementing change.

## 2. Social

The next largest cluster of change is that of learning about group work and communication. There are relatively few links to literature for this cluster. This is possibly explained by the fact that these changes are specific skills which are encouraged by the EDE curriculum, whereas other courses or volunteer activities do not specifically focus on these skills. Indeed, in the study on Estonian EDEs, Trapido (n.d.) also highlights open communication as an outcome. And also volunteers in Auroville remark upon an alternative way of relating to each other in the ecovillage (Andriopoulou, 2011).

Various aspects explain these improved social competencies (group work and communication) among EDE participants. Learning activities present methods for group work and alternative communication (*arrow k*), and participatory learning encourages participants to practice these skills (*arrow l*). Furthermore, using these communication tools outside the sessions further integrates them (*arrow m*). The atmosphere of the group lowers the threshold for practicing these communication tools, as well as for more generally communicating openly and entering deep connections (*arrow n*). Lastly, being in a social context where one is surrounded by people most of the time allows participants to unravel false judgements and impressions of others and to realise the importance of a compassionate attitude (*arrow o*).

The development of these social competencies with regard to communication, group- and project work is very useful in general. However, also especially within the context of ecovillages, these competencies seem crucial, when one learns that indeed most communities fail because of social conflicts. Without these social skills, the best intentions will not suffice. Since social change requires cooperation between many people with different opinions, knowing how to communicate and work together are crucial skills.

### 3. Active engagement

The next cluster is that of engagement for change. A few related literature cases have similarly found changes indicating more active engagement after a (transformative) learning experience. In fact, the notion of being ambassadors for change was brought up by EDE participants in this study as well as by volunteers during their stay in Auroville (Andriopoulou, 2011). Furthermore, EDE participants mentioning that they desire to take responsibility and get active can be paralleled to participants of outdoor education being more committed to protecting the environment after their nature experience (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011). These changes are also in line with the aim of Gaia Education that "students emerge as embodied leaders and designers of sustainable communities" (Greenberg, 2015, p.27).

There are many links to be drawn from the cluster of the Self to the cluster of engagement for change: hope and energy can drive engagement for change (*arrow p*). Feeling empowered (*arrow q*) and knowing one's passions stirs active involvement in projects (*arrow r*). Furthermore, the community experience causes people to feel more determined and ready to inspire others (*arrow s*). Having a network of fellow change agents also facilitates active engagement for change (*arrow t*). Additionally, the group and project skills that are learnt can be applied when setting up projects and working with others (*arrow u*). Sometimes, knowledge about a specific topic also initiates change projects (*arrow v*).

### 4. Network and community experience

In terms of the clusters of the network and community experience, there are similarities which can be found to literature cases, however there are few concrete factors which influence these clusters. It is mainly the evident influence of organising as a community which causes people to experience what it's like to live in community (*arrow w*). In other cases, learning about community life was also emphasised as an outcome (Andriopoulou, 2011; Cook & Cutting, 2014). Also the importance of meeting a network is highlighted in other cases: for volunteers in Auroville, precisely the notion of not being alone was mentioned as an important realisation (Andriopoulou, 2011). And for participants of a transformative sustainability course, the connections created were so valuable that they decided to set up an institute to stay in touch (Lange, 2009).

### 5. Knowledge

Expanding one's understanding and knowledge base is a cluster of change among EDE participants, which has also been seen as an outcome of other studies investigating transformative learning. Having more knowledge about specific topics and strengthening one's view of sustainability can be paralleled to the findings of Cook & Cutting (2014), who talk about people gaining understanding with regard to sustainability, and to the findings of Reddy (2010), who reports that participants of her course became more ecologically literate. In the EDE, it is mainly the exchange of experiences with other EDE participants and members of the ecovillage (*arrow x*) as well as specific concepts introduced in the organised sessions (*arrow y*) which widen knowledge and understanding.

### 6. Information "beyond the mind"

For the last and smallest cluster entitled "information beyond the mind", there are no concrete parallels with the studied literature cases. Whilst some people mentioning these changes were particularly receptive to such information due to previous experiences, accessing information "beyond the mind" was also encouraged by certain activities during the sessions (*arrow z*).

## 7. Merging of clusters of change

Overall, there are many categories and clusters of change which illustrate how people change in EDE courses. Many of these clusters have parallels to literature cases, but overall, the diversity of changes portrayed by EDE participants is unique to this study.

Whilst not all changes are experienced by all EDE participants, all people experienced multiple types of changes. How exactly an individual changed probably depends on a combination of the personal EDE experience and the previous stance of the person, before embarking on the EDE journey. Every person participating in an EDE will have a slightly different story and experience. This study provided an overview of types of changes experienced by EDE participants by grouping changes mentioned by interviewees into clusters of change. However these types of changes are often intertwined, as already suggested in the text and diagrams. Separate types of changes experienced by participants are of course all merged in the individual (and not divided into separate boxes). These changes form a complex web of changes in/for each individual participant, where further subtle nuances of change and interactions might exist. The complexity of these changes cannot be captured by a simple categorisation. Indeed, following the comparison of Kim (a participant in Lange's study, 2009), "transformation is like a butterfly; ... a butterfly is about its flight, its dance in the light and its delicacy." (p. 203). As he suggests, the profoundness of transformative experiences might not be able to be captured by words.

## **B. Diving into the factors influencing the learning**

In the second part of the discussion, the influencing factors and their relevance to the learning experience at the EDE will be elaborated on. Where clear links from influencing factors could be drawn to specific changes, these are already presented in the previous section. The manner in which these factors can influence learning is discussed in more detail here. Findings on influencing factors are also paralleled to literature cases (to empirical case studies and other literature texts). Specifically, two controversial factors, namely the size and diversity of the learning group, will be debated. In the end, the importance of the combined presence of these factors in a course with a "living curriculum" is highlighted.

### **1. Seeing oneself from many different perspectives**

The first cluster of influencing factors is that the EDE gives participants the opportunity to see themselves differently. It is in interaction with others that one can learn a lot about oneself. This has also been noted by Andriopoulou (2011). Spending so much time in/with a group of people creates many opportunities where one can observe oneself in different situations. The intense social environment brings up internal processes in people and makes one's own habitual behaviour and thought patterns more explicit. To use Boyd's terminology, these interactions can evoke images, which represent internally unresolved problems (Boyd, as summarised in Dirkx, 2006). As such, these opportunities can foster personal discovery and inner growth.

In addition to interaction with others, specifically the aspect of getting feedback from others has been highlighted as a useful factor. On the one hand, this represents "simple" appreciative feedback which can boost one's confidence. On the other hand, this also includes more critical feedback which causes personal reflection. The notion of "mirroring", which is used among EDE participants, further explains the influence which feedback can have. The idea is that every person is one's own mirror and reflecting back aspects of oneself. One hence sees one's own qualities and weaknesses in others (Kotsos, n.d.). Being in group with others provides many mirrors which are the basis to learn about oneself. During the EDE, one may hence receive feedback in the form of mirrors by simply observing and reflecting on one's reaction to the other. None of these forms of feedback have been specifically mentioned in the studies on transformative learning reviewed here.

Beyond the input for personal reflection arising from the social environment, the EDE also provides time and space to observe and reflect on oneself. Various activities invite participants to go deeper into their inner selves. Similar settings, such as a course in Auroville, also provided opportunities for people to reflect more on themselves (Reddy, 2010).

### **2. Meeting others and learning from their experiences**

Another cluster of influencing factors is the exchange of experiences. Every person has a lifetime full of experiences and wisdom which can be inspiring or insightful to others. Especially since people at the EDE tend to be embarked on a similar path and have related interests, exchanging stories can be very enriching for one's learning journey. It can also provide alternative perspectives on a topic and help differentiate one's own opinion. Furthermore, talking with members of the ecovillage provides opportunities to gain insight into the ecovillage and community lifestyle. In combination with the experience of life in the ecovillage, these exchanges also allow people to see/hear that things can be done differently. This importance of the exchange of experiences is uniquely highlighted in this study.

### **3. Learning style at the EDE**

The learning style during the sessions and beyond also contributes to the experience. This learning style has similarities with practices which are encouraged in literature for transformative learning:

facilitators guide the learning journey authentically, there is much focus on experiential and participatory learning and activities invite “whole person” involvement.

Facilitators at the EDE are described as inspiring and experienced people, who embody a lot of knowledge. When “teaching”, facilitators often share personal stories and use this to guide the learning process (as advocated by Boyd & Myers 1988, in Taylor, 1998). They are facilitating the session authentically, by sharing personal stories and by being fully present, moving around, sharing feelings and admitting their own mistakes. Whilst a few people highlighted some more “mainstream” characteristics, overall there is no strong hierarchy in the EDE course, which further encourages a nice learning environment where participants and facilitators interact and are both learning.

Many of the sessions are “hands-on” learning where participants are interacting with each other. In fact, after a concept is introduced, this is often directly applied and practiced; in this way the concept can be better understood and learnt. Practicing the skills builds confidence and makes it easier to apply tools in other situations after the EDE.

