Gaia education
Design for Sustainability

report

July 7th to August 7th

EDE course 2017

At La Cité Écologique in Québec

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Wing/EDE EDE course 2017 at la Cité Écologique
Course overview

Our summer EDE course was, once again, a success! Offered by the C.A.P. Eco-Community team at the ecovillage La Cité Écologique in Quebec, the program ran from July 7th to August 7th. This month-long ecovillage immersive course optimally accompanied participants in the design of their projects.

The students took part in this program wishing to be better equipped to realize their dream of living in a new society. Several members of La Cité Écologique have greatly contributed by connecting the students with the host community. They offered workshops in their areas of expertise: organic farming, holistic health, permaculture, education, sustainable forestry management and so on. Other teachers from the region were invited to contribute to the curriculum objectives. As so, a Metis Micmac teacher talked about the reconnection with local traditions and a funding member of an periurban ecovillage shared his expertise.

Throughout the training, the concept of sustainable development has been visited through practical workshops, theoretical classes and study time sessions. All learning were integrated into the development of two concrete new ecovillage related projects: “Ainés-Écolos”, a village for elderly, and “AcuaPROnie”, an aquaponic coop.

For this third edition of our EDE, we think it was our best one regarding organization, the content of the workshops and the flow between the different facilitators. We made some adjustments to specific workshops, added material for personal studies and added activities regarding alternative urban communities and green building that were a perfect match.

Quick overview of our host site: La Cité Écologique

The ecovillage La Cité Écologique is located in Ham-Nord in the region of les Bois-Francs in Quebec. Its residents give priority to education, sustainable development and respect for life. Established more than thirty years ago, the community now counts 80 residents, ten businesses and an alternative school. Visitors and interns are welcomed within an eco-tourism program.

From the beginning, the school has been the dynamic center and core of the ecovillage. It has emphasized team building and collaboration among students, as well as parental involvement. The school covers primary education through secondary education. It focuses on the balance between the three parts of a human being: the will, the intellect, and the heart. Early on, students have the chance to operate businesses in which the educational principles are grounded. Over time, the community became known for its abundance of youth-run businesses, including some that focus on organic farming, health services, ecological clothing, meaningful gifts and by now, a learning center. This training center offers dynamic practical trainings inspired by ecovillage lifestyle. This team wishes to empower its participants with the skills needed to kick off ecological and social changes in their communities.
Participants

Eight participants joined the course for a week or four. During the EDEs, we have to talk about multigenerational relations, well, this year we fully experienced that topic, since our participants were aged between 18 and 67 years old. What a great experience!

Backgrounds

Diversity was also present in the various backgrounds and nationalities represented. Our elder participant had studied in animation and law and was originally from France. The youngest one was from an ecovillage in USA. Also represented in our group was someone from Hong Kong and another metis from African and Arabian families. Regarding the study fields covered within the group, we can mention: anthropology, theology, green buildings, town planning and environment.

Regarding gender ratio, we had just two guys on the team. Maybe we need to see if we can adjust our promotion...but last year, we had a stronger male majority... It is a point we will be looking at closely.

Course rhythms

The students had the opportunity to start the day with a yoga session. Then, meetings, participatory workshops and/or theoretical classes were offered. Informative games were organised to maintain a dynamic atmosphere. Lunches were served in the community hall, giving the ecovillage members a chance to meet and chat with newcomers. During the afternoon, classes continued focussing more on the practical skills and studio design time. In the evening, the students, the facilitators and the residents organized dinners and activities in order to go deeper in the exchanges. Open discussions ended the week allowing students to talk about their impressions and feelings, exchange on what they had learned and enjoyed or would like to adjust for the coming week. Overall, students dedicated 125 hours in workshops and lectures, 20 in study time and 25 in practical sessions. Furthermore, the participates had the opportunity to join four optional field trips during the weekends. Those included a suburban ecovillage, a local eco-building neighbourhood and an alternative urban art community.

