



Imagining transformation otherwise

Case studies of
learning practices



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The project aims at mobilizing and strengthening civil society worldwide to innovate for more transformative Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and advocate for the realization of target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Bridge 47 Network brings people of various backgrounds together to learn from each other and collaborate across sectors. Get more info and join the network on: www.bridge47.org

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Introduction

THIS PUBLICATION FEATURES ten case studies of organizations and initiatives from around the world that are committed to bringing about positive changes in society and strive to do that in different ways. Working in diverse social, cultural and political contexts, the organizations and initiatives presented in this publication seek to address the systemic inequalities, injustices and harm they perceive as important. They strive to do that in ways that correspond to their analysis of the problems, their respective theories of change and their available means and resources. Although highly diverse in the ways they approach social change, these organizations and initiatives emphasize the importance of learning and unlearning in their work. This applies in equal measure to those initiatives with an explicitly education-oriented mission and to those that work on other approaches to social change, such as different practices of (internal) organizational transformation.

Transformative education is a term with many interpretations. In this publication it refers to those educational and learning practices that seek to bring about positive change in the beliefs, perceptions, dispositions, understandings, relations and methods of individuals, organizations and larger social systems. This positive change is generally understood to be calibrated towards greater sobriety, maturity, discernment and accountability in the shared struggle against multi-faceted global injustices, inequalities and unsustainability. Not all transformative practices necessarily embody an explicit global justice focus, but when we look at them through the prism of global (citizenship) education, we are interested in exploring how their transformative potential can be mobilized in such ways.

The text has been created with three main intentions and three corresponding audiences in mind. The first intention is to help facilitate the emergence of conversations about the importance and value of transformative education in the wider civil society sector. In this, it wishes to engage especially those who work in civil society organizations whose mandate and general social purpose are perhaps not explicitly tied to the struggle for global justice, but who are beginning to see that we need a deeper, more rigorous and more holistic engagement with the rising complexity, inter-relatedness and scale of the problems and challenges our societies are facing. Such an engagement will undoubtedly require a lot of deep learning and unlearning for individuals and organizations alike.

The second intention is to offer some inspiration and “breath of fresh air” to those who have been engaged in the work of transformative/global education and global justice for a long time and are struggling with the many paradoxes and contradictions they observe in their work. After some time, people can become frustrated and exhausted with working in ways that cannot deliver the kind of change and transformation they would like to see happening. Such readers, we hope, will find inspiring examples in this booklet that can help them re-imagine their practice, or at the very least, encourage them to explore other possibilities in more depth.

The third intended audience is young people who may be considering entering the world of civil society organizations (CSOs), either by starting their own initiatives or by joining existing ones. To those, this booklet can demonstrate that the world of CSOs and socially transformative practices is a diverse one, and that although it may seem difficult at first to find an initiative that speaks their

language, there are many approaches and practices to choose from, and they can always be combined and re-articulated in novel ways.

Readers who are just starting to dip their toes into the fields of transformative education and global justice may find this first part of their journey challenging. Although this text will try to bring you up to speed with the current conversations, there may still be words and expressions you may not be familiar with, or specific analyses and propositions you may not agree with or consider to be too radical or irrelevant for your purpose. Please do not let yourselves be discouraged by this. There is always great learning potential to be tapped when we meet with understandings and ways of thinking and being that are different from our own or even completely unknown, but it usually requires a degree of conscious effort.¹ The case studies presented in this text were not chosen as universally applicable models to be followed or replicated, but as examples of how things are done differently elsewhere, and how these examples may inspire our own learning by helping us identify and better understand some of the issues we may have been struggling with, but perhaps could not articulate fully.

Readers will inevitably find some examples more useful, inspiring and relevant for the context of their work than others. Individual responses to particular case studies will most likely be related to the extent to which each reader finds the presented case studies relatable, familiar and aligned with their existing beliefs, ideas, investments and perceptions. This alignment is not necessarily related to similarity of context in which the featured initiatives operate, but to the relatability of the

Readers will inevitably find some examples more useful, inspiring and relevant for the context of their work than others.

kind of worldviews and ways of thinking and being guiding the work of a particular organization or initiative. For instance, some readers working in the international development sector will find great inspiration in the work of initiatives that critique the very notion of development, while other such readers may be more inspired by initiatives that seek to transform the way the international development sector works from the inside. Both groups of readers would be interested in change and transformation of the existing practices, but, depending

on their understanding of the nature of the systemic issues they are trying to address within their own particular context, they will not necessarily agree on the best way forward. These differences should not represent a problem, as long as we remain aware that we do not have to agree on a single way forward, and as long as we can agree to a commitment to learn to “dig deeper and relate wider” in whatever it is that we do. Depending on how satisfied and comfortable we are with the current state of affairs in our area of work and our societies at large, we may find ourselves to be more or less aligned with the analyses and propositions of initiatives that more or less radically challenge our personal worldviews and the worldviews of those around us.

When we are working with difficult knowledge – that is, the kind of knowledge that challenges our existing perceptions, beliefs, understandings and dispositions, we tend to approach such knowledge in two main ways. In the first, we mobilize different strategies of denial, deflection and de-valuation, so that we can continue to believe whatever it is we want to believe in. In the second, we try to learn from our resistance to what we are being taught. In the first option, we may

¹ Readers who feel they are not sufficiently familiar with terms such as global citizenship education, global education, global justice, transformative education and others, are invited to have a look at the *Global Citizenship Education (GCE) for Unknown Futures* (Bridge 47, 2019) report that preceded this publication. The GCE for Unknown Futures report explains the different understandings and approaches to global citizenship education and how they relate to different ways people engage in the struggle for global justice. For those that might be interested in learning more about the practices and methodologies of transformative education are invited to explore also the *Transformative Learning Journeys: Venturing into the Wilds of Global Citizenship Education* (Bridge 47, 2020) publication.

acknowledge the mere existence of understandings and beliefs different to our own, but we do not really mobilize their teaching and transformative potential. In the current context, when a significant part of our interactions happens within the algorithmically selected information bubbles and echo chambers of various social media platforms, it is becoming more and more difficult to be exposed (intentionally or unintentionally) to opinions and perceptions that are profoundly different from our own. For this and other related reasons, such as a widespread but highly contested belief that learners should be the sole authors of their own learning journeys, our capacities to engage with difficult knowledge in generative, respectful and equivocal ways are being considerably diminished. In educational literature, critical scholars such as Gert Biesta suggest that we need to learn how to move from a learner-centred disposition that primarily seeks to consume knowledge for self-affirmation and self-realization to a different kind of disposition that decentres the learner and opens us to being taught by the world and its contradictions, paradoxes, uncertainties and complexities.² Such a disposition is difficult to embody, because it goes against the established reward mechanisms in our neural networks that have been built to flood our bodies with comforting chemicals such as dopamine and oxytocin every time we receive confirmation of our existing beliefs, and with agitating chemicals such as cortisol and adrenaline every time we encounter something that goes against our established assumptions and beliefs. It takes a lot of conscious effort to be able stay focused, sober and discerning under such circumstances and to try to go against what is perceived as more pleasurable, comforting and effortless.

In the second disposition, rather than selectively looking for things that will confirm our existing beliefs, we try to explore what the unexpected things we are being taught are. We may not like or agree with the particular teachings that are emerging, but we are learning to acknowledge our resistance to difficult knowledge and try to see these acts of resistance as important teachers. This does not mean we have to agree uncritically with or even fully understand the things that do not align with our existing worldviews and dispositions, but it does mean we are trying to open up the possibility of being taught by the kind of responses that emerge within us when we meet with propositions that challenge our existing ways of thinking about and being in the world. Depending on their personal and professional backgrounds, readers may find some of the examples from the case studies to be personally and professionally challenging in such ways. For instance, those who believe that our modern societies, despite their minor or major shortcomings, still represent the best possible, or even the only imaginable world, might find that belief being challenged by the work of those initiatives grounded in deeper critiques of modernity, colonialism, systemic racism, heteropatriarchy, neoliberal capitalism, nation-states, human exceptionalism, and compulsory modern/formal schooling. Other readers might perceive the promises of modern societies for wellbeing, equality, justice and prosperity not only as broken, but also as false from the outset. They may find some of the case studies that do not directly challenge the mainstream narratives of continuous progress and development not to be critical or radical enough for them. If either of these two things happens, please remember that you do not have to agree with any of the initiatives, critiques or propositions. Instead, you are invited to explore what it is that their examples and your potential resistance to their suggestions may be

Depending on their personal and professional backgrounds, readers may find some of the examples from the case studies to be personally and professionally challenging.

2 See: Biesta, G. J. (2015). *Beautiful risk of education*. Routledge.

trying to teach you. For those less familiar with words such as modernity, coloniality and neoliberalism, there is also a glossary at the end of this booklet explaining them in some detail.

The overarching purpose of this publication is thus to showcase the diversity of approaches to transformative education and social change as they emerge from the different contexts and logics that inspire, guide, and sometimes also set limits to the practical work of these organizations and initiatives. Rather than being a collection of best practices, this publication strives to offer a selection of next practices, that is, practices that can inspire others to develop their own approaches to social change and transformation that are relevant, culturally sensitive and sensible within their particular contexts.

Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who writes about connections between the struggle for social justice and the struggle for cognitive (or intellectual) justice, states that today, above everything else, what we need is not more alternatives, but alternative thinking of alternatives.³ One of the things this statement implies is that we should focus on the lessons alternatives bring rather than seeing them as recipes to be followed. Rather than seeing alternatives as models that should be either replicated, scalable or readily replicable and adaptable across the spectrum of different possible contexts, we should see them for what they are: particular and situated responses to particular situations. In this sense it is more important to learn about why certain alternatives work in certain contexts, how these contexts and responses emerged, what challenges, complexities and paradoxes are at work in these contexts, and what lessons can be drawn from big and small achievements and failures. Especially when working with non-Western or Indigenous alternatives, we need to be attentive on the one hand, to patterns of deficit theorization (when we see other communities as lacking or lagging what we understand as progress), and on the other hand, to romanticization (when we imagine these communities as representative of an idealized standard of humanity). We should also be attentive to patterns of appropriation and extraction that happen when we want alternatives to offer solutions and hope can appease our anxieties about the future.

This publication was commissioned by Bridge 47, which receives funding from the European Commission. Bridge 47 was created to connect people and organizations from different sectors of civil society from all parts of the world around the topics of transformative education and global justice. Although transformative education is a connecting thread that brings together the work of various members of the Bridge 47 network, not all network members come from organizations with an exclusively educational background. Many of the members come from civil society organizations that also work on advocacy, campaigning or research, or provide services and support for different marginalized communities. Many of them do educational work on specific thematic areas, such as sustainability education, or anti-racism education, peace education, human rights education and many other topics. The work of Bridge 47 has been described by some participants in Bridge 47 events and activities as an attempt at “dancing between the established silos” and this is also the approach adopted in this publication. One of the main goals of Bridge 47 is to build bridges between different sectors of civil society, including between civil society organizations and the public and private sectors. Those that have been involved in any of Bridge 47’s activities will likely have realized that building such bridges is by no means an easy task. It requires a commitment to building long-lasting partnerships and developing a shared capacity to move beyond our collective and individual comfort zones. In organizing large-scale international and cross-sectoral events, Bridge 47 members have had ample opportunity to learn about the importance of appropriate facilitation of such encounters. We hope readers will

3 See: de Sousa Santos, B. (2018). *The end of the cognitive empire: The coming of age of epistemologies of the South*. Duke University Press.

find this publication as welcoming to diverse interests and orientations as the most generative Bridge 47 events and related initiatives have reportedly been.

As mentioned initially, this publication is primarily intended for those who wish to learn more about what kind of educationally, socially, institutionally or personally transformative work is being done by other organizations outside their immediate professional contexts. For those already working on transformative education-related topics and projects, the case studies presented here can offer new sources of insight and inspiration in their work. For those who are only starting to dip their toes in these waters, this publication is meant to offer an insight into the diversity and plurality of approaches to transformational education, global justice and social change.

The research that informs this publication extends and builds upon previous research commissioned by Bridge 47 and published under the title *Global Citizenship Education (GCE) For Unknown Futures: Mapping Past and Current Experiments and Debates* (Bridge 47/Suša, 2019). The *GCE for Unknown Futures* report engaged with a multitude of global-citizenship-education-related topics, including different understandings of the concept of GCE, a cartography of GCE-related initiatives, projects and partnerships from across the world, and a mapping of different approaches to GCE. Although this original research featured a cartography of inspiring GCE-related initiatives, projects and partnerships, limitations of space did not allow for an in-depth presentation of case studies that would help make visible the gifts and limitations of these different approaches to transformative education and social change that originate from vastly different socio-cultural contexts. This was particularly unfortunate because approaches to personal and institutional transformation such as capacity building and professional development, types of outreach activities and advocacy, organizational ethos and vision and format of internal organization, differ vastly among these different organizations and initiatives, and there is substantial learning potential to be tapped through learning about how and why the various initiatives and organizations that operate in contexts of high and low-intensity struggles⁴ approach their work very differently.