Inviting the whole person into the learning space is an important notion discussed in literature on transformative learning. Various suggestions for inviting the whole person that have been presented in the review by Burns (2015) are present during the EDE: sitting in a circle, walking around and inviting emotions into the class are normal aspects of the EDE. Furthermore, aspects such as dancing, rituals, music, art and stories encourage other parts of a person besides the mind to be involved of the learning process. These elements can provoke images and/or allow learners to work with images and their unconscious processes (Dirkx, 2000). These aspects also further allow people get to know each other on different levels and therewith build trust and a positive atmosphere in the group (*arrow aa*).

#### **4. The importance of the group atmosphere: a safe space**

The atmosphere in the group is indeed an important factor influencing the learning. Feeling bonded with the group and having a loving relationship with each other positively influences the learning environment. Also in other cases, the community that formed among course participants has been emphasised as an important aspect of the learning experience (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011). Furthermore, the notion of a “safe space” is highlighted by EDE participants. Such a safe environment is a recurring aspect in literature on transformative learning. Mezirow himself described “a safe, open, and trusting environment” as one of the ideal conditions for transformative learning. Students of Schumacher College also point out the safe environment as an aspect influencing transformative learning (Blake et al., 2013). And volunteers in Auroville more specifically highlight the importance of being able to be who they really are (Andriopoulou, 2011).

In the EDE, this safe space is partially created by inviting the whole self into the space, including the physical and emotional body, and allowing people to be their true self. By engaging in communal activities and joint learning processes, this safety can further expand. As Parker & Wilding (2012) suggest, the creation of a safe learning environment through whole person involvement and joint exploration seems to further create trust in the co-learners and in the Self.

In fact, at the EDE, the safe environment and supportive group atmosphere in combination with being in a new social setting away from one’s home further encourage the feeling that the EDE is like a playground where participants can experiment and practice new behaviour (*arrow bb*). Similarly, participation in outdoor education has been noted as a place where participants could explore different roles (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011).

## 5. Taking on responsibilities in the co-living space

Also the organisation of the EDE group has an influence on the learning. This is an element which is uniquely standing out in relation to the EDE in Schloss Glarisegg. People organise as a community and share responsibilities, such as cooking and cleaning. Taking up responsibilities can contribute to empowerment and can lead to a feeling of more co-ownership of the course. Group ownership and individual agency have in turn been suggested to promote transformative learning (Taylor, 2000, as referenced in Baumgartner, 2001). The importance of sharing such responsibilities is also highlighted amongst students at Schumacher College (Blake et al., 2013). The joint organisation of tasks and using group decision tools not only enables learning through practice (*arrow cc*), but also contributes to this experience resembling community lifestyle. In this way, the EDE shows its members how things (e.g. organisation of society) can be done differently.

## 6. Ideal group size?

Whilst group sizes vary amongst EDEs (from 12 to 54 participants) there are advantages to smaller and larger groups. Several people who were part of a small EDE group (about 12 people) highlighted specifically that this allowed for a very intimate group connection. In fact, since some participants of larger EDE groups mentioned “missing something” on the entire group level, this suggests that intimate bonding is easier among smaller groups. For such more intimate bonding, the large group is divided into smaller “homegroups”. The importance of smaller group sizes has also been reported by students at Schumacher College, where the community of about 50 people also meets in smaller subgroups (Blake et al., 2013). However, larger group sizes have their own advantage: being with more people allows for better application and use of community tools. A larger group also represents a larger social context and creates a more energetic dynamic.

## 7. Like-minded vs diverse participants?

Another interesting aspect to reflect upon is the diversity amongst the learners. Whilst meeting like-minded people is an appreciated aspect of the EDE, this does not foster dissonance and transformative learning in the same manner as a more diverse learning group would. Nevertheless, although EDE participants are “like-minded”, there are of course still many differences in experiences and perspectives which can contribute to learning and changing one’s frame of reference. Furthermore, it is imaginable that transformative learning as conceptualised by Mezirow profits from more diversity, whereas transformative learning as seen by Boyd can be fostered better in an environment of cohesion and safety, which may be easier to create with more similarly orientated individuals.

## 8. Merging of influencing factors – a living curriculum

All in all, there are many factors which contribute to learning at the EDE. Joining together all these factors creates a very intense experience with many inputs.

There are many influencing factors at the EDE that contribute to the learning experience that are co-created and evolve along the journey. Many of the influencing factors are introduced and put forward by the facilitators. However, at the same time, many of these factors require co-creation and implementation by all participants. Whilst various learning opportunities are designed, other learning experiences arise in the moment. Learning in interaction in different social situations is for example partially up to chance and can also be partially co-stirred by individuals. In this way, many different types and layers of learning experiences arise throughout a typical EDE day.

Overall, most of the learning is made possible by the co-living experience. Living together for at least four weeks allows to create deeper relationships, build a good group atmosphere, dive into the vibrant social environment, set up new “social norms” (e.g. communication style and group

organisation) and truly feel what it means to live in community. It is exactly this, which the Living and Learning pedagogy advocates. As suggested in the Living and Learning pedagogy and literature on transformative spaces, the EDE creates a learning community where authentic and trusting relationships can form. In fact, the personal, interpersonal and contextual influences at the EDE create a learning community where people can jointly learn how to deal with sustainability challenges (as suggested by Wals & Schwarzin, 2012).

## C. Reflection on changes beyond the web of clusters

In the third part of the discussion, an overarching theme which shines through some categories of change and influencing factors will be discussed: the culture of authenticity at the EDE. The unique culture created *inside* the EDE leads over to the question of the persistence of changes *outside* the EDE environment.

### 1. Authentic culture

A high value is placed on the topic of “authenticity” at the EDE: it is highlighted that the EDE is a place where you can be “yourself”, “real”, “human”, “without masks”. Important changes which are mentioned are: being open and honest in expressing who one is and overcoming personal limitations to be who one truly wants to be. All these themes put forward the idea of becoming who one truly is. Also in group work, the idea of being authentically present, for example by sharing when one is not feeling well, is considered important and beneficial to the work process.

The idea is that oftentimes, we do not show our real selves in fear of being judged and hence put on masks to conform to social norms. Contrasting the culture built during the EDE to modern culture, Kostas explains that *“our western civilisation is based on hypocrisy and trying to show off with other things, not being real person. So this transformative culture definitely includes real me.”* There is a strong invitation for people to be “themselves” at the EDE. In fact, the idea is presented that once social masks no longer need to be upheld, this causes people to change. Elisabeth says *“we try to create a space of safety. ... a container who allows to be who you really are. ... and in the moment where this is possible, there is a change, and this is visible in the faces.”* This is in line with Perls’ paradoxical theory of change, (as referenced by Beisser, n.d.): change happens when one takes time to explore and become who one truly is in the present moment and allows that to unfold. Exactly this can happen at the EDE.

Since authenticity seems strongly influenced by the safe environment created during the EDE, the question arises whether this change stays present afterwards.

### 2. Inside vs outside the EDE bubble

In fact, the emphasis which is placed on the EDE as a safe place where one can experiment freely in contrast to the outside world leads over to question what happens when going back home. Is this safe playground like a liminal space (Lange, 2015) where learners can unfold and gain strength and step out fresh into the world? Or is the change – the new role taken on – limited to the stay at the EDE? Whilst certain behaviour and energy gained through the experience possibly fades away, this research suggests that most changes do indeed remain since they are mentioned by both current and past participants.

The image of “bubbles” has been used by interviewees in this research. Also Andriopoulou (2011) talks about bubbles, she describes them as a “safe, nurturing space where travellers can try out new roles that they might take on in their future lives” (p.4). In contrast to other/outside spaces, the culture inside these bubbles seems to encourage more free expression and bathe individuals in a loving and accepting atmosphere. This research suggests that the EDE is such a bubble, where participants can unfold their Self and take on new roles. Furthermore, it is suggested that diving back into such bubbles after some time can reinforce the strength and outcome of the experience. Visiting other ecovillages and organising EDE reunions can serve this purpose.

## D. The transformativeness of the changes

The fourth part of the discussion is dedicated to transformative learning. So far, it has been illustrated in what ways participants of EDE courses change. In literature cases on the topic of transformative learning, similar changes have been experienced. However, often the occurrence of these changes is taken to qualify as transformative learning and this is not critically questioned. This results in some authors suggesting that the term transformative learning is being used too loosely and losing its meaning (Tisdell 2012, as referenced in Taylor & Laros, 2014). Hence, this section will look more closely at the transformativeness of the changes in order to understand whether transformative learning occurs during the EDEs. Firstly, the occurrence of transformative learning among EDE participants will be looked at through the lens of Mezirow's psychocritical view. Secondly, Boyd's psychoanalytical view will be used as a lens to investigate this question. Thereafter, a more general discussion on the transformativeness of the changes will open up.

### 1. Transformative learning according to Mezirow

As explained in the literature review (Chapter III), transformative learning according to Mezirow is the change in a frame of reference, in "the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences" (Mezirow, 1997, p.5). For this to happen, Mezirow highlights the importance of critical reflection on the assumptions. As will be illustrated below, many of the categories of change identified in this study do not fall under this strict definition of transformative learning. Only a few categories of change fit with the criteria of transformative learning identified by Mezirow. Additionally, two interview accounts that do not belong to specific categories of change indicate a change in a frame of reference. Before concluding on the occurrence transformative learning as seen by Mezirow, presence of the ten phases of transformation among EDE participants will be consulted.