Highlights & challenges of each dimension

Overall, we are verry happy with the unfolding of this 3rd edition of the EDE. Once again, the closing ceremony was celebrated during La Cité's open-house day, this is a winner! Students then had the chance to discuss with nearly 150 visitors who were curious about ecovillages and the course. It was also the time when we chose to give the certificates and scholarships. This day and the meetings with previous EDEs graduates were the most powerfull moments.

In the next lines, we are inviting you to look closer to the highlights of each week.
Social Highlights

As our main facilitators for this first week, we had Nébesna and Marianne. Nébesna is the main organizer and hostess. She is sharing her passion for collective lifestyle and her experience of growing up in an ecovillage. Her main focus of interest is the interconnection and balance between each dimension of sustainable living. During the full month she was facilitating the sessions connecting together all classes. With her overview vision, she also presented different ways of implementing the learnings and drew ideas from the 20 communities she visited (including Findhorn Foundation in Scotland where she followed her EDE training). Marianne’s passion includes dynamics among groups and between different communities and networks. She focuses her studies around personal and inter-personal communications and relations skills. She explores the concept of different perspectives based on fundamental values. Dynamic, funny, profound and artistic are the qualifications of her workshops. She is also the co-host of the all courses and stays with the team all through the month offering her conflict resolution consultations and cooking superpower.

Our highest moment of this week was the birthday celebration of one of our participant; everyone participated in cooking an amazing pancake buffet, we ate together and ended the night with a drumming circle! So much fun 😊

Included in the week’s topics we covered: team building, the 7 keys of success, conflict resolution, positive communication and collaborative governance. It was also during that week that each participant presented their dreams and projects. After, we built the working groups for the Design Studio Cases.

“Exciting tools to be discovered, plus hopeful and fascinating presentations. I am so grateful!!”
- Michèle

Economic Highlights

Social entrepreneurship, international and local economic mechanisms, alternative local currencies, laws and land management, crowd funding and marketing storytelling – what a full week! Our second dimension was probably the most intense. One appreciated workshop was about marketing since it was offering direct inputs into the design of the Studio Cases, such as working on the logos. The success was also due to the dynamism and professionalism of the teacher, Marty.

Marty was invited from Valhalla Coop near Montreal to present the marketing aspects including social crowd funding, storytelling and social media management. During a panel on social entrepreneurship, the students discussed with Marie-Josée, the president of our main business, Kheops International, and Dobrina and Benoit our main accountants. They presented different business models for ecovillages and business plans to support the financial aspect.

One amazing day of that week was the introduction to economic dynamics with two participants from our first EDE! Mylène and Baptist are social workers and researchers really involved in the economic component of sustainability; including social justice, fair-trade, international transactions and voluntary simplicity initiatives in Montreal.

“The information was applicable and very relevant. I really enjoyed!”
- Arya
Worldview Highlights

Our main facilitator invited for this worldview dimension was Riel. He is a Metis Micmac presenting the cultures of nations living in harmony with the Forest. He presented the dynamics of social life in those communities, the governance, the education, the building systems and the villages design. Wow! Amazing, he is an example of living traditions, of patience and of humility. He truly inspired the participants to reconnect with this rich heritage of our ancestry. During that day, we had the brilliant idea to invite all de kids of the ecovillage to build the Goöom (the traditional conic building) with us. That was such a strong and inspiring moment!

The other workshops and activities included were: arts, socially engaged spirituality (through participatory facilitation with the four elements), reconnection with Nature and holistic health. This year again, based on last years’ success, we added time to work on the gathering of text-books for communities in Africa. Plus, we added a workshop on Mayan astrology that was highly appreciated. Over all, that week allowed more private time and personal reflection moments – which is always needed at that point in the course.

For the first time, we decided to add an optional visit to an art community in Montreal during the opening weekend. This was really nice; it gave us the chance to do some arts in a relaxed way. It also showcased another style of community and made the participants feel a different urban energy. We will definitively keep that idea in mind for our next EDE courses.