This publication seeks to address this gap by introducing a series of case studies of approaches to personal, institutional and cultural/systemic transformation that the featured initiatives have developed over time. These case studies were developed through a series of interviews with the representatives of the featured organizations and initiatives, as well as through an analysis of other supportive materials. All the direct quotes in the individual case studies were selected from these conversations, and the interviewees also kindly provided all the accompanying visual materials. Following the thread of the conversations, each case study explains what kind of change and transformation these organizations and initiatives are trying to bring about – what the focus of their work is, what they want their work to do in the world, how they try to do that, what the most important lessons they have already learned are, and which difficulties they continue to grapple with. Their experiences should not be taken as recipes to be followed directly, but as stories, we can sit with and learn from, without a need to replicate them in their existing form. An initial mapping of featured initiatives presented below offers a first impression of the different approaches to transformative education and organizational and systemic change presented in this publication.

4 In this text, the term ‘high-intensity struggle’ refers to those contexts where people’s lives and livelihoods are directly threatened by state-sanctioned modern-colonial violence. The term ‘low-intensity struggle’ refers to contexts where people are still enjoying the relative protection and comforts of modernity (the social security of the welfare state) that are made possible through the externalization of violence elsewhere. Different groups in different countries can find themselves to be working and living within the context of either high- or low-intensity struggle, depending on how threatening their work and continued existence is perceived by the dominant society. Because the externalization of systemic violence often flows from the global North to the global South, disproportionately more communities in the global South are subject to conditions of high-intensity struggle than in the North. This does not mean high-intensity struggles do not also exist in the global North; it simply means that, relatively speaking, fewer people are subject to them.

Name	Area of work	Context of work	Theory of change
Sociocracy For All	Governance, organizational re-structuring	Low-intensity struggles, global North	Develop organizational structures that enable more equitable and effective participation by everyone.
EWB/ Admitting Failure/Fail Forward	International development, social entrepreneurship	Low-intensity struggles, global South and North	Unlock human potential through support for innovative socially responsible business practices.
Tamarind Tree Associates	Organizational development, leadership and empowerment	High- and low-intensity struggles, global South	Support social change organizations by helping them to unlock the energy, cooperation and creativity of their staff and members.
new visions/ TAIGA	Empowering women, working in areas of arts and culture in Eastern Europe	Low- and high-intensity struggles, global North	Systems are reflections of underlying cultures, by transforming the culture one can transform the system.
HEADS UP toolkit	GCE, formal education	Low-intensity struggles, global North	Develop critical literacy skills for more engaged, (self)reflexive and socially responsible global citizens.
Shikshantar Institute/Swaraj University	De-schooling, unlearning, sustainable living	Low- and high-intensity struggles, global South	Heal the harms of Western formal schooling through self-designed learning, community living and nurturing of alternative economies.
Unitierra Oaxaca	Learner- and community-centred education	High-intensity struggles, global South	Develop resilient, self-governed, self-educated, and self-sustainable local communities.
Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures collective	Transformative education, de-colonial of education, hospicing modernity	Low- and high-intensity struggles, global North and South	Interrupt harmful investments in modern/colonial continuities to allow improved possibilities for different unimaginable futures.
Teia das 5 curas	Indigenous education, collective/ metabolic healing	High- and low-intensity struggles, global South and North	Develop and share pedagogical transformative practices of five modes of healing: healing of thinking, feeling, relating, flows/exchanges and cycles of life and death.
Our Bodhi Project	Holistic systemic transformation, collective/ metabolic healing	Low- and high-intensity struggles, global North	By re-imaging systems as living organisms rather than inanimate machines, it is possible to develop collective health-oriented practices that can help heal wounds inflicted by violence of dysfunctional systems.

The selection of case studies for this publication may seem surprising to some, as it features initiatives with very different understandings of change and transformation. Some of them focus on changing internal structures of civil society organizations in ways that make them more inclusive and participatory and less hierarchical. Others focus on transforming organizational cultures, or the culture of whole sectors of society. The initiatives presented here operate across a plethora of different sectors and contexts, often in ways that may be considered both mutually exclusive *and* complementary. For instance, some wish to transform formal education systems, while others wish to renounce them and find ways of healing people from the harms of Western schooling. Some of the initiatives presented actively engage in international development programmes, while others critique the very notion of development. The differences among these various approaches point to fundamental differences in understandings of the root causes of the problems they are trying to address.

For some the key global issue to be addressed could be poverty; for others, it could be injustice; for someone else it could be what they perceive as inherent violence and unsustainability of modern/colonial systems and habits of being. The radicality of each featured initiative's transformative practice is often proportional to the depth and complexity of their systemic critique. Depending on how much the promises of our current modern/colonial social systems, structures, and institutions are perceived as broken and in need of fixing, or, alternatively, unrealistic from the onset and thus non-fixable, these different initiatives will seek either to address their minor or major shortcomings or try either to reject them altogether, develop alternatives to them, hack them or even hospice them – that is, help them in their process of dying and decomposing. The original report *GCE for Unknown Futures* featured a mapping of these and many other initiatives onto a cartography of soft, radical and beyond-reform approaches. A similar mapping can be imagined here.

The diversity of featured case studies is thus a result of a deliberate choice, as the purpose of this publication is to show that there is no single or best way of approaching social transformation and change. What we believe needs to be done and how that something should be done depend on the depth and complexity of our analysis of the global problems, the specific social, cultural, political and environmental context in which we find ourselves, the orientation and focus of our organizational/institutional mindset and setting, and the personal beliefs, projections, hopes and fears we all carry within ourselves that are in many ways the result of the kind of lives we have led so far and the different cultures we are embedded in. There is good and bad news related to that. The bad news is that we will never all agree on how to bring about the needed change in the world, nor will we even agree on what that change should look like. This is impossible, because each of us is looking at the same problems of unsustainability, injustice, inequality, systemic violence and complicity in harm (the elephant in the room) from a different standpoint, and what is close and visible to some can be distant and almost imperceptible to someone else.

But, if the bad news is that there is dissonance that everyone is trying to grapple with in different ways, then the good news is that there is also a tremendous learning potential to be tapped in this diversity of approaches. There is a lot we can learn from each other, both in terms of what is working and even more in terms of what is not working. In fact, several of the initiatives featured in this publication emphasize the importance of learning from failure and through failure. Others emphasize the need to learn from our shadows, our denials and the things we are not

There is a lot we can learn from each other, both in terms of what is working and even more in terms of what is not working.

willing to face. Depending on the kind of questions about personal, organizational or systemic transformative potential you ask yourself, you will find some case studies more useful or relatable than others.

Some questions that readers may consider while engaging with the case studies:

Following the Sousa Santos's suggestion that we need alternative ways of engaging with alternatives, some of the more interesting questions to take with you as you explore the featured case studies could be: Why do some things that work well in some contexts not work well in others? What kind of conditions make specific alternatives possible, whilst making others impossible? How are those conditions similar to or different from the context of your own work? What are the stories trying to teach you and how is that similar to or different from what you want to learn? How does your geo-political context and positionality impact how you interpret and relate to the case studies? As you sit with something that you find more challenging to understand, reflect on the extent to which your context and culturally specific socialization restrict your capacity to imagine something genuinely different. What different questions and ways of thinking and imagining have emerged from your engagement with each case study? How are you going to translate these insights into your context of work in a relevant and accessible way? Who might be able to support you in that?

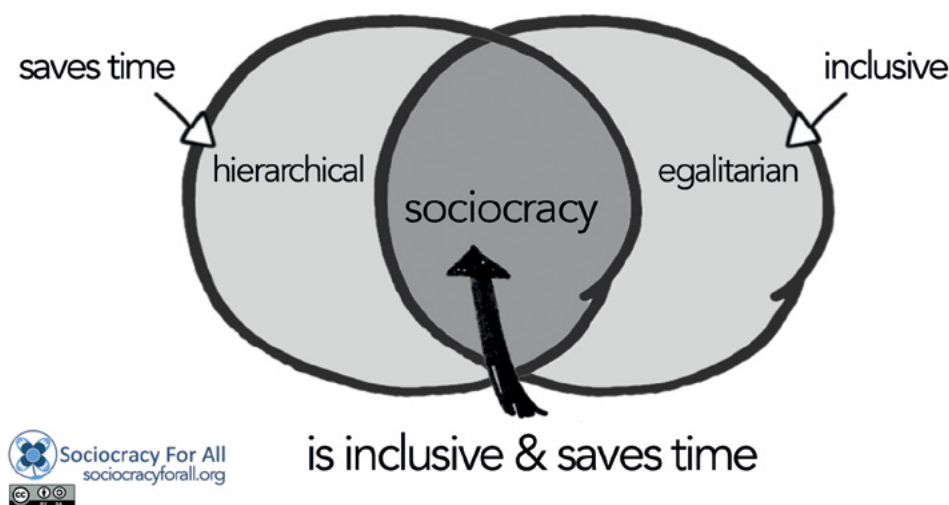
Readers who are interested in transforming the internal structures of their organizations in ways that make them more equitable, inclusive, horizontal and open to continuous change may find interesting insights in the first three case studies of Sociocracy For All, Tamarind Tree Associates and Engineers Without Borders / Admitting Failure / Fail Forward. Readers who are more interested in how to transform organizational cultures, or cultures in general, especially if they are not already in positions of leadership and power, could find some insight in the work of new visions' TAIGA programme. Readers who are interested in opening up possibilities for more critical or transformative practices in formal education systems may find the case study of the HEADS UP toolkit to be the most relatable. Readers who believe that learner- and community-centred education is the way to transform education can explore the examples of Swaraj University and Unitierra, while readers who are interested in more psychoanalytical and land-centred approaches to education will enjoy reading the last three case studies of the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective, Teia das 5 curas and Our Bodhi Project.

Please consider these only as rough guidelines on how to approach this publication. It is just as possible you will find interesting insights from case studies that you would, at first sight, have thought to be irrelevant for you. Each of the case studies also features one or more weblinks you can access to explore the work of each initiative more deeply. Many of them, especially the ones that work on transformative education, offer plenty of freely available pedagogical and other resources on their websites. The last section of this publication features a text outlining ten important lessons about transformative practices learned while this study was being compiled. You might even consider starting your reading there and working your way back to individual case studies. Do not be concerned if you do not find all the case studies immediately relatable. Indeed, one of the ten learned lessons is that not everything will work for everybody. This text encourages you to learn to be comfortable with that and to focus on those examples that are most useful and relevant in your context. We hope you will find insights that will change the way you imagine transformative education and social change.

Case studies

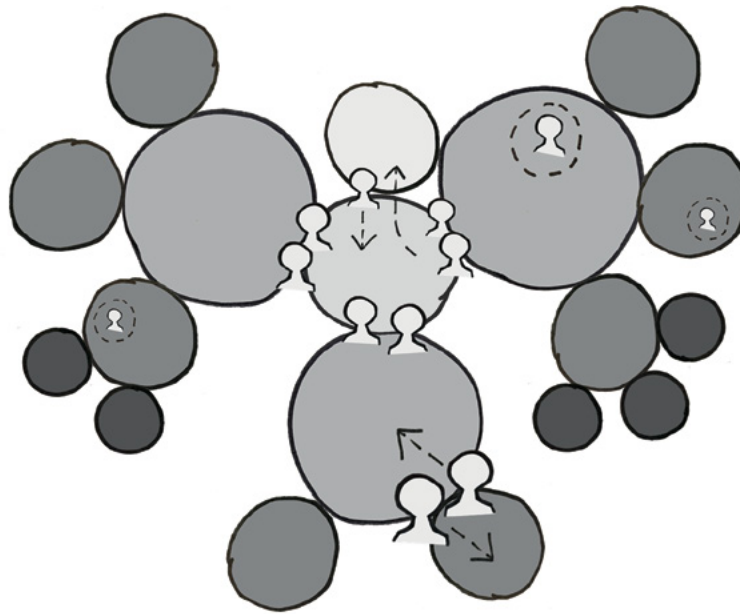
Sociocracy For All – transforming hierarchical organizational structures into participatory models of distributed governance

SOCIOCRACY FOR ALL (SoFA) is a US-based, non-profit membership organization operating globally, whose mission is to make organizational transitions to sociocracy easier by producing training and implementation materials and by interweaving the connections between sociocracy and related movements. Sociocracy is an alternative model of organizational governance that allows teams of people within an organization to self-organize as peers without a top-down hierarchy. Its stated purpose is to enable the creation of working environments that are psychologically safe and enable members of an organization to participate actively in distributed governance of the organization they work for.



Founded in 2016, SoFA develops pedagogical resources about sociocracy, runs seminars and workshops on the topic, and helps its members develop networks both within and outside SoFA's framework. When starting SoFA, the founders sought primarily to develop an organization that would be able to bring the practice of sociocracy, which they have experienced as beneficial in their community and professional contexts, to wider audiences. Committed to making the principles of sociocracy known and accessible to all, many of SoFA's resources and seminars on sociocracy are available for free from their website. Although based in the US, SoFA has a highly international membership of more than 160 members worldwide, most of whom are based in the EU-member countries, the US and several countries of Latin America.