Looking at the categories of changes identified in this study, many of them (e.g. developing group work skills, obtaining knowledge, feeling confident and empowered, meeting a network of change agents) do not meet the criteria for transformative learning according to Mezirow's view. Whilst these can all be part of transformative learning, the larger shift in perspective is missing to label them as a transformative learning experience. Learning skills and knowledge on its own (without this relating to a new perspective) are just simple learning experiences – certainly they can be very useful and have an impact, but they are not transformative. Aspects such as confidence and empowerment may affect how one feels in the world, but there is no shift in a frame of reference or reflection on assumptions involved. Rather so, many of these changes can be seen as an expansion or a growth. In general, whilst Mezirow's view requires critical examination of assumptions and a cognitive change, many changes seen in this study are more experiential, affecting how a person feels or acts with others. Whilst it is conceivable that changing the way we interact with the world leads over to a change in the way we see the world, such as follow up change in a frame of reference was not indicated in this study.

However, some other categories of change, such as becoming aware of habitual behaviour or realising that judgements about others are personal projections, can be labelled as transformative learning. In these cases, the types of changes are in line with the description of transformative learning: people become conscious of their thought patterns and realise what influences their way of being. After unveiling assumptions and reassessing these, a further change is often sought to realign with new realisations.

Additionally, two specific accounts can be labelled as transformative if we take Mezirow's perspective, since they involve an obvious change in a frame of reference with resulting

consequences in the participants' lives. Anna describes that for her, the EDE led to a crisis which made her question everything. She realised that different aspects of her life were separate before ("*had non communicating doors*") and that they needed to be more integrated. With this new view, she reassessed many aspects of her life and made big changes accordingly. The second case is that of Alagie, who talks about how his "understanding of life" has improved; whilst he says that before he was a "normal guy", the EDE made him think over possibilities. He realised that external organisations are not necessary to change things, but that he himself can also set up projects. He adds that earlier he was thinking of going somewhere far away, but now his ambition is to develop his own village.

Beyond trying to label specific changes as transformative learning, the correspondence with the ten phases of transformation as determined by Mezirow will be looked at more closely (see Chapter III, Section A1 for the steps). In fact, all ten steps can be found in the interview accounts. Some interviewees refer to only one step, whilst other participants relate one concrete change with multiple steps. As for the **first step**, there have been relatively few disorientating dilemmas leading to change. However, people mention "aha" moments opening up new realisations. And Elena talks about the experience of being in the EDE community being a disorienting dilemma. She says "*I thought, oh yeah coming here, I realised I had this assumption in me that it will be easy or that it will go easy for me because I am used to a community setting. But coming here, I found that was not true. ... and actually that's going out of my comfort zone, I realise that I still have a lot to work with things. For example with my self-confidence mainly and not feeling good enough maybe or not really knowing how to connect*". More steps of transformative learning can be recognized in Elena's story, and will be presented subsequently as an illustration. The **third step**, assessment of assumptions is also present in this case: Elena says that she realised her own assumption that she would be comfortable in the community. She also realised that her own community has become a comfort zone where she knows people. Further, she says "*I shared this realization with people and I shared it in the sharing circle*" which is the **fourth step** of sharing and analysing personal discontent with others. Relating to the **fifth step** of exploring options for new ways of thinking, she says "*I tried to change my perception of that*". Going through an inner process of telling herself to "*just be yourself*", which leads to the **ninth step** of building competence and self confidence in "new" roles. Other participants talk in more detail about the **second step** of self-examination with feelings and about exploring options for new ways, such as developing better communication and building competence in this. Also the **sixth step** of planning a course of action is referred to multiple times, both with regard to events during and after the EDE. Having acquired knowledge and skills (**step 7**) in group organisation, several people for example plan to incorporate this in communities or other projects after the EDE. Lastly, various people refer to trying new roles (**step 8**) during the EDE, such as Denis being more direct and honest. Such as in his case, these new perspectives or roles sometimes become reintegrated into the participants' life (**step 10**). Whilst not always in a full series, many changes experienced during the EDE do hence in fact relate to phases of transformative learning. Whether changes indicating partial completion of the steps can be referred to as transformative learning depends on the larger picture within which they fit: on prior and subsequent events and on the depth of the change.

Overall, a few specific interview accounts and categories of change mirror the criteria of transformative learning, some parallels to the ten steps are also present. However, when being very critical of the changes and their alignment with Mezirow's definition of transformative learning, many other categories of change do not relate to a shift in a frame of reference (through critical reflection on the underlying assumptions) and can hence not be labelled as transformative learning. However, it might very well be that attempting to label categorised changes as a shift in a frame of

reference is problematic and produces a limited view. In fact, as suggested earlier, many of the categories of change are intertwined. Furthermore, interviewees of course find it easiest to mention concrete changes and might not yet see the larger shift in a frame of reference to which individual changes belong.

## **2. Transformative learning according to Boyd**

In this next part, the changes experienced by participants of the EDE will be looked at through the lens of transformative learning as described by Boyd. In his conception of transformative learning, the process of individuation plays a crucial role. This involves becoming conscious of unconscious parts of the mind which influence us, and actively participating in the formation of oneself. It involves understanding one's own identity (Taylor, 2008), understanding who one really is apart from societal influences (Jacobi, 1967, as referenced in Dirkx, 2006).

The whole categories of changes lying within the cluster of the Self are very much in line with this view of transformative learning. Changes in the category of personal discovery, such as becoming more aware of oneself and discovering new parts of one's inner reality can be seen as conscious individuation. For example, thought patterns and habitual behaviour are aspects of the inner self that are brought to the conscious mind during the EDE and which are then consciously ignored or altered. This is exactly what Boyd and Myers (1988, as cited in Talyor, 1998) say: "old patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting, which previously prevented growth, have finally been discarded" (p.17). Also the idea of emotion laden images influencing the process of transformative learning can be found back in the EDE: just as in the example of a student in Boyd's learning group (as referenced in Dirkx, 2006), EDE participants project internal unresolved dilemmas onto other participants of the group and use such situations as learning opportunities.

Furthermore, changes described under the label of inner growth also contribute to forming and developing one's identity. In fact, Boyd (as summarised in Taylor, 1998) explains that "[i]ndividuation involves the discovery of new talents, a sense of empowerment and confidence, a deeper understanding of one's inner self, and greater sense of self responsibility" (p.13). This sentence basically sums up changes under the category of personal discovery and inner growth of EDE participants. The reference to new talents may also be linked to developing skills in communication and group work.

The idea of being more authentic or real during the EDE can also be paralleled to becoming what we truly are, as is the idea in Boyd's theory of transformative learning. In fact, in reference to this, it is suggested that the process of individuation allows a person to develop more authentic relationships with oneself as well as with others (Dirkx, 2006). Becoming more conscious of their own individuation process may hence contribute to the culture of honesty and authenticity which is present at the EDE.

Whereas transformative learning as described by Mezirow relies on critical reflection on one's assumptions, transformative learning as seen by Boyd involves a more contemplative process where the learner observes the own inner Self (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003). This is fitting with the onset of changes in the self of EDE participants, which is often triggered by activities or social interaction rather than through active reflection.

Overall, transformative learning as seen through the psychoanalytical view hence seems to be part of the EDE. This research suggests that transformative processes and changes relating to self-understanding and formation occur at the EDE.

### 3. Are changes experienced by EDE participants transformative?

After looking through the two lenses of transformative learning, it becomes clear that the different views lead to a different conclusion regarding which changes described by EDE participants are truly transformative learning. This section will make a more general statement about the transformativeness of the changes experienced at the EDE.

Whilst both the psychocritical (Mezirow's) and psychoanalytical (Boyd's) view see transformative learning as a learning process touching upon deeper layers of knowing, the way they conceptualise the learning process as well as focus of the learning differs. Whilst Mezirow focuses on cognitive conflicts arising between an individual and culture, Boyd is more focused on the individual's psyche (Taylor, 1998). Whilst parallels between changes experienced at the EDE can be drawn to both processes, the focus on transformative processes at the EDE relates to the Self, one's inner world and one's capacities much more than to changing one's understanding and view of culture. The changes at the EDE hence represent a larger thematic overlap with the focus of Boyd's conceptualisation, when compared to that of Mezirow.

It makes sense that there are more similarities found to the process of individuation than to changing one's frame of reference. In fact, it is probable that people participating in an EDE already have a worldview similar to this program and were hence already very conscious, critical and open minded. Indeed, most people who participated in EDEs were already very aware of sustainability and environmental issues and many talked about the need to shift society towards another way of living. Also, in terms of lifestyle and acting, many people said themselves that they did not change so much in this regard because they were already very conscious of this before. Hans also highlights *"everybody who is signing up for such a program must already have something within them that qualifies them as open-minded, open-hearted, active, interested in alternative ideas, with the desire to change the world along these directions, otherwise they wouldn't sign up, pay money for it, take the time and go do that thing."*

In fact, it is possible that some participants had transformative learning experiences before the EDE that led them onto this path. For example, a few people talk about movies which they watched and which "opened their eyes" and one participant describes how living and volunteering in an ecovillage broadened her horizons and perspectives, changing her as a person.