“Games, time alone and arts activities helped us to integrate the learnings. Plus, they lightened up the week.”
- Lynda

Ecological Highlights

As our main facilitators for that last week, we received Dr Christian Gueymard a professional solar energy consultant. Fred, from Solution ERA team, was also present to talk about affordable-sustainable building design offering a lifestyle of abundance. For the permaculture and organic farming aspects, we met with Gloria who is studying and volunteering on farms for the last five years. Born at the ecovillage, she is now exploring sustainable food production wishing to eventually become our main gardener.
During that week, we also took some time to go back in each dimension to fully integrate the whole system approach to the Studio Cases. It was also the moment we prepared ourselves for the closing ceremony and the project presentation during the open house day of the host ecovillage.

“I have gained valuable tools that can be applied in any area of my future activities.”

- Arya

The four-week challenges

Regarding our main challenges, we have to say that it was always related to fitting all the contents we wanted to include in each week. Since our first year, we added some important workshops and worked on giving more theoretical content (ex.: on decision-making processes, on green building and on international economic systems). Those adjustments were done after some feedbacks of past participants wishing to go deeper in those subjects. We are really happy with those adjustments, but they also make the schedule heavier. And this year, we had requests for lighter sessions... We will need to look closely at the schedule for next year to fully balance the needs of the heart, mind and will.

The closing ceremony

Again, we closed the EDE course with a celebration with the whole community. Participants were invited to present their learnings, projects and journey with the ecovillage members and with visitors of the open-house-day. Nearly 200 people were present that day and assisted to the EDE overview presented in a PowerPoint by Nébesna. The day ended with the delivery of the certificates of completion.

Design

Here is a brief presentation of our two Studio Cases developed during the program. We are looking forward to hearing more from them!
“AcuaPROnie”

“AcuaPROnie“ mission is to achieve food and energy self-sufficiency through technological resilience. This project aims for the production of organic vegetables with an ethical and sustainable approach via an aquaponic Coop. It wishes to set an example by sharing activities that promote the appreciation of good food grown in a responsible, fair and transparent way.

The larger project unfolds in two main steps:
1. Establishing an urban aquaponic system to raise funds for the development of a future ecovillage in the countryside. Vegetables, fishes and local products will be sold in a "Café" style business. Training, visits and internship opportunities will also be offered.
2. Establishing a self-sufficient ecovillage, with the Coop revenues, both in terms of food and energy. It would be an egalitarian community with a decision-making system based on consensus allowing all members to participate.

Why aquaponic? Because it is an ecosystem on its own. It may be a challenge at first, but it is a good solution for the upcoming problems related to the destruction of our ecosystem due to conventional food production. Plus this system:
- cannot use any chemical products without risking destroying the ecosystem that is created.
- only requires 5% of the water used in conventional agricultural food production.

Find the full presentation of the project in French here.

“Écovillage Aînés-Écolos”

“Aînés-Écolos“ is an ecovillage project that seeks to build a community for seniors wishing to age together alternatively and sustainably. Nowadays, there are many seniors who would like to or have already begun to change their lifestyle, habits, and diet, in order to live more sustainably. However, unfortunately, they reside in an unsatisfactory or unsupportive social environment. Thus, “Aînés-Écolos“ brings a solution, with its intentional community located in the countryside. There, the collective goal is to live simply and conscientiously in harmony with nature. The core values of the community are to cultivate respect, implement a mutual support network, and promote organic farming, natural therapy and spiritual practices. These socio-ecological values and the desire to remain active are reinforced by regular communal activities and services within the community. To encourage exchanges with the surrounding neighborhood, the members are invited to share their ecological knowledge and sustainable practices. Additionally, it is the community's utmost priority to actualize sustainable development by maximizing shared resources, renewable energy and energy-efficient construction. Furthermore, the community seeks on attaining food self-sufficiency from the harvests of its organic gardens. Ultimately, “Aînés-Écolos“ ecovillage offers a way of growing older filled with purpose for those who wish to flourish in optimal health and contribute positively to society and the environment.