The sociocratic method of organizational governance, also known as the Sociocratic Circle Organization Method, originated in the work of Gerard Endenburg in the Netherlands in the 1980s,



and SoFA's work remains largely grounded in this original tradition, but enhanced with teaching from other complementary methodologies such as Non-Violent Communication.⁵ As expected, SoFA itself is also organized according to sociocratic principles. Over time many different strands of sociocracy evolved in different parts of the world, corresponding to different needs of particular organizations and sectors, such as CSOs, social enterprises, intentional communities, the permaculture movement, for-profit organizations, schools and many others. Although diverse in their specifics, the different approaches to sociocracy are, in general, built around the same three key principles, proposed by Endenburg: (1) organizing in circles; (2) decision making by consent; and (3) double linking. These three principles are presented in more detail below.

Principally, what differentiates sociocracy from classical top-down organizational structures is that sociocratic organizations operate on the principle of internal organization in circles, rather than in the shape of a vertical pyramid, with an executive management on top. Although most sociocratic organizations have a general circle that serves as the main communicating/overseeing body of the organization, the general circle does not have the authority to intervene in the activities of other circles that are designed to act autonomously within their designated mandate. Its function is more akin to that of a forum where representatives of other circles meet to inform each other about important decisions made within other circles that have consequences for the whole organization or for other particular circles. The complexity of the structure usually increases with the size of the organization, but for the majority of smaller organizations a general circle with a few main circles and their sub-circles is the predominant type.

Second, all policy decisions in any given circle are made by general consent, meaning that no decision is made until no major objections are raised by any of the members of the circles to whom the decision pertains. Sociocracy differentiates between consensus and consent, with consensus being understood as universal agreement (which is often very difficult to achieve), while consent is understood as the absence of relevant or irreconcilable disagreement. The decision-making process thus often takes many rounds of objection harvesting, where all objections are expected to be voiced, acknowledged, and ultimately, addressed or resolved.

⁵ See: Rau, T. J., and Koch-Gonzalez, J. (2018). *Many Voices One Song : Shared Power with Sociocracy*. Sociocracy for All.

Third, since sharing relevant information is key to the successful functioning of any organization, let alone one that is based on the idea of distributed governance, sociocratic organizations employ the method of double linking to ensure a constant flow of information among different circles. To make sure that a supercircle and its subcircle are well-connected and aligned, two people will be members of both circles. That way, there is accountability in reporting and a more complete sharing of information. When there are overlapping areas of interest between different circles, it is the task of these communicating members to ensure that any objections or concerns raised by other circles are communicated to their home circle, and vice-versa.

Sharing relevant information is key to the successful functioning of any organization.

Although these three principles form the core of the sociocratic method, they do not suffice to create the truly equality-based and effective work environment sociocracy is striving to bring about. This is particularly true when existing organizations seek to transition from their traditional hierarchical structure to a more self-organized and decentralized form of governance. Often, the biggest challenge to organizational transformation does not lie in changing the organizational structure, but in changing its culture. In particular, if an organization is truly to adopt and internalize the sociocratic model, the people who are members of the organization are often required to transform their previous relationship to power, agency, responsibility and decision making, all of which can be challenging.

Sociocracy is often, at least initially, very hard for two groups of people, and unfortunately, almost everybody falls into one of the two groups. The first group is made of people who are used to being in charge. They often want to have control so that they can't get in trouble, by delegating responsibility onto others, their subordinates. But in sociocracy we're taking that element away quite a bit, because typically things live in teams and the teams, not individuals are responsible for the decision-making process. The other group is made of people who are not used to being in charge, not used of being responsible. They absolutely hate it at first. Often such a disposition comes from being discouraged for so long and not having the belief that you even have agency that you have, that you are capable and so on. (Ted Rau, SoFA)

While sociocracy is committed to nurturing horizontal decision-making processes and encourages peer equality among all participants through its principle of “No one's need will be ignored”, that does not necessarily mean that all voices will be willing to speak up, nor that all voices will be heard equally. Ted Rau, one of SoFA's founders, particularly warns about the dangers of proclaimed equality and how oppressive this idea can be, especially for those who have been either systemically or personally marginalized for various reasons. In his understanding, sociocracy as a governance tool cannot in and of itself guarantee true equality. For it to be effective, it needs to be combined with more learning about historical and current oppression, as well as with deep unlearning of harmful and problematic internalized patterns of behaviour.

Sociocracy just offers the stage, but of course that doesn't mean everybody's going to be on that stage in the same way. In the self-organizing world, the erasure of oppression sometimes comes across as: Oh, horizontal organizing – oppression gone! To me that's an additional problem. Let's imagine somebody who comes from any kind of group that is not used to being in a privileged position. Now they enter an organization where everybody celebrates that oppression is now a non-existent idea. But they know it is there, as they have a hard time speaking up.

They're scared to object and so on. And everybody says, yeah, but you could, you know, so your problem. In such contexts it is very easy to enter into a victim shaming kind of dynamic, which is very worrisome. (Ted Rau, SoFA)

Somewhat paradoxically, these kinds of systemic violence can be even more difficult to bring to the table in the context of the work of organizations that have a clearly defined social mission and that are explicitly committed to ideas and ideals of justice, equality, fairness, anti-oppression, anti-racism and anti-discrimination. Because collective identities of these kinds of organizations and their members are built around positive self-identification with such ideas and ideals, questioning and challenging their practical implementation can be difficult for those who wish to bring attention to systemic problems that continue to persist, even, or especially, in contexts that see themselves as already beyond them.

Although it is quite beyond the scope of the sociocratic method of governance to be able to address these issues more deeply, the experience of SoFA's members shows that some of the things that make sociocracy-based organizations run well can also contribute positively to responding to these underlying structural tensions and problems. Much of the art of successful implementation of sociocracy in any organizational environment depends on the capacity of the organization's members to develop mutual trust and respect, both within and between individual circles. This largely depends on developing not just the capacity to delineate borders between domains of different circles clearly, but also the capacity to be able constantly to share relevant information to make sure that all concerned circles are on-board with the ongoing processes happening across the organization.

We have a running joke in our organization that when decisions are made by whole group consensus, everyone knows how little work gets done. But once you learn to introduce (small) circles, nobody knows how much is being done. The nature of decentralized organizations is that you don't know everything that is happening. (Ted Rau, SoFA)

For this flow of information to happen well, it is crucial to develop the capacity of knowing which information is relevant for whom, and even more importantly, to develop the capacity to sense what is not being said and what has not been shared openly. In that sense, if sociocracy is about improving effectiveness, equality and the joy of participating in a shared organism, learning how to read the pulse of that organism is crucial for its success. That often requires letting go of the idea that the only possible way of having effective work relations is through exercise of control through knowledge and power. Instead, much of the liberated energy seems to come from releasing some of that control, which is only possible when relations within the organization are built on mutual trust, respect, consideration and consent. This is often much more difficult to achieve than simply introducing a new governance structure.

More information about the work of SoFA and sociocracy in general can be found at:
www.sociocracyforall.org.

Engineers Without Borders Canada Failure Reports, Admitting Failure online hub and Fail Forward consultancy – exploring ways failure can be used as a vehicle for organizational and personal transformation

THIS CASE STUDY combines the insights from three different but closely related projects: the Engineers Without Borders Canada (EWB) Failure Reports; the Admitting Failure online hub; and the work of Fail Forward consultancy organization. Together, the experiences gained from these three projects offer important insights into how failure and learning from failure can become an important source of inspiration, innovation and organizational transformation.

EWB Canada is a Toronto-based non-governmental organization, working in the area of international development. Founded in 2000 by George Roter and Parker Mitchell, engineering graduates of the University of Waterloo, the organization has chapters at universities across Canada and regional chapters aimed at professionals in several major cities. Admitting Failure is on an online hub that hosts informative stories about learning from failure from across the world, while Fail Forward is a Toronto-based consultancy organization that supports organizations in transforming their relationship with failure in ways that can help facilitate generative organizational learning. Both Admitting Failure and the Fail Forward organization have been developed by one of EWB's former volunteers and Failure Report authors, Ashley Good.

Given that the original EWB's Failure Reports set the scene for the emergence of both Admitting Failure and Fail Forward, they will be presented first, together with some contextual information about the work of EWB Canada. EWB's first Failure Report was published in 2008, and nine such reports were published between 2008 and 2017. At the time the first reports were published, EWB was engaged in sending young professionals (recently graduated volunteers) to support the work of different organizations in mostly sub-Saharan Africa as part of their organizational development initiative. As a relative newcomer to the field of international development in the 2000s, EWB's approach was grounded in a critical stance towards the international development sector, such as the one espoused by William Easterly and his critique of foreign aid, development assistance programmes and celebrity-based approaches to poverty eradication, epitomized in initiatives such as the Live8.⁶ One of the key questions that EWB has been grappling with since its inception is: Why does poverty persist, in spite of all the resources and projects directed towards its elimination?

The collective experience of EWB's volunteers, working on various development-related international projects, was that one of the more problematic aspects of the work included the fact that

⁶ See: Easterly, W. (2006). *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*. Penguin.

at that time there were virtually no conversations about failure, ineffectiveness, and even inappropriateness of certain development cooperation projects, many of which had been running for several years. This absence was largely attributed to the need to meet the project funders' expectations of desired deliverables and maintain a successful public image. Volunteers had observed a considerable gap between funders' reports that invariably portrayed a very positive picture and what was really happening in the projects they were working on.

We grew a bit frustrated with the disjointed narrative between donor reports that were saying, everything is fine, everything is great, and what we would see in the field, which was a lot of dysfunctional implementations. A lot of people in the front lines who really understood what the complexity of the challenges at hand were, were very, very seldom given an opportunity to direct and to lead. This made our organizational development efforts difficult because the incentives and the agenda was kind of already set by somebody else. And so, the team was not there to have a conversation about performance. They were there to have a conversation about compliance. You know, it's a very different type of conversation. (Boris Martin, EWB)

Turning these insights into a practice of self-reflection, EWB volunteers decided to gather examples from their own experience and compiled them into the first Failure Report, which was presented to EWB's head office. Although EWB's leadership did not commission this report, it did nurture a culture of inquiry within the organization that made the report possible and has supported the volunteers' ambition to make learning from mistakes and failures a key component of organizational learning, as well as recognizing the need to send a signal to the international development sector that some things need to change. For its tenth anniversary, in 2010, EWB decided to make that year's

A majority of volunteers cited the existence of Failure Reports as one of the key reasons they wished to join EWB in the first place.

Failure Report a key element of its public communication strategy. The strategy and the 2010 Failure Report received widespread publicity that has inspired many other organizations and initiatives to explore the potential of learning from failure, either through publicly documented stories or through internal learning mechanisms, especially in the international development sector. One such website that hosts case studies of learning from failure is the already mentioned **Admitting Failure** online hub, while another is the **Failure Files**, hosted by India Development Review in partnership with the

Acumen Academy. Indeed, a majority of volunteers who have joined EWB since the reports have been published have cited the existence of Failure Reports, which they considered as indicative of the organization's willingness not to shy away from difficult and critical questions, as one of the key reasons they wished to join EWB in the first place.

The stories, featured in the EWB reports, evolved over time. The first reports featured mostly stories that problematized the design of certain projects and initiatives – what was and was not working in certain projects, while later stories focused more on the need for internal organizational reflection, looking at what was and was not working within the EWB organization itself. In this sense, the reports became an important tool for developing the organizational culture of learning, inquiry and experimentation, strongly supported by EWB's leadership. However, it soon became evident that learning from hindsight was only the first step towards transformation of organizational culture, and that other structural changes were required to utilize the reports' potential better. One surprising outcome of the first report that was presented by EWB's volunteers to

the organization's founders and donors was that it helped deepen the trust of the donors towards the organization, because it showed them that they were taking their commitment to inquiry and transparency seriously.

Given that critical self-reflection is not necessarily an integral component of every organization's work culture, experiments such as the Failure Reports would not necessarily always be welcomed, or indeed possible in all contexts. Boris Martin, who was one of the volunteers at EWB at the time when the first report came out, and is now EWB's CEO, suggests that it was the high level of autonomy and independence of volunteers from the main office in Toronto, combined with the volunteers' capacity for critical reflection and their access to digital platforms of communication which were new at that time, that sparked the ideas for the first report. The first report was thus developed by a circle of concerned volunteers in response to their own experience from the field and aimed to shake up the mainstream success narratives that were, and still are, circulating in the international development sector. However, it was the founders' commitment to the same ambition of disrupting the mainstream narratives and EWB's culture of experimentation that ultimately made its publication possible. What was also important was that EWB's funding was fairly dispersed, so its organizational continuity was not dependent on the support of a few key donors.

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This example illustrates how a transformation of organizational practice is made possible, or certainly much easier, when the desire to change and interrupt something dysfunctional or harmful is at the core of an organization's culture, and especially of its leadership. It also undoubtedly helps when the emerging critiques are not seen as threatening the financial viability or reputation of the organization in question. In a certain way, the first Failure Reports may thus be considered as acts of self-organized rebellion by volunteers, but it was a rebellion that was being welcomed by the founders and donors alike, and not seen as vitally threatening within this particular context.