Whilst the frames of references regarding how one sees the world are not changed as much during the EDE, the conscious participation in the process of individuation is more prevalent. At the EDE, people who are on this path gain further support. Participants of the EDE are all in one way or another curious about creating another society or culture. The EDE is one part of this path where intense learning can happen and strengthen people and give them insights, tools and support as needed. Depending on previous experiences, this experience may be more or less transformative for people. For some, the journey into the Self may be a transformative aspect altering how one perceives oneself. For others, the community experience or meeting like-minded people and realising there is a network of change agents can be very powerful. And yet for others, their view of sustainability may become confirmed during the course, or their way of communicating and relating to others may change. Whilst not all of these aspects meet the criteria of transformative learning, this is not to say that these other changes are less important! In fact, even if not strictly fitting within the definitions of transformative learning, many of these changes can still be experienced as transformative by the individual. This raises the question whether the theory of transformative learning should include more the felt experience of the individual rather than trying to argue what

theoretically qualifies as transformative learning and what not. This also relates to various authors calling for a more holistic understanding of transformative learning (Cranton & Roy, 2003).

## VII. Conclusion

This research started out with an interest in “learning from ecovillages” and “creating sustainable societies by transforming people”. The idea was introduced that in order to address the depth of the problems which our society is facing nowadays and to move into the direction of creating more sustainable societies, our way of *seeing* and *doing* things (Sterling, 2004) needs to change. This led to transformative learning theory and Ecovillage Design Education courses – courses which promised to show transformative learning in practice. According to Gaia Education, participants of EDE courses “become change agents and sustainability designers ... as well as leading more joyful, more meaningful and healthier lives” (“EDE Programmes”, n.d.). This research hence set out to study these courses, to find out *how* and *why* people change during EDE courses, and to gain more insight into the theory and practice of transformative learning theory with regard to sustainability.

Interviews with current and past participants were carried out and one EDE course was attended to inform this research path. After detailed analysis, a large range of themes was found in response to the two main research questions: seven clusters of change illustrate how people change and six clusters of influencing factors indicate what contributes to these changes. This research found that many changes experienced at the EDE relate to developing and learning about oneself and gaining inner strengths. Empowerment and confidence in oneself are common outcomes. Skills and competencies relating to communication and interaction as well as group work and project organisation are learnt and developed. Also new insights and knowledge in relation to sustainability are obtained. After the EDE, people often start projects and spread their ideas by inspiring others’ in their life. Participants return with the knowledge that there is a large network of like-minded people and fellow change agents to whom they can reach out. Many of these changes contribute to participants becoming change agents as well as finding courage and skills to lead their life in line with their own worldview.

Many of the changes experienced as a result of the EDE are attributable to its “Living and Learning” pedagogy, to the wide array of influences from sessions, other participants, the setting and the group atmosphere. The course allows participants to experience community life, to engage in an intense and personal learning journey with fellow travellers for an extended period of time in a unique setting – in an ecovillage away from home. Sharing communal tasks, inviting and accepting the “whole person” into the space, encouraging open communication and deep sharing and practicing tools together are all influencing factors. A learning space is created that allows everyone to have plenty of opportunities to learn and explore. For this, the creation of a safe environment within the EDE group is crucial. Such an open and trusting atmosphere that encourages learners to explore themselves in relation with others is the soil on which rich learning can happen.

A few of the changes experienced by participants at the EDE can be labelled as transformative learning in line with Mezirow’s view, following the definition of a change in a frame of reference. However, it was easier to parallel changes in this study with transformative learning as seen by Boyd and the process of individuation. It is likely that transformation focusing on cultural influences (as seen by Mezirow) occurred for some participants prior to the EDE experience and led them on this path. In fact, many participants at the EDE were already conscious and critical in their worldview. However, a large amount of changes experienced at the EDE relate to unblocking personal conflicts and becoming one’s real Self, as seen in the theory of transformation of Boyd. Whilst it is interesting to compare and contrast different conceptualisations of transformative learning theory, this study reminds that it is important to remember the individual’s own perception of the transformativeness of the changes.

Through an elaborate discussion of changes and influencing factors, this case study research on EDE courses provided unique insight into transformative learning experiences. Whilst many themes in this study could be paralleled to separate literature cases, the breadth of findings in this study, the elaboration on the themes and the linking of influencing factors and changes, are unique to this study.

## VIII. Recommendations

In this chapter, I will make practical recommendations for the EDE courses (and other sustainability courses with a desire to encourage transformative learning). Furthermore, I will put forward some questions regarding research on transformative learning and suggest steps forward.

### A. Practical recommendations for EDE courses

Overall, participants really appreciate the EDE as it is and do not have many suggestions for improvement. The richness and diversity of changes experienced as a result of the course further highlight its promise of transformative potential. With its holistic design inspired by the Living and Learning pedagogy, the EDE serves as a great example of a course that helps people grow on the path of change agents for a sustainable future and transform their own lives. The main recommendation is hence for these courses to continue the same way and keep monitoring participants' feedback. I will highlight a few key aspects in which EDE courses should continue on the same way. These recommendations can be used as a guideline for facilitators of EDE and other courses. For more detail, refer to prior sections on influencing factors (Chapter VI, section B). Whilst many of these recommendations are paralleled with the influencing factors identified in this study, a few more "new" recommendations are also made.

#### During the course:

1. It's a co-living experience! The learning group should live together during the course to enable the majority of the other factors.<sup>10</sup>
2. The social setting provides a rich learning opportunity.
  - a. Encourage participants to engage in diverse social interactions, create opportunities for encounters with different constellations of people and invite participants to observe how the social dynamics influence them (e.g. how they feel, how they behave).
  - b. Create moments where participants provide feedback to each other, based on specific performance and more generally on they perceive each other. Invite participants to see this as a basis to reflect on themselves.
  - c. Introduce the idea of "mirroring" (you perceive yourself in others; others are reflecting back aspects of yourself) and invite participants to see themselves in others.
3. Personal stories and experiences provide unique learning opportunities.
  - a. Emphasise on the richness of the personal stories and the opportunity to learn from each other's experiences.
  - b. Create opportunities for participants of the EDE to talk with members of the ecovillage (e.g. organised session, common lunch).
4. Learning should be non-hierarchical, participatory and applied, it should be personal and include the whole persons.
  - a. Facilitators should use their own experience and life stories as a basis for sharing knowledge – knowledge which they "embody" and are passionate about.
  - b. Include the whole person in the learning space: ask about the "energy level", work with feelings and use body movement, such as dance.
  - c. Limit the amount of pure theoretical learning. Make learning endeavours interactive and participatory. Encourage participants to apply new knowledge and practice skills as much as possible (in the sessions, outside the sessions, during the group work).

---

<sup>10</sup> This research does not include insights from EDE formats that spread out over a year during the weekends, nevertheless it strongly suggests the importance of the communal living.

5. The course activities and set-up should be structured enough for participants to know ahead of time what is happening.
6. A secluded setting (away from normal life “outside the EDE”) can be used as a “playground” to experiment.
  - a. Set forth the idea that the EDE is a safe space away from home, which is ideal to experiment, to try new roles and step outside the comfort zone.
7. The feeling within/towards the group is important.
  - a. Activities described above and time spent together should enable intimate bonding and authentic relationships between members of the EDE.
  - b. Underline that the EDE is a “safe space”, where everyone is accepted and loved exactly as they are.
8. Enable the EDE group to organise as a community.
  - a. Organise cooking and cleaning in a communal manner.
  - b. Make decisions about the EDE course and community in a communal way, such as by using sociocracy.
  - c. Provide time for all members to meet outside the learning sessions (e.g. morning circle)
9. Co-shape the course experience.
  - a. Welcome input and initiatives from participants.
  - b. Do an inventory of interests among participants.
10. Provide time for personal reflection.
  - a. Stimulate and possibly guide reflection during the sessions.
  - b. Allow quiet time outside the sessions for further open personal reflection.

#### Before the course:

11. Managing participants’ prior expectations of the course
  - a. Make sure participants know what they sign up for:
    - i. EDE courses spend a lot of time on personal and social processes : “*it’s an inner journey more than anything else.*” (Nébesna)
    - ii. You will not come out of the course knowing exactly how to build an ecovillage, but you will learn how to start that process.
    - iii. Many concepts are introduced but they don’t go very deep into theory.<sup>11</sup>
  - b. Consider changing the name of the course – Ecovillage Design Education – to something better fitting the content and guiding expectations. Especially the word “design” seems misleading. An example for an alternative name is: Change Agents for Sustainable Communities.

#### After the course:

12. The network of EDE alumni allows people to “stay on track”
  - a. Reunion with one’s own EDE course: reconnect and exchange, dive back into the EDE “bubble”.
  - b. Local platforms of fellow (EDE-) change agents close to one’s home to enable joint project organisations.