Find the full presentation of this project in French here.
Lessons learned - notes for future benefit

As mentioned in the challenges paragraph, we will need to look closely at the schedule for the next years and add more breathing sessions. One change we will make for sure is to move the more intense intellectual workshops in the mornings and be sure they are followed by lighter sessions to allow a better balance.

This year, we also experienced the early departure of two participants, including one project holder. That urged us to adjust our classes and especially rearrange the Studio Cases study time. Finally, we were able to give enough support for the new group to work things out. They did a great job catching up and the final document looks great, it will be extremely useful in the next steps of that vital project. Regarding the lessons learned from that, we will need to be taking our time to find the best solutions. For now, here are our main reflections regarding that situation: first, we need to improve our presentation of the course so participants better know what they are getting into; second, we will have to work on the team building before we define the Cases Studio teams and/or have a better preparation for an extra plan in the event one group or project get dissolved.

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Overall evaluation

Key trends from our evaluation forms

Here are the key trends from the students’ evaluations.

Everyone agreed that the course was relevant, interesting and offering solutions for daylife afterwards. Most participants agreed that the information, material and introduction at the beginning were good, but there was a need to better present the different way classes are taught. We are looking for ideas regarding that specific aspect of preparation. Otherwise, classes content was highly appreciated and all workshops have a high score rate regarding interest and presentation. Some, such as the money game, will need better framing in order to fit different learning styles among participants.

The most appreciated aspect was the facilitators, teachers and intervenors qualites such as professionalism, adaptability, listening skills and giving and receiving feedbacks.

Best projects and activities

Here are the two best activities we did each week:

Social; participatory governance and conflict resolution
Economic; fair trade game and marketing storytelling
Cultural; reconnecting with local indigenous culture and walk to the village’s waterfalls
Ecological; sustainable forestry management and visit to a local eco-building neighbourhood

Furthermore, the day they really appreciated was the participatory facilitation games with the four archetypes where they had the chance to better connect. Also, the last day was amazing; they simply wrote down all the subjects and activities they would have liked to do or dig deeper, and they collectively built a fulfilling day!

Financial information

Again it was a tight year; the course was made possible due to a lot of volunteering teaching hours and three main donors who supported us with sponsorships and scholarships.
Here is a resume of our income and expenses:

+ 9 250 from the registrations
+ 1 500 from bursaries
+ 1 050 from donations

**11 800$** income

- 1 205 for taxes
- 2 565 for food
- 7 000 for external teachers, transport and material
- 1 000 for internal teachers

**11 770$** expense

For a benefit of 30$

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**Participant quotes**

Here are some of our participants’ comments after the course:

“What a wonderful month spent in a beautiful place with equally wonderful people. It is impressive the amount of information we received and the quality of the various facilitators, not to mention the fact that through all this we had the privilege of experiencing an immersion in this great ecovillage. And, as if it was not enough, it allowed us to make introspection, thanks to the numerous reflection moments. It is a beautiful gift to give yourself.”

*Again thank you to the whole team.*

- Lynda

“Flatsharing, immersive workshops and intergenerational teamwork in the Studio Cases project have provided me with concrete learning. That has been helping me to integrate theories and principles, especially the challenges and their solutions to live in harmony among various people.”

*Thanks.*

- Michèle

“The EDE experience was amazing because it not only provided me with practical solutions to catastrophic problems, but also initiated in me immense personal growth.”

*Thank you!*

- Arya
Conclusion

All the C.A.P. Eco-Community team and the members of the ecovillage are very proud of this powerful month. We are already beginning to prepare a next EDE for the summer of 2018.

We are giving a huge thanks to all those who participated to this success; the facilitators, the volunteers, the participants, the members of the community that received the participants during the ecovillage exploratory sessions and all the members of La Cité Écologique.

Congratulations Arya, Michèle, Lynda, Leah and Marc-Antoine
It was a pleasure meeting you, we are sure our roads will meet again, may we fly together soon!

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