Since the publication of the Failure Reports, EWB has re-oriented its activities away from working with civil society organizations on projects of international aid and development towards focusing exclusively on providing organizational development support for locally-led early-stage social enterprises in selected countries that either have or are trying to build their own revenue models. In so doing, they are also asking important questions about what makes an enterprise social – that is, fundamentally oriented towards the commons, rather than just being profit-oriented while providing some form of social service. Many important lessons learned from the Failure Reports have contributed to this change in focus, but arguably donor-agenda dependence of many of the CSOs has been among the most important factors.

We felt that aid funded projects were often dependent on donor priorities that were left out of the control of the projects. For this reason, local civil society organizations oftentimes became mosaic organizations responding to a mosaic of donor priorities around them. And instead of having one kind of mission and the ability to learn in any specific area, they would be pulled into responding to wishes of other people. They became service providers in a mosaic of different services. We felt that our unique contribution could be in tapping into the engineering profession, understanding the role of technology in society, having a little bit of flexible funding, which was well suited in supporting social enterprises and which is also a sector that's actually



rather overlooked and under-resourced. So, for the past 10 years now, we've been supporting early-stage startups in with financial resources, organizational development programs, and advocacy activities. (Boris Martin, EWB)

Although the Failure Reports were originally intended to provide EWB with materials for internal organizational self-reflection, it soon became clear the topic of failure and our collective and individual incapacity to engage with failure in generative ways was something that was relevant to organizations beyond EWB's network, and even beyond the sector of international development. For this reason, Admitting Failure online hub was started in 2010 as an attempt to create an online space where people from around the world could share their stories of learning from failure. The purpose of this hub was to show that failure is inevitable every time we interact with complex systems and that no matter how well we plan things and how much effort we invest in bringing these plans to fruition, there will always be things that exceed our capacities for prediction and control. Admitting Failure emerged from a belief that in order to change our problematic, culturally conditioned responses to failure, stories about re-imagining failure and learning from failure needed to be publicly shared worldwide. Although the number of stories collected over the decade of its existence remained fairly small – 37 stories have been collected over a decade – the project has attracted large-scale media attention that was considered disproportionate to its actual size and has helped spark a new wave of interest in having different kinds of conversations about failure in certain circles, especially in the field of international development.

I realized fairly early on in this work that everyone knows we should talk about our failures openly and learn from them and use them as a stepping stone and share our learnings with others so that mistakes aren't repeated. Everyone knows that we should do that, and none of us, myself included, actually do that in practice consistently. So, the question became, why? Why do we not practice what we know is in the best interest of everyone and our learning and the problems we're trying to solve? And so that's the question that Fail Forward was designed to start to address. To help people and organizations overcome our instincts, our Learned behaviors, our organizational structures to be able to have a healthy relationship with failure. (Ashley Good, Fail Forward)

In response to increased interest in talking about and learning from failure, sparked by the EWB Failure Reports and the Admitting Failure online hub, Fail Forward consulting organization was created to provide organizations with the necessary tools and methodologies that can help them engage with failure in more generative ways. Fail Forward most often works with non-profit, private and governmental organizations that either are struggling with overcoming a recent big

failure and need external help in having generative conversations about failure, or wish to set up proactive mechanisms that help them learn from failure, or they are struggling with overcoming the fear of failure that is preventing them from engaging in more innovative work through taking calculated and responsible risks. Whatever the motivation for transforming an organization's relationship with failure may be, Fail Forward has identified three important layers that organizations need to work through if they are serious in their commitment to changing this relationship.

When people are able to accept and move through their failure, they no longer talk about it as failure. Instead, they see it as a very important moment in their life, a turning point that set them off in a new and important direction. (Ashley Good, Fail Forward)

The first layer requires a shift in the mindset and language related to failure. This entails developing a capacity to understand that there are different kinds of failures and that we can learn to respond to them differently. In this sense, it is important to learn to acknowledge failure as an often inevitable and powerful teacher that may sometimes be unwelcome but usually holds great transformative potential if we can tap into it and learn from it. In a certain sense that requires developing an understanding that, at the end of the day, there is no such thing as failure, nor there is such a thing as success. What matters is the depth of learning that can be drawn from the experience. For this to be possible, a considerable level of institutional and personal humility is a necessary pre-condition. Given that the narcissist socialization patterns in our societies incentivize us to see ourselves as successful human beings who project failure onto others, this part of learning tends to be difficult, especially for those who embody higher levels of intersectional privilege – that is, privilege related to class, gender, race and other markers of systemic differentiation.

We need to acknowledge that it is a privilege to be able to move forward through failure. Not everyone is offered that second chance. If you have certain power and privilege, you're allowed to fail and try again and are often rewarded for that. But that is not universal. How can we learn to see where we're privileging certain folks and actually develop a practice of responding with grace for ourselves and for each other when we mess it up, no matter who and what we are? (Ashley Good, Fail Forward)

The second layer builds upon the recognition of the fact that engaging generatively with failure is a very important skill that most of us have not been taught. Depending on the level of socially attributed privilege, some of us have been brought up to externalize personal responsibility for



our failure onto others, while others have been brought up always to internalize responsibility for failure, even when that failure was a result of structural and systemic injustices. In this layer it is important to engage in exploring what kind of skills we need to build to have that healthy relationship with failure and practice it on a day-to-day basis – whether that is through our own internal dialogue about how we handle our own defensiveness and shame in responding to what we perceive as failure, or at the organizational level. For organizations it is particularly important to explore how they can have generative conversations about failure publicly, especially considering all the power relations inherent in most organizations that make such conversations difficult.

How we get better at taking a step back and seeing each other as humans might be the most important thing that we need to get right. Because when we blame others for their failures, it makes them more likely to act defensively and less likely to learn. Which has the exact opposite reaction of what we would like to see happen. (Ashley Good, Fail Forward)

The third and final layer of generative engagement with failure is about getting a healthy engagement with failure to permeate all the pores of an organization's structure and internal culture. In particular this third layer is about re-imaging existing reward systems that not only discourage people from developing a generative relationship with failure but also make innovation, change and transformation difficult. For this to change, it is important to develop social mechanisms that can support people in the midst of failure, so that deeper organizational and individual learning can happen, while at the same time understanding that all learning comes at a cost and that these costs are often very unevenly distributed. Engaging with failure in generative ways requires a lot of unlearning of pre-established affective responses and transformations of narratives that we tell ourselves and each other in moments of failure. For Fail Forward, important open questions that remains are: How do we create organizations that allow people to thrive – especially when facing failure? And how do we make it possible for them to show up through good times and bad, by learning to embrace failure as an inherent, inevitable, but also potentially transformative trait of our shared humanity?

More information about the work of organizations presented in this case study can be found at the following online addresses:

EWB Canada Failure Reports: <http://reports.ewb.ca/>

Admitting Failure online hub: <https://www.admittingfailure.org/>

Fail Forward consultancy: <https://failforward.org/>

Tamarind Tree Associates – putting experiential learning at the heart of generative organizational transformation

TAMARIND TREE ASSOCIATES (TTA) is a team of organization development practitioners working to support social change organizations. TTA assists organizations to clarify their visions, strengthen their purpose, enliven their practice and build effective, human organizations able to unlock the energy, cooperation and creativity of their staff and members. Based in Cape Town, South Africa, this small consultancy agency works locally, regionally and globally. Four of the team members were previously part of Community Development Resource Association (CDRA) that closed in 2020. Each of the team members has been practicing for more than thirty years, working with civil society organizations (CSOs), government, universities, private foundations and corporate social investment programmes. Their values and commitment to social transformation are most closely aligned with the commitments of others CSOs.

Similar to many other social actors, TTA remains deeply concerned and challenged by the growing inequality, de-humanizing poverty and socio-economic processes that exclude and do not support the wellbeing and dignity of people. In order to address these issues, the core of TTA's activity is focused on working alongside organizations, accompanying them on their journeys of development and nurturing processes and practices that are humanizing and respect the inherent dignity and value of everyone involved. According to TTA, CSOs have historically played a role in shaping South African society, but increased threats to the country's democracy in recent years, growing inequality and endless exclusion of people from democratic and economic processes have led to increased demand for strengthening the CSO sector. CSOs have an important voice and role in holding the government and private sector accountable for ensuring the wellbeing of citizens.



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TTA identified a dearth of humanizing, generative leadership and creative, dynamic practices in all sectors, including the CSOs, as arguably the key challenge that needs to be addressed to transform the work of organizations and larger social systems in ways that are more socially and environmentally accountable, non-discriminating and inclusive. For TTA, deep and systemic change

must happen in several dimensions. It must shift who we are and how we think and feel (being). It must shift our relationships, especially the sense and experience of power between us (relating), and it must lead to different behaviours and practices (doing).

For this reason, TTA's work is through one-on-one accompaniment of individual organizations, often beginning with unblocking and cultivating the will of organizations to nurture processes that are inclusive, creative and generative of human vitality. The support that TTA provides is focused on helping organizations to (re)identify and (re)connect with their social purpose. The social purpose is about the deeper intentions that underpin the work of organizations, about their enduring reason for being. The social purpose guides what the organization does; it is at the heart of its being, its relationships and its doing. For TTA, learning from their own experiences and drawing on that learning to renew, revitalize and re-invent themselves is critical for organizations.

There is a strong connection between learning and transformative change. Change comes from learning, which is why it is important that organizations develop the capacity to learn. Organizational learning should be integrally linked to the vital work of organizations, it should not be seen as an add-on. Learning is not something you do when you are not working, it is something you do to improve your doing. (Nomvula Dlamini, Tamarind Tree Associates)

When learning, both as core process and competency, is seen as central to the life and work of an organization, then transformation and change can happen. Learning also helps organizations to stay relevant and focused on their mission. However, from TTA's experience, not all organizations are necessarily open to putting learning and (self)reflection at the heart of their work. In some instances, the leaders in organizations are resistant to learning.

Organizations that want to have learning at the core of their organizational culture need to transform their leadership culture and processes. Those in leadership need to recognize the value and contribution of learning. They need to have personal experience of how transformative reflective learning processes can be. A good starting point is for those in leadership to reflect on their own leadership practice. It can be difficult and challenging for leaders to have a mirror being held up to them, because the way they lead tells a lot about who they are, and about how they lead. Where there is a willingness to reflect on one's own leadership practice, it is important to create a safe space for leaders to do so before such processes are opened to the whole organization. (Nomvula Dlamini, Tamarind Tree Associates)

Although learning happens in organizations, mostly unconsciously, many organizations struggle with integrating learning into their culture as a core process and competency in a way that promotes curiosity, improves practice, contributes to productive relationships and enables enduring change. In other words, organizations struggle with cultivating a culture of learning that fosters deep and



enduring transformations. Transformative learning entails not only learning about how we do things and how we work but also about how we engage with others and how we relate to each other. This kind of transformative learning does not happen automatically; organizations have to work hard towards it. The first step is to recognize that learning itself is valuable for an organization. It should be seen as a core value. Once this recognition is there, organizations need to put in place the learning rhythms and processes that support the learning, and these should be aligned with existing spaces in the organization. In addition, there should be conscious championing of such learning. With time, and not without challenges, learning can become embedded in organizational life.

TTA's experiences show that starting small is often a good idea. For example, to help with introducing a learning rhythm, an organization could adopt a practice of having one learning day a month. Over time that practice could grow into two days and perhaps, over time, into one learning week a month. These learning days, where people share their experiences and reflect together on such experiences, also offer a dedicated space for building relationships of trust. Organizations that wish to transform themselves into learning organizations need to find ways to learn together, as an organizational collective and not merely as a grouping of individuals. It is critical to bear in mind that individual learning does not translate automatically into organizational change; it might transform individual practices, but to transform organizational practices and improve effectiveness learning must become an organizational endeavour. It is as a collective endeavour that learning holds the greatest transformational potential for organizations. For this to happen, processes and practices that enable the translation of individual learning into collective learning need to be put in place. More importantly, having learning as a core process and competency requires the support and buy-in of leadership. Where leadership is not supportive, cultivating a learning culture becomes difficult.

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A small but effective example from TTA's own internal practice of collective reflection and learning is their monthly gatherings, where each team member shares reflections from practice and of what they see shifting in the context of their work. From these

individual reflections the team then collectively develops a picture of what is moving in the context, what is coming towards TTA and what this means for its practice.

Members of TTA are strong believers in an action-learning approach; learning that comes from reflecting on one's own experience. For TTA, people's own real experience is a rich resource from which they can and do learn. It is a natural change process, something that people do daily. However, to learn well from experience people need to develop skills that enable them to do this. There is a need for a thorough approach that helps them to be more thoughtful and which leads to deeper and more useful learning. Action-learning is especially important in contexts where organizations work with people who have been historically and systemically marginalized and where the patterns of exclusion, marginalization and disrespect are being unconsciously repeated through organizations' internal and external practices. In such contexts, people's experience and knowledge have been discounted. Repeating such harmful practices not only contradicts most organizations' stated missions, but it also compromises human dignity and causes long-term, often irreparable damage to people's sense of dignity, integrity and identity.