#### Alternative course design:

13. Some participants express the wish for an extended or advanced EDE course. Main aspects which are desired are: more in-depth theory, more time to work with the individual concepts and at the same time having more free time to rest, recover and integrate the learning.

---

<sup>11</sup> For more in depth knowledge, participants can follow the online courses of Gaia Education, or consult the broad ocean of information available in books and on the internet. Facilitators will happily provide you with more information. But the focus of the course is more on the co-living experience.

## **B. Recommendations and contribution to theory on transformative learning**

This part will provide insights on research on transformative learning based on this study.

Firstly, I would like to invite careful use of the label “transformative learning”. I ask fellow researchers to clearly indicate the definition and criteria for transformative learning which they use to label outcomes in their study as transformative. In fact, whilst there were many similarities in terms of changes experienced among this study and literature cases, this study was more conservative in labelling these changes in line with transformative learning as viewed by Mezirow. In many cases, changes were not (clearly) constituting a change in a frame of reference, nor was there evidence that critical reflection on assumptions contributed to these changes.

Secondly, to aid in the implementation of the first recommendation, I believe that more clarification of the criteria for transformative learning as seen by the separate lenses would be useful. Diverse theories exist with different foci in terms of the “end result” and aim, as well as in terms of the process to achieve this. It is not always clear how to interpret the different views of transformative learning: who qualifies as “transformed”? What are the minimum criteria to be fulfilled? What if a change in a frame of reference is achieved, but this is without critical reflection on the assumptions underlying it? What do the theoretical conceptions look like in practice?

Perfectly interpreting transformative learning is further complicated by disagreements between the main authors in the field. Some have called for a holistic theory of transformative learning, incorporating all theories (Cranton & Roy, 2003). Whilst I see advantages of a merged theory of transformative learning, I also believe that since authors view transformative learning in different manners, no agreement should be forced between the different conceptualisations. Staying in communication is important and joint progress and learning from each other can still be ensured. More so, the debate should be broadened beyond theoretical interpretations to include the perception of the learners. Which changes are experienced as “transformative” by people? How far do changes experienced as transformative and those labelled as transformative according to theories overlap? And where are differences?

When it comes to “measuring” transformative learning experiences, this study further advocates a more inclusive approach. Looking for concrete (categories of) changes might miss more subtle changes and the overall picture of the transformation. To further use the analogy introduced above, researchers should attempt to observe the butterfly in the flight (Lange, 2009) – to see transformative learning in its whole as it is happening. For this, following a few learners throughout their journey in depth is suggested. Journal entries, participant observation and multiple open interviews at different points in time can be combined. To properly view the evolution of the learner, a longitudinal study with at least three meeting points would be ideal: a first meeting should take place prior to the learning experience, for the participant to familiarise herself/himself with the study and for the researcher to get some insight into the participants’ lifestyle. A second meeting should take place during the “peak” phase to note changes and thoughts in the moment. And a third meeting should take place a couple of months after the completion of the course to evaluate the long-term impact (what is remembered as significant, are changes implemented, how is the overall feeling now?). The learners should be closely involved with the research and their opinion about the “transformativeness” of their changes should be consulted to provide further insight.

## **IX. Reflections on the research**

In this chapter, research strengths and limitations will be discussed: in a first part, having a variety of participants from different locations and years will be presented as a strength, leading over to a second part on the representativeness of the participants. Thirdly, the significance of differences between EDE courses will be reflected on. Thereafter, the interviews will be discussed with regard to the depth of information shared. Also the influence of my development throughout the research will be considered. Finally, the reliability of the analysis and the theoretical interpretation will be reflected on.

### **A. Strength of mixed groups**

Having a mixed group of people who participated in the EDE in different locations allowed to see it as a worldwide occurring event and talk about it more generally than if only one EDE would have been studied. Although some differences exist between EDE experiences, having accounts from various places was valuable to see that many similarities also exist, and that indeed this phenomenon is not unique to one place. Furthermore, having accounts of participants who participated in the EDE in the past in combination with participants right at the completion of their EDE presents various strengths. People who just had the EDE have a fresh mind to recall details and people who have participated in the EDE in the past have had more time to digest the experience and possibly act on insights and make changes. This also allows to see that the changes mentioned are not simply due to the energy of the moment but carried on after the EDE as well. However, multiple of the “past participants” that I have spoken to had in fact just recently completed the EDE themselves (a few months ago). And even if more than a year had passed since their completion of the EDE, past participants sometimes noted that they had not fully integrated all changes yet. Interestingly, this is also what Trapido (n.d.) found: participants of the Estonian EDE often took a couple of years to implement changes. Another research into the transformative impact of EDEs or similar courses would benefit from a longitudinal research design that would allow to more closely observe EDE related changes in participants throughout time: if planned changes are implemented, if there are further spin-off changes, or if the changes fade away after some time.

### **B. Representativeness of EDE participants**

Further, when looking at past participants, it is also interesting to wonder whether people who responded to my e-mail are those who experienced more changes and hence felt more comfortable talking about the transformative impact of the course. Whilst this is plausible, the fact that various interviewees mentioned other people in their course for whom certain experiences were more transformative and who made more changes after the course, seems to indicate that respondents were not the most transformed individuals. Furthermore, since at the EDE in Schloss Glarisegg, I could approach different people for interviews – not only the first enthusiastic volunteers, the scope of people and experiences is widespread and does not only include a certain group but is representative of EDE participants.

Every individual participant of course experienced a different learning journey and no two interview accounts are identical: some participants talk in detail about how they changed and others briefly touch upon several areas of change. For some participants, the EDE caused many types of changes, and for others, much less (diverse) changes are experienced. In part, this diversity represents the reality that for everyone, the EDE offers a unique learning journey and changes felt by every participant vary. However, in part, this may also be influenced by the fact that some people find it easier to illustrate their experience and capture changes.

### **C. Differences due to specific EDEs**

Moreover, the representativeness of the EDE courses and differences attributed to specific EDEs can be reflected upon. Indeed, when comparing interview accounts between different EDEs, a few changes can be noticed. Firstly, the amount of changes mentioned (as seen by the number of quotes extracted from the interview during the data analysis) is highest for participants of the EDE in Schloss Glarisegg in 2018. However, this may in fact simply be because “current participants” were still freshly in the experience and could recall more details and give more elaborate accounts. Secondly, a few themes of changes (awareness about own behaviour, being open and honest) were only found in interviews of participants of the EDE in Schloss Glarisegg. It is possible that this is due to specific influencing factors of this EDE. However, it is also possible that this is simply a coincidence. Indeed, these changes are by far not mentioned by all participants of the EDE in Schloss Glarisegg. In general, multiple themes of change are only mentioned by a few people. Overall, there are no apparent differences between changes that can be attributed to specific EDE courses. Thirdly, when it comes to the organisation of the EDE and influencing factors, it is difficult to compare them without having experienced multiple EDEs. As noted previously, group size and organisation seem to differ between courses, in addition to specific choice of activities and facilitators. Whilst one participant who experienced multiple EDEs noted that these were very similar in content and set-up, another person highlighted that the EDE in Findhorn was more content-heavy, whilst the EDE in Schloss Glarisegg included more group processes and “magic of the community”. Nevertheless, multiple people mentioned that the EDE in which they participated was “special” or “unique” in one way or another. All in all, it seems that there are nuanced differences between all EDEs, but mostly, the influencing factors apply to all courses.

### **D. Interviews: stories shared and rapport**

Reflecting on the interviews themselves, I believe that an open structure allowed for people to tell their own story and what was important to them. In a few cases, very interesting comments were made at the very end, when I asked if interviewees wanted to add anything. I wonder if this information simply did not “fit” into their story before or if – as I had the impression in one case – they considered this not so important for my research. Whilst there may hence be more changes, the long and open interviews in combination with a large amount of interviewees allowed to get a deep and broad insight into many EDE experiences.

Having lived together with participants in Schloss Glarisegg, I had a close relation with them and a good trusting basis for an interview rapport. However, I also had the impression of having a good rapport with people over Skype interviews; interviewees were open and comfortable sharing their view and personal stories relating to their EDE experience. In fact, in all cases, I was positively surprised by the support and kindness of interviewees. Also, I was happy to hear from many that they enjoyed the interview and saw it as a nice reflection for themselves.

### **E. The influence of a developing participant-researcher**

Since I participated in the EDE in Schloss Glarisegg myself, I also went through a learning journey and developed during the course. Overall, I believe that this inside view is beneficial for the research, providing a deeper understanding of the experience. Having deep insight into specific activities and events that occurred at the EDE allowed me to more easily understand and “catch” comments in the interviews. It also allowed me to ask more concrete follow-up questions and adjust my probing. However, it is possible that in this way, I unconsciously drove the interview into different directions, relating it to my own subjective experience and observations.

At the same time, I gained experience at skilful interviewing throughout the research, which also influenced my ability to guide the interview. In the beginning I found it more difficult to be open to stories when they diverged a lot from my list of questions, potentially having affected what people told me. Whilst I kept my interview guide all along and asked key questions to all participants, the interview structure was more open and unstructured towards the end of the research, allowing participants to diverge more into an open talk about their experience.