The most difficult thing is to witness situations where people are completely disconnected from their own power. Where they are disempowered to the point that it becomes debilitating. This tells me that I have to find a way of doing the “invisible work” of helping them connect to their own power. Sometimes I work with people that have been so disempowered, that they can't even see themselves, that in their own minds they don't even exist. Then I know I have to do the deeper work, the personal development work, before we even begin talking about organizations, leadership and other things. We first need to bring people to recognize their own humanity. The spaces to do the deeper, inner personal development work are not always available, but when there is even the slightest opportunity, we try to open these spaces. How we listen to other people is very important and in this process of listening we must recognize the dignity and humanity of others. But we often lose sight of that because other demands take over. (Nomvula Dlamini, Tamarind Tree Associates)

The TTA team remains concerned about the observable unhealthy relationships and dehumanising processes that can often be felt in even the most well-intended organizations, and how these drain people's energy, block their creativity and undermine their growth. The TTA team believe that organizations need to learn to nurture life-giving, open spaces and design processes that have honest human engagement at their core so they do not just become battlegrounds and technical implementors, but transformative spaces that are life-giving. Deep listening, humility and respect are qualities that they believe are indispensable in this process. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they also happen to be the defining qualities of good, generative leadership.

More information about the work of TTA can be found at: <https://www.tamarindtreeassociates.co.za/>.

TAIGA – empowering women in arts and culture for exercising leadership in organizational and cultural transformation

TAIGA IS A transformational leadership programme for women and persons who identify as women working in arts and culture sectors in Eastern Europe. TAIGA is one of the programmes of the new visions collective. The project grew out of the founders' personal experience as women working in the arts and culture sectors in Latvia and Poland, with sexism, patriarchal power structures and systemic discrimination. Through their learning about diverse forms of exclusion and structural discrimination and about hierarchies of critique established by dominant Western traditions of feminism, TAIGA was created to offer a leadership and empowerment programme tailored to the lived experience of women in arts and culture in Eastern Europe. The programme is also open to participants with intersectional identities, such as queer and non-binary participants, especially from non-White communities, who are subject to increasing violence and marginalization in many Eastern European countries.

TAIGA believes that systems are reflections of underlying cultures and that by transforming the culture one can transform the system. TAIGA focuses on working with women in arts and culture because problematic reproduction of patriarchal, sexist and racist tropes and modes of engagement does not manifest itself only in cultural products such as news, films, art and museum exhibitions and books, but also in the internal functioning of organizations and institutions that are responsible for their production, including media houses, museums, galleries, publishing companies, cinemas and others.

TAIGA's holistic and experiential empowerment programme consists of four modules called Willow, Moss, Elm and Maple. The Willow module focuses on self- and community-care, and its purpose is to work through the disempowering feelings of separability and isolation that many of the participants experience at their workplace and in other aspects of their lives. In this module, the participants learn to explore interdependence with other humans and more-than-humans and collectively reflect on what different kinds of community- and self-care might look like. They are also provided with tools that help them engage in this kind of care, both in their workplace and elsewhere. For TAIGA, re-imagined care and love are the two key concepts on which leadership for a different kind of future needs to be built. When speaking about love, TAIGA facilitators use bell hooks' definition of love as a practice that is based on commitment, care, responsibility, respect, knowledge and trust.

The next module, Moss, focuses on activism and conversations about the roles and importance of different social and political identities. Here participants learn to navigate complex social and political power structures through an intersectional lens. Moss is about reflecting on how we are all part of the problem and part of the solution, and about acquiring tools and practices for being proactive and reactive in the face of systemic injustices and discrimination. Since the project is aimed at participants from Eastern Europe, particular attention is paid to the specific positionality

of Eastern Europe in debates about Whiteness and racism, colonialism and colonality, where these topics are, for historic reasons that have led to high levels of cultural and ethnic homogeneity, often under-represented, or seen as disconnected from conversations about gender justice and other related debates.

The third module, Elm, engages with the possibilities and challenges of human and planet-centred entrepreneurship. Emerging as a critique of capitalism and profit-centred entrepreneurship, this module enables participants to explore different systems of economic organization and reflect on how all our practices are connected with other areas of work and the world. The module also introduces tools and ideas for creating organizational structures that challenge capitalist ideas and ideals and open pathways for experiments with alternative economies, such as de-growth and other similar initiatives. TAIGA facilitators consider the teachings of this module to be the most difficult to translate into practice due to the over-determining influence that profit-oriented capitalism has on people's lives, yet on the other hand they share the belief that "revolution will not be funded" (Agnieszka Bulacik, new visions collective).

The last module, Maple, focuses on exploring different approaches to self- and community-leadership, and in so doing challenges the mainstream notion of leadership training events and workshops being developed mostly for those in already established and formalized leadership roles. Maple starts with the idea of transformative feminist leadership of Peggy Antrobus⁷, in which

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distribution of power.**

everyone is seen as having intrinsic leadership potential, regardless of their current position in the hierarchies of formally recognized power. For TAIGA, inclusive and effective leadership is about power *and* humility – a notion often overlooked and under-recognized in patriarchal hierarchical structures. Particular emphasis in this module is placed on the notion of collective leadership and distribution of power. TAIGA is also developing their own framework of leadership for cultural revolution that is specifically focused on

leadership in arts and culture sectors. Key elements of this framework are holism, imagination, solidarity, interconnectedness and love.

One of the key lessons to be learned from TAIGA's work is that TAIGA's facilitators own lived experience as women, as queer people, as women of colour with sexism, discrimination and systemic violence has provided them with personal insight into how this violence is felt in the body, and how it feels to be threatened and belittled by the work environment that surrounds you. No amount of theory can provide that kind of insight, and without it, TAIGA would probably adopt a less holistic approach to dealing with systemic violence and the healing of systemic trauma. On the other hand, the personal experiences, accompanied by bodywork and affective emotional healing practices, would likely run the risk of becoming something akin to de-politicized group therapy, which, although helpful to everyday functioning of individuals, would not necessarily be directed towards the same horizon of institutional, cultural, and systemic transformation. This is where TAIGA's deep engagement with feminist, intersectional, decolonial and other strands of critical theory becomes helpful not only in clear articulation of their own theory of change and development of corresponding transformative leadership programmes, but also in developing a vocabulary and systemic analysis that helps their participants see and articulate their experiences with structural violence, not as individualized events, but as embedded in much more complex, subtle

7 See: Antrobus, P. (2000). Transformational leadership: Advancing the agenda for gender justice. *Gender & Development*, 8(3), 50-56.



and omnipresent systemic patriarchal and racist modern/colonial systems. TAIGA facilitators have noted that such conversations are particularly difficult to have in the context of Eastern European countries, which often perceive themselves outside the historical flows of Western modernity/coloniality, though they remain just as much influenced by them.

According to the experience of TAIGA facilitators, however, critical rigour cannot be effectively mobilized without first establishing safe and inclusive conversational spaces where participants feel welcomed and supported, regardless of their personal and professional backgrounds. This is particularly important in work with individuals and groups who have suffered systemic discrimination based on their gender and racial profiles, because these are indelible markers that accompany them in almost all aspects of life. It is perhaps even more important with working in individuals from the arts sector, who are often subject to high pressure for critical and commercial validation.

Safe spaces are not the same as comfortable spaces, and if participants feel comfortable all the time, then we are doing something wrong. Safe spaces are not spaces of avoidance of difficult conversations, but are rather spaces where difficult and discomforting conversations can be had, once the participants feel that the respect for their personal integrity is unconditional at all times. The most important thing about our work is to make sure that people feel this unconditional respect for their personal integrity at all times. (Agnieszka Bulacik, new visions collective)

Discomfort and resistance are thus recognized as important elements of transformative education, and rather than trying to prevent their emergence, TAIGA uses pedagogical methods that help participants develop the capacity to work through their discomfort and difficult learning experiences. When these learning processes are held safely and respectfully, resistance and discomfort are among the most powerful and transformative teachers. According to feedback from the participants, the participation in somatic practices such as meditation, mindfulness practices, and

other types of bodywork surfaces a lot of resistance, but the shared experience of discomfort is also key in building the collective capacity and stamina to work through it. These experiences are considered crucial by the participants, even when they are conducted in an online environment. Equally important is the unfacilitated informal peer-mentorship that runs parallel to the facilitated workshops. Further, the TAIGA programme is designed to include *two* participants from any single organization, meaning that close peer support is available during and after the end of the programme. This is important for ensuring long-term multiplicative effects of the training and its applicability beyond the original group of participants, because individual participants often struggle with challenging the status quo within their home institutions, when they lack appropriate support from inside. Such considerations demonstrate the importance of relationship building in developing and sustaining any transformative practice. No one can change the world alone, and sometimes two is already far more than one.

TAIGA's long-term vision is cultural shift in Eastern Europe, driven by organizations and institutions led by people who represent all the communities from the region, practice leadership based on care and love, are committed to social justice and contributing to a world where differences are embraced and cherished, power is shared, and interdependence is acknowledged. On an everyday level, this would transform the Eastern European region into an area where all people, regardless of their gender, racial and other identities could feel safe in public spaces. For that to happen many steps need to be taken. TAIGA's particular contribution towards this goal is to help develop a strong regional network of women working in arts and culture who can offer each other support in their work against systemic violence and discrimination. Peer-to-peer relationship building is seen as the key vehicle of strength, resilience and relevance of this network and arguably an important element of protection against such violence and discrimination.

More information about the work of TAIGA and the new visions collective can be found at: <https://newvisions.me/en/leadership-program>

HEADS UP educational toolkit – changing the ways global issues are being taught in schools

TEACHING FOR SUSTAINABLE development through ethical global issues pedagogy: A resource for secondary teachers is an educational toolkit developed by researchers Dr. Karen Pashby from Manchester Metropolitan University and Dr. Louise Sund from Örebro University and Mälardalen University, with contributions from secondary school teachers from England, Sweden and Finland. The involvement of teachers was pivotal in the development and piloting of this educational resource because relevance and usefulness for teachers' educational practice was a key concern of the project. This toolkit is built around a checklist of common problematic patterns that are often repeated in well-intended approaches to understanding and addressing global issues in educational contexts. This checklist and its corresponding analytical framework, originally developed by Prof. Vanessa Andreotti, is known under the acronym HEADS UP, where the individual letters stand for **H**egemony, **E**thnocentrism, **A**historicism, **D**epoliticization, **S**alvationism, **U**ncomplicated solutions and **P**aternalism. In this text, the *Teaching for sustainable development through ethical global issues pedagogy* toolkit will be referred to simply as the HEADS UP toolkit, as its main purpose is to offer pedagogical tools and exercises that help translate the HEADS UP checklist into pedagogical practice.

Hegemony Justifying superiority and supporting domination which can be unseen

Ethnocentrism Projecting one view as universal and unknowingly being limited by one's worldview

Ahistoricism Forgetting historical legacies and complicities

Depoliticization Disregarding power inequalities and ideological roots of analyses and proposals

Salvationism Framing help as the burden of the fittest

Un-complicated solutions Offering easy and simple solutions that do not require systemic change

Paternalism Seeking affirmation of authority/superiority through the provision of help and the infantilization of recipients, including putting young people in the Global North in the position to solve the problems of others.

The HEADS UP toolkit emerged as a response from an identified need to bring the insights from critical Global Citizenship Education (GCE) together with environmental and sustainability education and research and tie them to civics education. While the environmental perspectives have been integrated in formal education settings in the project partner countries, particularly the Nordic contexts, for many decades, other important political, social, cultural and ethical aspects have tended to remain side-lined. The development of the HEADS UP toolkit sought to bridge that gap. The authors of the toolkit were well aware that bringing GCE to classrooms requires more than simply talking about common global issues such as poverty, climate change, discrimination and human rights. The point of quality GCE is not merely to discuss these issues, especially not in ways that simply reproduce problematic dominant discourse about them, but to engage with them in a critically informed way from multiply positioned perspectives. The analysis of global problems changes profoundly when considerations of power enter these conversations.

For example, a persistent global problem such as widespread material poverty in the disenfranchised communities in the countries of the global South can, from a mainstream perspective, be seen as largely resulting from a perceived lack of technological and economic development: the countries of global South need to catch up. Such a perspective is aligned with highly contestable beliefs that this problem can be solved effectively with more development aid or charity, education and technological support. On the other hand, from a critically informed perspective, global poverty

The analysis of global problems changes profoundly when considerations of power enter these conversations.

is more likely to be seen as resulting from widespread and multifaceted systemic exploitation and historical continuity of modern/colonial structures of power that operate both between and within national borders. From this perspective, development aid and assistance are seen as problematic integral parts of these power structures which, although helpful in certain contexts and situations, also perpetuate the existing hegemonic relations of subjugation and dependency between global North and South. This example is

only one of the many possible ways in which the differences between mainstream and critical approaches can be articulated, and the analysis presented here is merely illustrative, provisional and lacking many other, more subtle nuances. That being said, with increased levels of critical reflection and self-reflexivity, the perceived complexity and interconnectedness of global issues inevitably increases, and complex problems are no longer seen as having simple and universal solutions. This deepening of the capacity for critical reflexivity and the subsequent reorientation of investments in solutions that no longer work, and never have, is what the HEADS UP toolkit aims to support.