#### **F. Analysis: reliability of interpretation**

Having plenty of stories from different people, the main challenge was the analysis: wanting to accurately represent everyone and deliver the magic of the experience whilst staying true and close to the data. Having carried out and transcribed the interviews myself, as well as having made notes and reread them several times, I feel that I am in a good position to talk about people's experience. However, this closeness to people and the experience can of course also influence my own judgement. I stayed particularly aware of this and relied on the interview data to guide this report.

To make the findings more robust and accurate, both a second reader of interviews for interrater reliability and validation of the findings with the interviewees would have been helpful. Sharing the report or a summary of the changes and influencing factors with interviewees and asking them to provide feedback would allow to clarify how fitting the picture painted in the report is. Due to time constraints, this was however not done.

#### **G. Theoretical interpretation / conceptualisation of findings**

A last point to reflect upon is the theoretical background holding the research findings. Whilst I did an intensive literature review on transformative learning, I have no (strong) background in education studies nor in psychology (and the understanding of human identity and selves). Someone with more expert knowledge in these domains may have represented the findings in a different structure or may have more thorough understanding of components making up personal development.

## X. Bibliography

### A

About GEN. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2017, from <https://ecovillage.org/about/about-gen/>

Andriopoulou, E. (2011). *Volunteer Travel and Learning Experiences in an Intentional Community: The Case of Sadhana Forest*. [Master Thesis, Wageningen University]. Retrieved October 9, 2017, from <http://edepot.wur.nl/176155>

### B

Baumgartner, L. M. (2001). An update on transformational learning. *New directions for adult and continuing education*, 2001(89), 15-24.

Beisser, A. (n.d.). The Paradoxical Theory of Change. Retrieved February 14, 2019, from <https://www.gestalt.org/arnie.htm>

Blake, J., Sterling, S., & Goodson, I. (2013). Transformative learning for a sustainable future: An exploration of pedagogies for change at an alternative college. *Sustainability*, 5(12), 5347-5372.

Burns, L., H. (2015). Transformative Sustainability Pedagogy: Learning From Ecological Systems and Indigenous Wisdom. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 13(3), 259-276.

### C

Capra, F. (1996). *The Web of Life*. London: HarperCollins.

Cranton, P. (2002). Teaching for transformation. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2002(93), 63-72.

Cranton, P., & Roy, M. (2003). When the Bottom Falls Out of the Bucket Toward A Holistic Perspective on Transformative Learning. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 1(2), 86-98.

Cook, R., & Cutting, R. (2014). 'Low-impact communities' and their value to experiential Education for Sustainability in higher education. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 14(3), 247-260.

Crutzen P. J. (2006). The "Anthropocene". In Ehlers, E., & Krafft, T. (Eds.), *Earth System Science in the Anthropocene* (pp. 13-18): Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg.

### D

D'Amato, L. G., & Krasny, M. E. (2011). Outdoor adventure education: Applying transformative learning theory to understanding instrumental learning and personal growth in environmental education. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 42(4), 237-254.

Dirkx, J. M. (2000). Transformative Learning and the Journey of Individuation. *ERIC Digest No. 223* (pp. 1-7). Columbus, Ohio: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. Retrieved February 14, 2019, from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED448305.pdf>

Dirkx, J. M. (2006). Engaging Emotions in Adult Learning: A Jungian Perspective on Emotion and Transformative Learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 109, 15-26.

### E

EDE Programmes. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2017, from <https://gaiaeducation.org/face-to-face/ede-programmes/>

Enkhtur, A., & Yamamoto, B. A. (2017). Transformative Learning Theory and its Application in Higher Education Settings: A Review Paper. *Osaka University Knowledge Archive* 43, 193-214.

## G

Gaia Education - Mission, Vision & Impact. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2017, from <https://gaiaeducation.org/about/mission-vision-impact/>

GEESE (Global Ecovillage Educators for a Sustainable Earth). (2012). *Ecovillage Design Education. A four-week comprehensive course in the fundamentals of Sustainability Design*. Version 5. Findhorn, Scotland: Gaia Education. Retrieved October 9, 2017, from <https://gaiaeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/EDE-Curriculum-English.pdf>

Global Ecovillage Network. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2017, from <https://ecovillage.org/>

Greenberg, D. (2015). A Living and Learning Pedagogy. In: East, M. (Ed.), *Gaia Education Report +10* (p.27). Findhorn, Scotland: Permanent Publications. Retrieved October 9, 2017, from [https://issuu.com/gaia.education.library/docs/gaia\\_10full\\_report\\_lowres/33](https://issuu.com/gaia.education.library/docs/gaia_10full_report_lowres/33)

## H

Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2011). *Qualitative research methods*. London: Sage.

## I

Illeris, K. (2014). Transformative Learning and Identity. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 12(2), 148-163.

## J

Joubert, K. (2015). Ecovillage Living – A new source of hope. [Video file]. Retrieved October 9, 2017, from <http://www.tedxgeneva.net/talks/kosha-joubert-ecovillage-living-new-source-hope/>

## K

King, N., & Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE.

Kotsos, T. (n.d.). Everyone is Your Mirror - The Greatest Relationship Secret. Retrieved January 10, 2019, from [http://www.mind-your-reality.com/your\\_mirror.html](http://www.mind-your-reality.com/your_mirror.html)

Kovan, J., T., & Dirx, J., M. (2003). "Being called awake": the role of transformative learning in the lives of environmental activists. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 53(2), 99-118.

Kunze, I. (2012). Social innovations for communal and ecological living: Lessons from sustainability research and observations in intentional communities. *Communal Societies*, 32(1), 39-55.

## L

Lange, E., A. (2009). Fostering a Learning Sanctuary for Transformation in Sustainability Education. In Mezirow, J. & Taylor, E. W. (Eds.), *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education* (pp. 193-204). San Francisco, California: Jossey Bass.

Lange, E., A. (2013). Interrogating Transformative Learning: Canadian Contributions. In Nesbit, T., Brigham, S. M., & Taber, N. (Eds), *Building on Critical Traditions: Adult Education and Learning in Canada* (pp. 91-102). Thompson Educational Publishing.

Lange, E. (2015). Transformative learning and concepts of the self: insights from immigrant and intercultural journeys, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 34(6), 623-642.

## M

Meadows, D. H. (1972). *The limits to growth: A report to the Club of Rome's project on the predicament of mankind*. New York: Universe Books.

Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New directions for adult and continuing education, 1997(74)*, 5-12.

Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult: core concepts of transformation theory. In Mezirow, J. & Associates, *Learning as Transformation. Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (pp. 3-33). San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.

## P

Parker, A. Z. & Wilding, M. D. (2012). *Transformative Learning and Sustainability*. Retrieved October 22, 2018, from <https://www.naropa.edu/documents/programs/ma-environmental-leadership/transformative-learning-and-sustainability.pdf>

Prince, S. (2017). Working towards sincere encounters in volunteer tourism: an ethnographic examination of key management issues at a Nordic eco-village. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1-16.

## R

Reddy, P. (2010). *Sustainable Agricultural Education: An Experiential Approach to Shifting Consciousness and Practices* [Dissertation, Prescott College]. Retrieved October 9, 2017, from <https://pqdtopen.proquest.com/doc/822194447.html?FMT=AI&pubnum=1483643>

Rockström, J., Steffen, W., Noone, K., Persson, Å, Chapin, F. S., Lambin, E. F., . . . Foley, J. A. (2009). A safe operating space for humanity. *Nature*, 461(7263), 472-475.

## S

Sterling, S. (2004). Higher education, sustainability, and the role of systemic learning. In Corcoran, P., B., & Wals, A. E. J. (Eds.), *Higher Education and the Challenge of Sustainability: Problematics, Promise and Practice* (pp. 49-70). The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.

Stuckey, H. L., Taylor, E. W., & Cranton, P. (n.d.). Transformative Learning Survey. Retrieved October 8, 2017, from <http://transformativelearningsurvey.com/>

## T

Taylor, E. W. (1998). Transformative Learning Theory – An Overview. In: *The Theory and Practice of Transformative Learning: A Critical Review, Information Series No. 374* (pp. 5-20). Columbus, Ohio: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. Retrieved February 14, 2019, from [https://archive.org/stream/ERIC\\_ED423422/ERIC\\_ED423422\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/ERIC_ED423422/ERIC_ED423422_djvu.txt)

Taylor, E. W. (2007). An update of transformative learning theory: a critical review of the empirical research (1999-2005), *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26(2), 173-191.

Taylor, E. W. (2008). Transformative learning theory. *New directions for adult and continuing education, 2008(119)*, 5-15.

Taylor, E. W., & Cranton, P. (2013). A theory in progress?: issues in transformative learning theory. *European journal for research on the education and learning of adults*, 4(1), 35-47.

Taylor, E. W., & Laros, A. (2014). Researching the practice of fostering transformative learning: Lessons learned from the study of andragogy. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 12(2), 134-147.

Trapido, T. (n.d.). *Gaia haridusprogrammi Eestis 2011.a. toimunud EDE kursuse tajutud mõju lõpetanutele*. [Summary]. Unpublished manuscript.

## **W**

Wals, A., & Schwarzin, L. (2012). Fostering organizational sustainability through dialogic interaction. *The Learning Organization*, 19(1), 11-27.

Wals, A. E., Tassone, V. C., Hampson, G. P., & Reams, J. (2015). Learning for walking the change: Eco-social innovation through sustainability-oriented higher education. Draft version, to be published in Barth, M., Michelsen, G., Rieckmann, M., & Ian, T. (Eds), *Handbook of Higher Education for Sustainable Development*. London: Routledge.

What is an Ecovillage. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2017, from <https://ecovillage.org/projects/what-is-an-ecovillage/>

## **Y**

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

## XI. Appendix

### A. Overview of people interviewed

Table 1: Overview of people interviewed for this study

Name	Main EDE experience	Other EDE experiences
<b>"Current" participants</b>		
Adrianna	Schloss Glarisegg, Switzerland, 2018	
Camilla (pseudonym)		
Denis (pseudonym)		
Elena (pseudonym)		
Konstantinos (Kostas)		
Mila (pseudonym)		
Tayla		
Tess (pseudonym)		
Vic		
<b>"Past" participants</b>		
Nil	Schloss Glarisegg 2016	Assistant of EDE in Schloss Glarisegg in 2017 and 2018
Rouven		
Christos	Schloss Glarisegg 2017	
Sebastian		
Thomas (pseudonym)		
Anna	Findhorn, UK, 2014	
Inge		Assistant of EDE in The Netherlands and in Schloss Glarisegg, 2018
Nébesna		Organiser and facilitator of EDE in La Cité Écologique, Canada
Florence (pseudonym)	Findhorn 2015	
Amita (pseudonym)	Findhorn 2017	
Isabella (pseudonym)		
Julie (pseudonym)		
Alagie	The Gambia 2014	Helped organise EDE in The Gambia in 2015, participant in EDE in Findhorn 2015
Hans (pseudonym)	Lost Valley, US, 2017	
Paul (pseudonym)	La Cité Écologique, Canada, year unknown	
Quinn	Orissa, India, 2017	
Mina*	Wongsanit Ashram, Thailand, 2017	
<b>Facilitators</b>		
Samantha (pseudonym)	Schloss Glarisegg	
Elisabeth	Schloss Glarisegg	
Nébesna	La Cité Écologique, Canada	

\* this interview was not included in the analysis

## B. Consent form (for past participants interviewed via Skype)

### Participation in a research project on Ecovillage Design Education courses Information and Consent

Dear graduate of Gaia Education,

This research project is part of my Master thesis at Wageningen University in the Netherlands. I am investigating the transformative impact of Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) courses. For this, I am very curious to hear about your experience during the EDE course and how this influenced your life afterwards! I would like to hear about your experience through a Skype interview that is estimated to take 30-90 minutes, depending on your availability.

With this research, I hope to make recommendations for further EDE courses and highlight best practices for education towards sustainability in general.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this research project, you can contact me at [miriam.amend-straif@wur.nl](mailto:miriam.amend-straif@wur.nl) or ask me over Skype before we start the interview.

Please read the statements below and indicate with a mark which ones you agree to.

*The statements marked with an asterisk\* are necessary to be checked in order for insights from your experience to be used for this research.*

1. \* I have read and understood the information above.
2. \* I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any point before, throughout or after the interview (until 22.02.2018) without any consequences for me.
3. \* I understand that insights from the interview will be used by Miriam Amend-Straif for her master thesis. The thesis report will be available at the library of Wageningen University; the report will also be sent to Gaia Education and to all interested participants. Additionally, insights from this research may be used for further scientific publication.  
In all cases, all information will be treated as confidential and will be anonymized (unless otherwise indicated by myself in the sixth statement).
4. \* I agree that the interview will be audio-recorded.
5.  I agree that parts of my answers may be used as quotes in the report and publications arising from this study.
6.  I want my real name to be mentioned in relation to the information which I share in the interview.
7.  I agree that the transcribed interview data can be passed on in an anonymized form to Gaia Education for follow-up research on the transformative impact of EDE courses.
8.  I would like to receive a copy of the report with the findings of this study.

Date: .....

Digital signature: .....

Thank you for your time to participate in this research!

Miriam Amend-Straif

Personal information:

- Name: .....
- Nationality: .....
- Gender: .....
- Age at time of the EDE course: .....
- E-mail address: .....
  
- Which course did you participate in?
  - Location (country, ecovillage): .....
  - Year: .....

## C. Interview guide for (past) participants

### Interview Guide for past students

#### Your life before joining the EDE

Before joining the course, how were you engaged in terms of **profession, hobbies or other projects**?

Did you have **any previous experience** with sustainability courses or living in intentional communities?

[And then in ... you joined the EDE in ...]

**Where** did you participate in the EDE course? (country, ecovillage)

**When** did you participate in the course?

Did you participate in the **full course**?

**Why** did you decide to join this EDE course? (intentions, expectations)

#### How the EDE might have changed you

What would you say are the **main things which you learnt** during the EDE? (knowledge, skills..)

#### **How do you feel the EDE experience has changed you?**

- (In terms of (knowledge, skills), values, beliefs, worldview..)
- Did you question or think about **your assumptions**?
- Did any of your **aspirations** change as a result of this course, and how? (= hopes, aims)
- Were there moments where you questioned your own habits, beliefs or values?

Inspired by this course, did you make **actual changes** in your life? Which ones and why? <sup>12</sup>

- **When** did you make these changes?
- Are there **other things which you planned** to do after the course which you did not end up doing or didn't do yet? Why?

With the EDE courses, Gaia Education has the aim that students “emerge as embodied **leaders and designers of sustainable communities**”. Can you reflect on how true this is for you?

Do you feel more (or less) **capable of changing** your life and the world around you? Why?

How has the EDE influenced your ideas about **sustainability**?

---

<sup>12</sup> Alternative question for current participants: Inspired by your EDE experience, are you planning to make any changes in your life?

### **Factors that influenced your experience**

You talked a bit already about aspects influencing your experience; however I'd still like to ask you a separate question on this:

Reflecting on your experience, why do you think the course had this impact on you? What do you think makes the EDE such an impactful experience?

Reflecting on your experience and the changes you described, why do you think the course had this impact on you? What do you think makes the EDE course such an impactful experience?

- **Living together** with the other participants and facilitators for one month is a big part of the EDE. Can you reflect on how you experienced this and how it may have influence you?  
(community, relationships, diversity, like-minded, conflict, ecovillage lifestyle, interaction with others)
  
- Can you describe any **specific moment** where you had a deep insight/revelation? Or another very impactful/influential moment?
- How do you think **the setting** shaped your experience? (nature, away from normal, ecovillage)
- How do you think the **intensity of the course** influenced your experience? (personal time, length of course)
- How do you think the **interaction with other people** throughout the course shaped your experience?
- Did you experience any **disagreement or tension** in the course that influenced your experience?
- Did you feel **challenged** during the course? How? (knowledge, thoughts, skills, values)

Were there any **other factors before, during or after** the EDE that influenced your experience?

### **If EDE was not at all influential**

What do you think kept you from experiencing the EDE as impactful?

- Can you describe any **specific moment** that you really disliked?
- *Other sub-questions can be asked as above*

### **Closing**

Do you have any suggestions of how the course could be **improved**?

(changes in the preparation stage, course program, in the follow-up stage)

Is there **anything else you would like to tell** about your experience to help understand the transformative impact of this course?

Thank you very much for your time and sharing your experience!

**Do you have any further questions or comments?**

**Can I contact you if I have follow-up questions?**

## D. Interview guide for facilitators

### Interview Guide organisers and facilitators

#### Your participation in the courses

Could you start by telling me a little bit about how you are involved in the EDE courses?

- When did you start organizing/facilitating?
- How many courses have you participated in?
- Where?
- Your role?

Why did you decide to organize / become a facilitator for EDE courses?

#### The impact of the courses

What do you want participants to **learn** through the EDE?

Can you reflect on how participants of EDE courses **change** throughout the course?  
(behaviour, values, knowledge, confidence, empowerment, action capability)

With the EDE courses, Gaia Education has the aim that students “**emerge as embodied leaders and designers of sustainable communities**”. Can you reflect on how true this is?

Reflecting on your own experiences and observations of other participants, what do you think makes EDE courses such an **impactful experience** for many participants?

As a facilitator/ organizer of EDE courses, what do you think are the most important **aspects to consider**? (Own competencies, role)

#### How the courses influenced you

How do you experience the EDE courses **yourself**? How impactful are they for you? Do you feel that you change through them?

#### Closing

What would you say are the main **similarities and differences** between the EDEs you participated in?

Do you have any **suggestions** of how the course could be improved?

Is there **anything else** you would like to tell about your experience to help understand the transformative impact of EDE course?

Thank you very much for your time and sharing your experience!

Do you have any further questions or comments?