As both Dr. Pashby and Dr. Sund had been using the HEADS UP checklist in their work (Pashby in critical GCE and Sund in ESE), they thought it could be mobilized as an important bridging framework. The HEADS UP checklist was chosen as the core framework of the newly developed toolkit in response to the critiques claiming that many existing GCE resources and practices unintentionally reproduce colonial systems of power. In fact, the HEADS UP checklist emerged from such critical observations, and putting this well-known critical framework at the heart of a pedagogical experiment that sought to transform the way environmental and sustainability education was being conducted in formal education systems seemed a logical idea. One thing authors want to change in the formal education systems is the mainstream perspective in which environmental and sustainability-related issues are often portrayed as largely technological, objectivist problems that can be solved by greener technology and better policies, rather than as political, social and

cultural problems requiring much deeper and more complex intervention and reflection to be not only effective, but also inclusive and accountable to multiple, especially systemically marginalized, communities, future generations, and other non-human beings.

A related ambition of introducing the HEADS UP toolkit to environmental and sustainability education was to raise the questions related to ethics in sustainability conversations that were perceived to be often absent. To discuss global ethics, it was important to develop a toolkit that would give the teachers and students the necessary tools and vocabulary to help them deepen their capacity for critical reflexivity. The timing for such an intervention now seems even more relevant, especially in countries where the impact of young climate activists such as Greta Thunberg and the School Strike for Climate movement and other initiatives such as Black Lives Matter opened spaces for conversations that were not possible before. In this sense the HEADS UP toolkit responds to the opening created by these movements, and many teachers not involved in the original project have since taken it up.

No good teacher would use a prefab lesson plan, nor would such a teacher use the same resource in the exact same way twice, because every group of students is different. We are very curious about how teachers adapt this toolkit for their contexts. The toolkit is not a recipe, but more of a suggestion. (Karen Pashby and Louse Sund, HEADS UP educational toolkit)

The feedback from the teachers who were part of the research project shows that the toolkit can be mobilized to open conversations about difficult subjects that have already been bubbling in the teacher's classrooms, such as racism, colonialism, or patriarchy. The teachers' feedback shows that this toolkit, which was developed primarily with the intention of bringing global issues that are often perceived as somewhat intangible and "out there" into the classroom, can quickly be mobilized by students and teachers alike to discuss manifestations of problematic power relations and systemic violence in their immediate environment, i.e. in their schools.

When teachers started using HEADS UP they started talking about racism in their own classrooms and in their own working environment. That is a synergy that HEADS UP invites. When you open conversations about hegemony in the global context it doesn't take long before you realize how that plays out in your immediate personal contexts, including your classroom. When we started using HEADS UP, people started talking about their classrooms and it seemed that they were not having these conversations regularly before. Something new opened up. (Karen Pashby and Louise Sund, HEADS UP educational toolkit)

Not all teachers welcomed the toolkit without resistance. Concerns were raised about whether it can be made to fit the constraints of formal education systems and the language was sometimes considered too difficult for younger students, which motivated some teachers to translate the resource into more accessible terminology. Some teachers expressed an unease towards linking GCE and ESD, feeling the latter would require taking a specific action, whereas HEADS UP focused on critical reflexivity. Some teachers worried about being perceived as too politically correct, noting divergent political views in classrooms. There can be a tendency for sustainability education to strive for ideals of neutrality and scientific objectivism without engaging in politically charged topics. In rare cases, the toolkit was even mobilized as a resource for re-affirmation of existing hegemonic structures, for instance in cases where topics such as racism, feminism and colonialism were

seen as side-lining and oppressive to white male audiences. A few teachers avoided systemically sanctioned investments in salvationist and paternalist narratives, as many schools actively seek to engage students in charitable activities and derive much institutional pride from them. In all such examples, HEADS UP can be a useful resource for the analysis of resistance that often falls within one or more of the seven problematic patterns identified in the acronym.

One of the main reasons HEADS UP can be an effective tool for transformative education is that its analytical framework can be applied with equal rigour for analysis of distant global issues as for analysis of our everyday responses and behaviour. As the authors suggest, this resource is not for every context and must be open to adaptation, but it can be helpful for those starting to dip their toes in conversations about racism, colonialism, global justice and other related topics. It will not be helpful for those who prefer not to engage in these conversations, nor for those who believe they have already learned all there is to know about these issues. The toolkit's invitation is extended to those who wish to learn about connecting the dots among multiple systems of oppression and to explore how we are complicit in them. This invitation should not be taken as definitive and normative but as one possible step on a much longer journey.

The HEADS UP toolkit (in English, Swedish and Finnish languages), as well as more information about the research project that led to its creation, can be found at:

<https://www.mmu.ac.uk/research/research-centres/esri/projects/teaching-sustainable-development>.

Swaraj University and the Shikshantar movement – re-imagining education outside the frameworks of formal schooling

SWARAJ UNIVERSITY WAS established in 2010 as a two-year initiation into a self-designed learning programme for young people. Swaraj University is situated on the regenerated land of the Tapovan Ashram, a 15-acre campus, retreat and organic farm located in the Aravalli Range, 15 km from the city of Udaipur in Rajasthan, India. Swaraj University is one of the many action-research experiments of Shikshantar: The Peoples’ Institute for Rethinking Education and Development, also based in Udaipur. The Shikshantar movement was founded in the 1990s in response to a shift in governmental policies and attitudes to a TINA⁸-inspired, neoliberal, consumerism, privatization-based agenda related to a strong wave of anti-Gandhian sentiment that took over the country during that period. The 1990s in India were also marked by a newly emerging trend of professionalization, or NGO-ization of social movements and social work in general. The traditional mechanisms of social cohesion and community support, such as the seva traditions of voluntary community service and its accompanying gift culture, started to be supplanted by programmes led by increasingly corporatized, professional NGOs, often supported by foreign funding.

In the 1990s many people, including myself, who had left the corporate world, joined the newly emerging NGOs. And very early on it was already possible to sense the frustration of people who wanted to escape the corporate culture, but suddenly found themselves to be part of a corporatist NGO structure, which was not what they signed up for. A very profound shift was happening, where you could see how people that used to be working with communities and working with their own visions, started shifting to become implementers of somebody else’s vision, the vision of international NGOs and international donor agencies. (Manish Jain, Swaraj University)

The 1990s also brought important changes to collective understandings of the role and purpose of education and learning. These were reduced to the idea of formal schooling, promoted globally through the World Bank and UNESCO’s *Education For All* program, whose aim was to introduce compulsory Western-type schooling to all children of the world under the slogan of the “right to education”, which Shikshantar refers to as McEducation for All.

During the Indian freedom struggle, important figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Jiddu Krishnamurti and Sri Aurobindo all spoke about schooling as slavery and of the need to re-imagine education in ways that help expand people’s consciousness. Gandhi’s work on Hind Swaraj questioned the dominant colonialist narratives of progress and development and

⁸ TINA – There Is No Alternative is a popular phrase in neoliberal economics coined by UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. TINA refers to the notion that deregulated, so-called free-market economies are the only functional way to organize societies and that globalized capitalism made possible by liberalization of international trade offers the best and only way to build economic growth, increase general wealth and organize social services.

challenged the assumptions of European/Western superiority, promulgated through modern/colonial institutions and notions of governance, health, education, technology and economical organization. Reviving education and transforming it from being a vehicle of colonial domination into a vehicle for anti-colonial resistance, grounded in the traditions of learning and sharing that were indigenous to India, was seen as pivotal to the success of the immediate and longer-term freedom struggle. However, in the 1990s radical critiques of formal education, grounded in the Gandhian Swaraj worldview or non-military-industrialist thought, had all but disappeared or become co-opted by the increasingly neoliberal state. The Shikshantar movement emerged from the perceived need to resuscitate the discourse on re-imagining education and development, not just as theoretical concepts, but as something rooted in the everyday realities of people's lives and cultures. The main problem of education framed as factory schooling that Shikshantar and Swaraj University are trying to address, is that modern compulsory education is grounded in a monoculture and deficit theorization of people who have not had access to formal schooling. It does not respect the diverse local knowledge, imaginations or wisdom traditions of communities and nature. Rather, the purpose and design of factory schooling, as understood by Shikshantar and Swaraj University, is geared towards the production of new cohorts of *homo economicus* in the guise of human resource development, to keep feeding and growing an extractive, exploitative and violent global economy.

The problem of formal education is much deeper than simply trying to reform the education system to make it more inclusive and accessible, more flexible, even more critical. The problem of education is essentially the same as the problem of development: it starts from a deficit perspective. It creates an artificial set of standards and starts to see the rest of the world through a deficit lens and tells people that they don't know anything because they don't have/go to schools. Even to this day, most of the international agencies and NGOs still use this language of "first generation learners" for children who go to school for the first time. This is a hugely insulting and humiliating thing to say, because it implies that until schools showed up, nobody



was ever learning anything. There was no knowledge being created or shared — no wisdom, no learning, no understanding of how to live a good life. This all-pervasive deficit theorization motivated us to really re-examine and unravel the whole design of education. (Manish Jain, Swaraj University)

For this and other related reasons, the Swaraj University programme focuses on self-designed learning that invites learners to identify their own visions and engages them in developing the skills, relationships and practices they need to manifest those visions. The learners, or *khojis*, engage in action-research experiments, participatory community living, unlearning workshops, learning journeys, apprenticeships, peer-to-peer informal interactions and self-reflection through silence. Swaraj's programme is as much about developing the capacities and confidence that young people need to create and pursue their unique learning paths as it is about strengthening their leadership capacities to develop and support regenerative and post-development initiatives in their communities.

The Swaraj University programme also helped initiate the India-wide campaign Healing Ourselves from the Diploma Disease which says “no” to degrees and certificates and promotes alternative personnel evaluation frameworks such as those based on experiential portfolios. Establishing alternative models of evaluation, indicators, definitions and alternative economies based on them is crucial for the relevance and success of Swaraj's educational programme. Many of the learners who come to Swaraj University, and even more their parents, are struggling with the fear of how they will be able to support themselves after finishing the programme. Given that Swaraj University issues no degrees or certificates, which are usually considered gateways to employment, it had to develop a complementary alternative system that enables the *khojis* to have access to work experience and opportunities outside formalized structures.

Diplomas create a hierarchical monopoly system that acts as a gatekeeper to opportunity. Many social justice groups are trying to get more young people from marginalized backgrounds into universities giving out a few more keys to the room. But we are trying to break down the door, saying you don't even need that particular key to hope to live a good life. (Manish Jain, Swaraj University)

The Healing Ourselves from the Diploma Disease campaign is part of this attempt to de-monopolize access to employment and other life opportunities and decent knowledge hierarchies created and reinforced by the system of formal education. Over several years, the campaign has attracted more than a thousand individuals, companies, NGOs, movements and other associations who are ready to take on Swaraj's *khojis* without a degree or diploma. The *khojis* can engage in a two-month internship and often receive an opportunity for a more permanent paid position.

The practice of learning by doing and making mistakes, which revitalizes the tradition of apprenticeship that has strong roots in India, is also important in Swaraj's educational model. One of the reasons learners are called *khojis* (seekers) is that learners who enter Swaraj University are encouraged to learn mostly from their own experiences and inner driving questions, but under guidance and support from their mentors.

Three important disciplines underpin all of Swaraj University's programmes and action-research: (1) unlearning of harmful modern/colonial or monoculture habits, fears and mindsets, (2) revitalization of the gift culture and learning to expand the field of trust and conviviality that



makes alternative economies and livelihoods viable and possible, and (3) *jugaad*, a disposition and practice of playful improvisation and prototyping with whatever materials are at hand. These three disciplines are also aligned with the Gandhian understanding of Nai Taleem education as being about educating the head (unlearning/decolonization), the heart (trust/gift culture/empathy) and hands (*jugaad*/playful improvisation/embodiment).

Whatever their personal background may be, *khojis* who enter Swaraj University usually find themselves at a stage in their lives where they are exploring questions related to finding some existential purpose and direction, while at the same time struggling with the fear of how will they be able to make a living after they finish the program. Apart from the safety net already mentioned, provided by Swaraj's partners who are engaged in the Healing Ourselves from Diploma Disease campaign, Swaraj University attempts to exorcise that fear of money, scarcity and livelihood through several interrelated streams of learning. Indeed, one of Swaraj's slogans is: from mainstreaming to many-streaming. The first learning strand follows the logic of "fighting poison with poison" and takes *khojis* on an intense learning course in social entrepreneurship business skills and starting up their own enterprises so they can gain confidence that, although they are exploring alternatives to dominant forms of education and employment, they will still know how to navigate the stresses and contradictions of the global financial and economic system. Furthermore, earning one's first paycheck has become a rite of passage into adulthood for many families. Once young people cross this line, they feel more confident about walking a path that is different from mainstream normative societal expectations.