E. Diagrams showing links between the clusters of change and the influencing factors

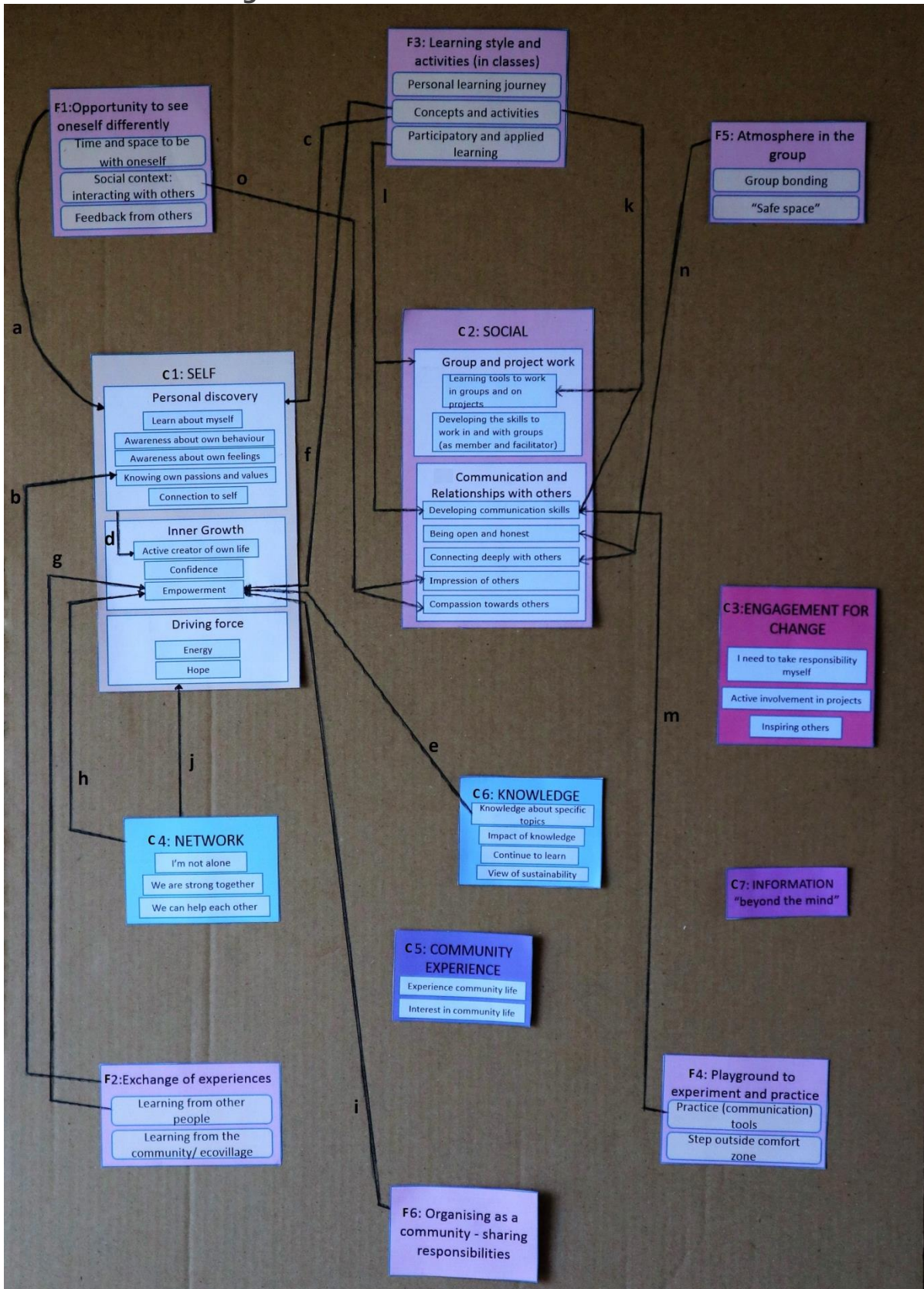


Figure 2: Diagram showing the links between the clusters of change and influencing factors from arrow a to arrow o

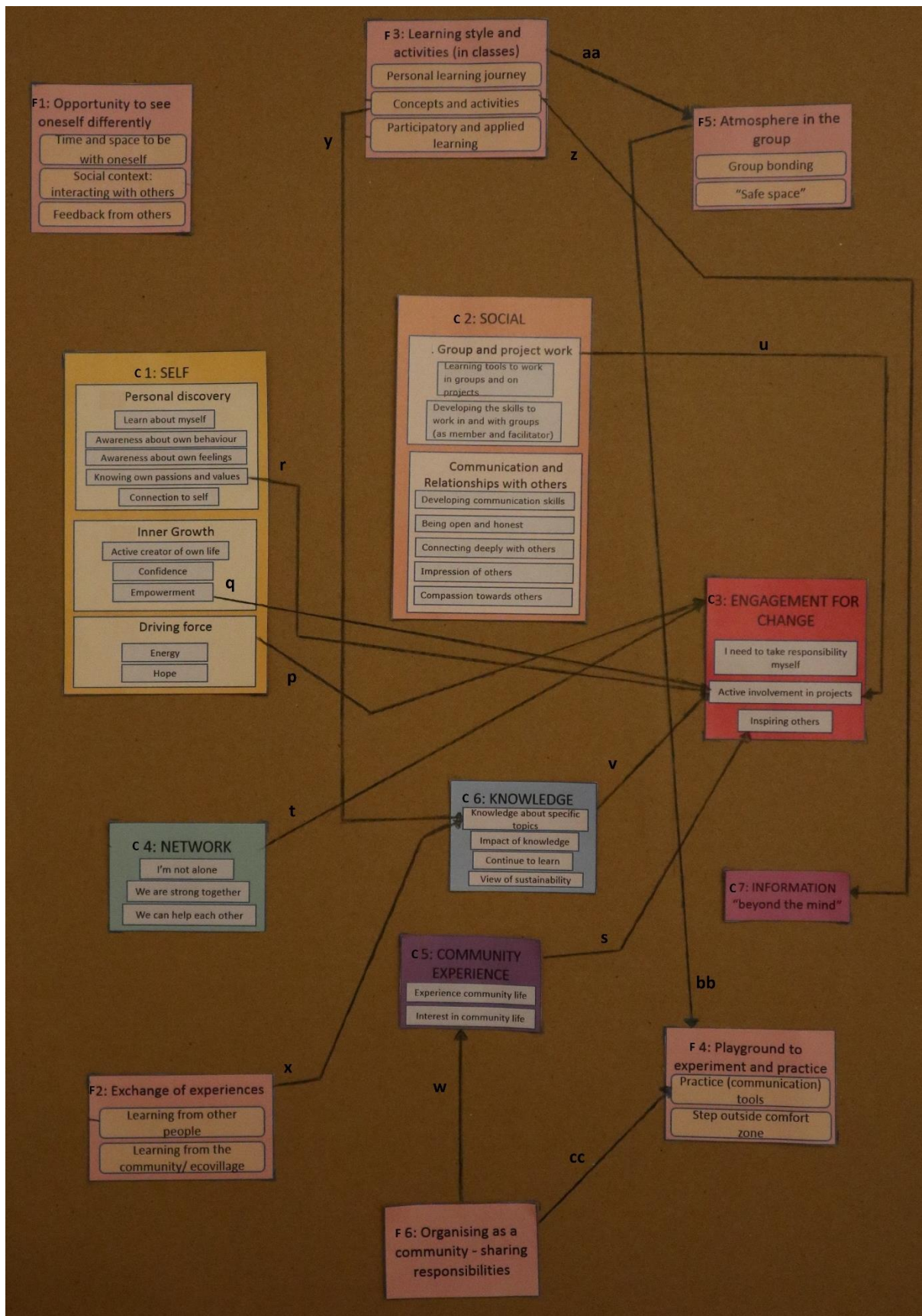


Figure 3: Diagram showing the links between the clusters of change and influencing factors from arrow p to arrow cc

The arrows in Figure 2 and 3 go from one category --> to another category as indicated below:

- a) opportunity to see oneself differently --> personal discovery
- b) exchange of experiences --> knowing own passion and values
- c) concepts and activities --> personal discovery
- d) personal discovery --> active creator of own life
- e) knowledge about specific topics --> empowerment
- f) concepts and activities --> empowerment
- g) learning from other people --> empowerment
- h) network --> empowerment
- i) organising as a community, sharing responsibilities --> empowerment
- j) network --> driving force
  
- k) concepts and activities --> group and project tools + communication skills
- l) participatory and applied learning --> group and project work + communication skills
- m) Practice tools --> communication skills
- n) Atmosphere in the group --> being open and honest + connecting deeply with others
- o) social context --> impression of others + compassion towards others
  
- p) driving force --> engagement for change
- q) empowerment --> active involvement in projects
- r) knowing own passions and values --> active involvement in projects
- s) community experience --> inspiring others
- t) network --> engagement for change
- u) group and project work --> active involvement in projects
- v) knowledge about specific topics --> active involvement in projects
  
- w) organising as a community --> community experience
  
- x) exchange of experiences --> knowledge about specific topics
- y) concepts and activities --> knowledge about specific topics
  
- z) concepts and activities --> information "beyond the mind"
  
- aa) learning style --> group atmosphere
- bb) group atmosphere --> playground to experiment and practice
- cc) organising as a community --> practice (communication) tools