The second stream invites *khojis* to learn about the ideas of commoning, *seva* (sacred service) and gift culture. The library, café and many other experiments of Swaraj University are organized according to the principles of sharing, abundance, and kindness. In addition, *khojis* enter traditional communities that have kept these practices alive through countless centuries, and they are given the opportunities to experience viscerally the benefits and struggles of such ways of living and being. One part of this learning stream is the "cycle yatra", a one-week-long pilgrimage journey

on bicycles through villages that the *khajis* go on without any money, plans, technology or other means of sustenance. These pedagogical experiments are grounded in various Sikh, Sufi, Buddhist and Jain traditions of practicing *seva*, voluntary simplicity and non-attachment to material possessions. There is a famous Sufi saying, “more possessions - more possessed”. The journey is designed to support *khajis* in finding new understanding of wealth, happiness and abundance beyond the dominant money game. The final learning strand *khajis* are invited to is related to developing one’s *hunar*, which could be roughly translated as living-skills, creativity and wisdom. *Khajis* explore basic skills of self-reliance such as how to make their own clothes, build their own mud houses, grow and cook their own food, rewild, upcycle and live in community.

These combined learning streams are designed to help *khajis* find their own inner compass that can help them better navigate the difficult terrain of modern life and exist within and without the toxic safety blankets of modern social, economic and educational structures.

More information about the work of Swaraj University can be found at: <http://www.swarajuniversity.org/>
More information about Shikshantar movement can be found at: <https://www.shikshantar.org/>
Swaraj University and Shikshantar have evolved other self-designed learning programmes, such as the Udaipur Jail University (<https://www.jailuniversity.org/>), the Hunarshala Tribal Youth Leadership Academy (<https://www.hunarshala.org/>) and the Unschooled Ecovillage.



Unitierra Oaxaca – learning in friendship and community for a possibility of different worlds

IN 1997, AMIDST the struggle against state-led violence, an assembly of Indigenous peoples in Oaxaca presented a declaration that formal education has been the main tool of the state to destroy the Indigenous peoples. The purpose of the state-led educational system, in Mexico, India, Canada, the US and other colonized countries has always been to de-Indigenize young Indigenous people and alienate them from their culture and their communities. Following this declaration, many communities in Oaxaca started pulling their children from the schools. The state intervened and mobilized its resources to enforce the return of children to the schools, labelling the Indigenous communities as savage, backward and harming their own children. An independent study by researcher Benjamin Maldonado was supposed to demonstrate the educational gap between school-attending children and those that stayed at home. To everyone's surprise, the study showed

Indigenous communities around Oaxaca were happy with the results of the study but wondered how young people could continue to learn by themselves as young adults.

that children that were raised and educated in the communities not only had better social skills, knowing how to live as members of communities, and had better everyday life skills such as how to grow food and do other useful things, but also knew how to read and write better and had greater knowledge of geography, history and other disciplines than their school-attending peers.

Indigenous communities around Oaxaca were happy with the results of the study but wondered how young people could continue to learn by themselves as young adults, because some of the specific knowledge they wished to acquire was not always available within their communities. These concerns gave birth to Universidad de la Tierra (Unitierra), established as a joint project of several Indige-

nous and non-Indigenous organizations. Although it does not issue diplomas and certificates, Unitierra calls itself a university because it focuses on adult learning and because it wishes to reclaim the tradition of learner-centred and learner-driven education of the first universities. The name Unitierra came from one of its Zapotec founders, who said that this university should always have its feet firmly on the ground (tierra) and should always be grounded in care for Mother Earth. Unitierras exist today in various communities, not just in Oaxaca, not just in Mexico, but also in Colombia, California, Canada, Spain and Japan. Although inspired by Unitierra Oaxaca, all of these organizations are unique, responding in their ways to the needs of the local communities.

Unitierra is not in the business of education, we avoid education, we resist education. We don't want to teach anything to anyone. We work in the field of learning. The idea is, for those who come, and for all of us here, to learn in freedom. (Gustavo Esteva, Unitierra Oaxaca)

As can be imagined, Unitierra's approach to education is different to that of most other universities. Unitierra has no teachers, no curriculum and no permanent classrooms and all of its services

are free. When people come to study at Unitierra they choose what they want to learn about and design their own learning programme, leaving them in charge of their own learning process. Unitierra helps to put them in contact with other people who have the necessary knowledge and skills learners are seeking. Learning by doing is the main pedagogical principle of Unitierra, and this learning often takes the form of various kinds of unpaid apprenticeships. Unitierra may officially have no teachers, but during the twenty years of its existence, they have managed to create a strong network of friends and supporters to whom they can send their learners to acquire the needed skills and knowledge.

Since Unitierra issues no diplomas, learners do not graduate once they have passed an exam or completed a thesis, but once they feel they have learned all they can in a particular context. Unitierra's main role is to make their learning journey possible by connecting them with their peers and mentors and providing various kinds of organizational and technical support they may require.

For a long time, successful completion of formal university education has been associated with better employment opportunities. However, in many parts of the world in both the global North and global South, having a university degree no longer provides tangible employment benefits. In fact, in many cases, it can even be seen as an obstacle towards getting a job, as more and more people are being considered over-qualified. Being aware of this reality, young people who come to study through Unitierra's network are mostly not interested in seeking employment opportunities within the existing job market, but instead are interested in creating their own ways of living through different modalities of autonomous activities and cooperative association.

For a long time, successful completion of formal university education has been associated with better employment opportunities.

Because many students from Indigenous communities struggle to cover the costs of living in the city of Oaxaca, where Unitierra is based, Unitierra started to work directly within and between communities, often facilitating processes of peer- and community-learning in which individuals and communities learn from each other. These learning exchanges are often focused on important specific topics, such as solving problems with water shortages or floods and learning techniques of composting, other kinds of waste processing, or food growing. Sometimes communities are trying to address very complex issues, such as the lack of work opportunities in the region which leads some of the young people, especially men, to join one of the many drug cartels that operate in the area. In their continuous struggle to break with the state-sanctioned violence of capitalism, many of the communities have identified the struggle against patriarchy as a key component and have started to establish safe spaces for women, where women can talk about their common problems and learn to fight and heal together.

The combination of traditional patriarchy with modern sexism is creating a kind of a hell for women in Oaxaca. In response, the women started a movement for feminization of politics, and they are taking up leadership positions in many social movements and in many institutions. But for their courage, they are paying a horrible price. Many have been victims of femicide, because men are responding with violence to this, at home and in public places. You now have parts of Unitierra, where men are not allowed to enter, because women meet there and discuss how to deal with the violence of men. They are singing there, they are doing many things to heal themselves from this horrible violence. (Gustavo Esteva, Unitierra Oaxaca)



Perhaps this example best illustrates how the work of Unitierra extends beyond the learning needs of individuals seeking to acquire new knowledges and skills, to respond to the needs for collective learning and healing that are both vitally important for building resilience and collective strength, especially in contexts of high levels of systemic and structural violence.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 forced many communities around Oaxaca into self-imposed lockdowns. Many of them have managed to turn this period into generative learning experiences, as people in the communities had to find new ways to feed themselves and keep each other healthy and safe. Self-sufficiency and self-governance have always been important features of the Indigenous struggles in Oaxaca and elsewhere, and under the changed realities of the pandemic, traditional knowledge of living and working with the land became even more important. Because the Indigenous communities in the region have never enjoyed the privilege of protection of their basic rights and needs from the state – in fact, the state has often acted as the main agent of violence against them – their survival depended on keeping alive the notion of commoning, of being, living, learning, laughing and crying together, always in relation to each other, to other beings and to the land. To those of us who have been brought up and socialized as autonomous, individual subjects, it may be difficult to imagine how differently a self can be imagined and how different it can feel to inhabit one's body, not as a separate singular individual, but as a multitude of selves, each emerging from our many relations with other people and other beings. Many Indigenous languages do not even have words for “me” and “you”; they only have “we” because the self is never imagined or felt as separate, but as always in relation with other human and other-than-human beings. While a world of “we-ing” instead of a world of “me-ing” might be difficult to imagine and embody for many of us, the work of Unitierra also depends strongly on another, more familiar concept: friendship.

The most important category today, in philosophical and political terms is friendship. You cannot escape the prison of individualism, consumerism and control-based society through ideology, through religion, or through creating “alternative” organizations, you escape that prison, you abandon that prison through friendship. Perhaps you only have a few true friends. But with true friends you can create a different world. This has been always our idea. Everything we try to do, we begin with friendship. (Gustavo Esteva, Unitierra Oaxaca)

It is the network of friendship, the willingness of hundreds of people to share their knowledges and skills with each other in a non-transactional way, that makes Unitierra possible. But deep and true friendship is indeed rare, because it requires that we learn to respect and support each other



unconditionally, with all the fabulous and fallible qualities that we may embody, especially in moments when it is not in our perceived self-interest to do so. Perhaps such forms of friendship do indeed hold the keys to a different world, especially if we can also learn how not to abuse them.

Modern/colonial history and the systemic violence that ensues from this history do not speak in favour of our individual and collective capacity to respond well to these kinds of invitations, but if we really want to have a different kind of future, or any future at all, we will have to invest considerable effort into healing the harmful relations we have built against ourselves, each other and the world that surrounds us. If we do not, the violent consequences of our destructive and immature collective behaviour, of our inherited and socialized incapacity to sense ourselves as entangled with each other, will again be felt most strongly by those that have been feeling and carrying this collective pain for a long time. Many, like the Indigenous women in Oaxaca, are paying with their lives when they tell us to stop. Perhaps Oaxaca seems far away to most people, but in an entangled world there is no such thing as far, as there is nothing that is not connected to everything and everyone else.

More information about the work of Unitierra Oaxaca can be found at: <https://unitierraoax.org/english/>.

Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures – developing the capacity to face difficult and painful challenges of our complex, uncertain and volatile times

GESTURING TOWARDS DECOLONIAL Futures (GTDF) collective is an international assemblage of researchers, artists, educators, students, social justice and environmental activists and Indigenous knowledge keepers. The educational work of the collective brings together concerns related to racism, colonialism, unsustainability, climate change, economic instability, physical and mental health crises, as well as the intensification of social and ecological violence. Unlike many other educational initiatives, the pedagogical frameworks developed by the GTDF collective start from the premise of questioning our normalized assumptions, beliefs and investments in the continuity of the kind of life and social structures we have been socialized into.

Drawing on insights and contributions from different communities around the world, but especially from Indigenous communities in contexts of high-intensity struggles in Latin America and Canada, the work of the collective has often been described as a decolonial, non-Western psychoanalytical approach to global education. This means that in its analysis of “wicked” global problems, the collective explores what kinds of pedagogical practice and theory are required when we take the inherent unsustainability and multifaceted violence (such as racism, gender-based violence, classism, speciesism and others) and injustices of our modern societies seriously.

The word “gesturing” in the name of our collective reflects our shared belief that truly different kind of futures that would not be simply an extension of our modern/colonial present, will only be possible when the stifling grip that modernity/coloniality exerts on our minds, hearts and bodies loses its power. Therefore, none of us can claim to already hold the answers and imaginaries of what such different futures might look like. Indeed, one of the main arguments that guide our work, suggests that true alternatives lie hidden, not in what we can imagine, but in the realm of not (yet) imaginable. (GTDF collective)

For members of the GTDF collective, taking unsustainability, violence and injustice seriously means they are not considered to be unintended and unfortunate side-effects of the kind of societies we have, but are instead seen as essential pre-conditions for their continued existence. In terms of environmental, sustainability and social justice issues and other topics, this means the pedagogical frameworks and approaches developed by the GTDF collective are attempting not only to question our collective and individual capacity, but above all examine our willingness or unwillingness to adopt the necessary changes and transformations required to address the many destructive patterns that consciously and unconsciously guide a substantial part of our shared and socially sanctioned and rewarded behaviour.

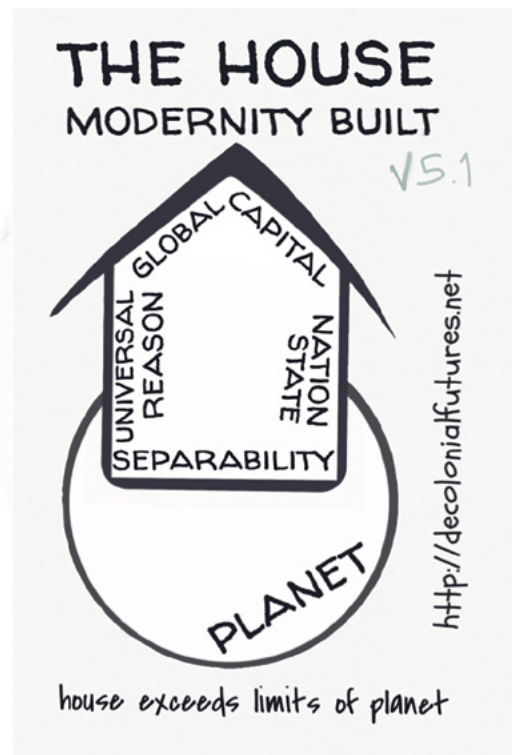
In this, the work of the GTDF collective often goes against the grain of common approaches to pedagogy, where more and better knowledge is considered to be the main vehicle that informs

changes in our thinking, which in turn is supposed to lead to changes in our behaviour that ultimately translate into changes in our societies. Such approaches usually operate from the underlying assumption that when given the right knowledge, skills and opportunities, people will act in ways that are beneficial to everyone. Instead of seeing better information, more knowledge and more critical thinking as the main, or even only vehicle for social change and transformation, members of the GTDF collective see our individual and collective incapacity seriously to address the multiple global crises we are facing today (environmental, social, health, political, economic, etc.) as resulting from a problematic and harmful modern/colonial habit of being that keeps us attached to and invested in the kind of beliefs, illusions and false hopes we are unwilling and perhaps unable to let go. In some ways, these attachments and investments could be compared to neuro-chemical addictions, because many of these harmful habits of being (individualism, separability, narcissism, human exceptionalism, and others) are socially sanctioned, and we often derive a sense of pleasure from pursuing them.

According to the research and pedagogical experience of the members of the collective, this kind of behaviour thus works hand in hand with our affective unconscious investments into the continuous upkeep of harmful patterns of behaviour we have been socialized into. Rather than facing the full extent of the consequences of our actions, which, at end of the day, may manifest themselves in our destruction of the planetary capacity to continue sustaining the human species, we instead deploy countless strategies of denial and distraction that help us shift our attention away from what really matters.

Members of the GTDF collective examined strategies and approaches used by various communities, initiatives, movements, activists, artists, researchers and other organizations and individuals, especially in contexts of low-intensity struggles, to engage, or not engage, with the problematic aspects of modernity's multiple inherent structural violence, such as (neo)colonialism, racism, heteropatriarchy, unsustainability and extractivism. They observed and mapped four main constitutive denials that can be traced across the spectrum of different approaches to social change. The general prevalence, and in many cases, depth of these denials, has led the GTDF collective to suggest that we may count these denials amongst the structural elements of the modern/colonial habit of being. They are: (1) the denial of systemic violence and complicity in harm (the fact that our comforts, securities and enjoyments are subsidized by expropriation, dispossession and exploitation somewhere else), (2) the denial of the limits of the planet (the fact that the planet cannot sustain exponential growth and consumption), (3) the denial of entanglement (our insistence on seeing ourselves as separate from each other and the land, rather than entangled within a living wider metabolism that has its own non-human intelligence), and (4) the denial of the depth and magnitude of the problems we face. Although not all of these denials are fully present at all times, the collective's research suggests that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to find and imagine approaches to social change and transformation that would be fully mindful of addressing all four denials at all times. One of the reasons this is such a difficult task is that many aspects of these denials are unconscious, and even our best intentions at addressing them invariably lead us to reproduce them in different, and often more subtle, ways.

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One of the main sets of pedagogical tools being developed by GTDF collective are social cartographies. Social cartographies are visual, metaphoric, provisional and situated mappings that can support people in clarifying the conditions and particularities of their own contexts, and help them to learn to sit with and learn from contradictions without seeking to resolve them immediately. These cartographies are being developed to support the depth and rigour of intellectual and self-reflective processes by orienting the processes through critical generosity, attention to difference, and self-implication, and thus avoid simplistic or universal solutions to complex problems. At the same time, cartographies create space for the breadth and integrity of the affective and relational processes that are involved in facing the full scope of current challenges, and walking and stumbling together toward other possibilities without determining the direction or outcome of change in advance.

The key social cartography used in the work of the GTDF collective is the house of modernity. House of modernity is used as shorthand to describe modernity as a way of being, seeing, desiring and relating to the world grounded on the foundation of separability of humans and nature, the twin carrying walls of the nation-state and Enlightenment (humanism), all sheltered by the roof of global capitalism. When members of the GTDF collective speak of modernity they refer not only to the basic political structural elements of our modern societies (capitalist nation-states), but also their deeper existential underpinnings, such as the notion of universal reason (Cartesian rationality), and above all the notion of individualistic separability, which sees humans as fundamentally separate not just from the rest of nature, but also from each other.

The pedagogical experience of the GTDF collective's members suggests that one's relationship to the house and investments or lack thereof in accessing its promises depends in part on where one is situated in relation to it, not only currently but also in aspiration (e.g., content being in the basement; desiring to monopolize the space on the top floors; seeking mobility from the bottom floor to the top; at the doors struggling to get in; outside of the house, but not seeking entry, etc.). This has important

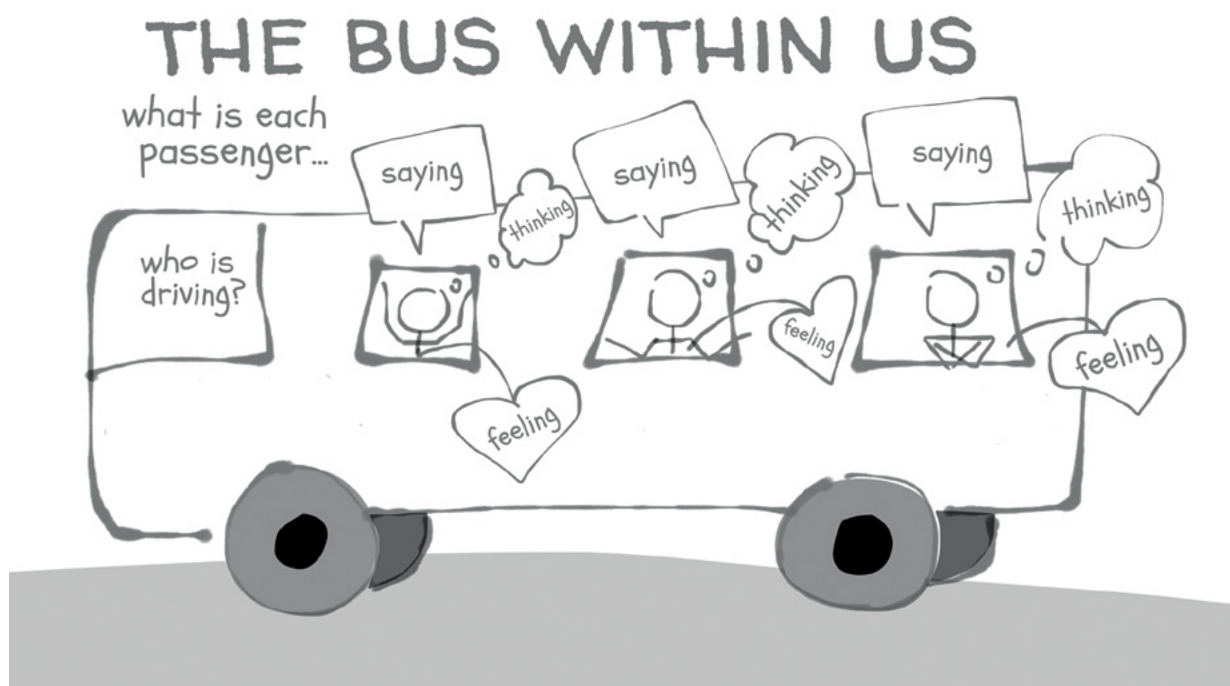
educational implications in terms of imagined and desirable social transformation, because depending on where we see and feel ourselves to be situated in the house, and depending on how we would like our position to change and on the extent to which we believe the house is still viable, we will want to enact different kinds of social change, or perhaps only want to engage in cosmetic changes to the house rather than deeper structural transformation, or even its dismantling.

Another key metaphor members of the GTDF collective use in their pedagogical work is the metaphor of the bus. The bus emerged as a response to the need for difficult, honest and sober conversations about difficult topics, where the integrity of relationships is prioritized above the emotional charge of the content being discussed. Given the often highly charged conversations about modern/colonial continuities and possible transformative decolonial gestures, the bus has been invaluable in helping the participants of the collective's educational activities to map and better navigate the complexity of different voices, sensations and affective responses that can emerge within people's bodies while engaging with various kinds of difficult knowledge. Especially, since most of us that have been socialized into sensing ourselves as coherent, homogenous, autonomous individuals (as "skin-encapsulated self"), the bus tool can offer a broader, more nuanced and more inclusive perspective on who we are and how broad the range of things we may be thinking, feeling and doing at any point in time is. Instead of perceiving ourselves as only one single, coherent and self-transparent person, inhabiting a single body, the bus metaphor invites learners to see imagine and sense themselves as multiple characters (passengers) who inhabit the individual and collective bodies (i.e. the different decks of our buses).

In group settings, the bus methodology can provide learners with a language to voice complex and conflictual thoughts and feelings, without suppressing our internal paradoxes or imposing artificial coherence. For instance, instead of saying: I think that... or I feel that... the bus metaphor can help transform the language into phrases, such as: There is a passenger on my bus saying that... or There are passengers on my bus debating whether... When using the bus as a mapping and communications tool it can be also helpful to determine some characteristics of our passengers, such as their age, gender or other personal traits to make it more clear which passengers are active and why. For instance, such an analysis would help us say things, such as: The angry teenager passenger inside me wants to... or The strict teacher inside me feels that... By introducing some distance between a person and their passengers, the bus can help people voice feelings and concerns that they might otherwise unwilling to acknowledge, either out of shame, guilt or any number of other reasons. (GTDF collective)

Members of the GTDF collective believe these changes in self-perception and language related to it are not only instrumental in building greater capacity for critical self-reflexivity but can also help learners release some of the socialized investments in coherent narratives and singular solutions that are often inimical to deeply transformative pedagogical work. Perhaps more importantly, they can help participants engage with the "shadow" or hidden side of their unconscious, which is often overlooked in educational practice but which also contains crucial, if perhaps uncomfortable, insights for personal and collective change.

More recently, the collective has framed its work as "depth education", which is an educational modality directed towards deeper manifestations of sobriety, maturity, discernment and accountability. In navigating the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of our current times, depth education is primarily about the development of "stomach and stamina" to navigate storms



in choppy seas. In other words, depth education is about developing negative and generative capabilities. Negative capability (i.e. stomach) is about our individual and collective disposition and capacity to face difficult and painful things without feeling overwhelmed, immobilized or demanding to be rescued from discomfort. Generative (stamina) capability is our individual and collective disposition and capacity generatively to navigate and move thinking and emotions in contexts characterized by fast-paced change, hyper-complexity, polarization, and wicked challenges (i.e. storms/choppy seas). This is different from teacher-centred and student-centred education, as it requires everyone to de-centre themselves, disarm their affective landmines, declutter distractions and disinvest in harmful desires in order to re-centre the world we share and have collectively harmed.

More information about the pedagogical, artistic and cartographic experiments of the GTDF collective, including the embodied and land-based practices of co-sensing with Radical Tenderness can be found at: www.decolonialfutures.net.

Teia das 5 curas – developing Indigenous-based pedagogies of justice, healing and wellbeing

“**TEIA DAS 5 curas**” (i.e. the web of five modes of healing) is an international network of Indigenous groups in Latin America and Canada focusing on education and participatory research around Indigenous practices that can help tackle the ecological, health and social crises the modern/colonial system has created. The project supports exchanges between Indigenous communities in the North and South and the work of learning centres in the villages of the communities that offer educational programmes based on an experiential land-based pedagogy that centres on the Earth. There are more than ten Indigenous groups associated with the network, but five groups currently form the core team in Brazil: Huni Kui (Feijó, Acre); Pitaguary (Pacatuba, Ceará); Fulni-ô (Aguas Belas, Pernambuco); Pataxó (Porto Seguro, Bahia); and Tremembé (Itapipoca, Ceará).



The Earth-centred pedagogy of the Teia is framed around five modes of justice, healing and wellbeing:

- healing the ways we think (cognitive justice/healing/wellbeing)
- healing the ways we feel (affective justice/healing/wellbeing)
- healing the ways we relate (relational justice/healing/wellbeing)
- healing the ways we exchange (economic justice/healing/wellbeing), and
- healing the cycles of the Earth itself and ourselves within them (ecological justice/healing/wellbeing)

The activities of the network currently centre around the development of two broad curricula for the five modes of healing, one focusing on the needs of Indigenous peoples, another for non-Indigenous peoples. The understanding of transformative education of the network underscores the fact that Indigenous peoples make up only 4% of the world's population, but they are responsible for the protection of 80% of the world's biodiversity against the threat of ecological destruction posed by modern societies. The network highlights the fact that this destruction is being carried out by well educated people, which poses questions about the role of schooling in modern societies in terms of supporting ideals of progress and development that are both violent and unsustainable.

People with the highest levels of formal education are often those who are the most invested in upholding the fantasies of separability and superiority that are destroying our planet. Therefore, although Western education has been and still is promoted worldwide as what can save the planet and alleviate poverty and promote sustainability, we can see how this kind of education also created the conditions for the continuity of urban consumerist individualism, where the sense of reverence and relationship towards the Earth is being replaced by a desire for social mobility through accumulation, greed and consumption. (Teia das 5 curas)

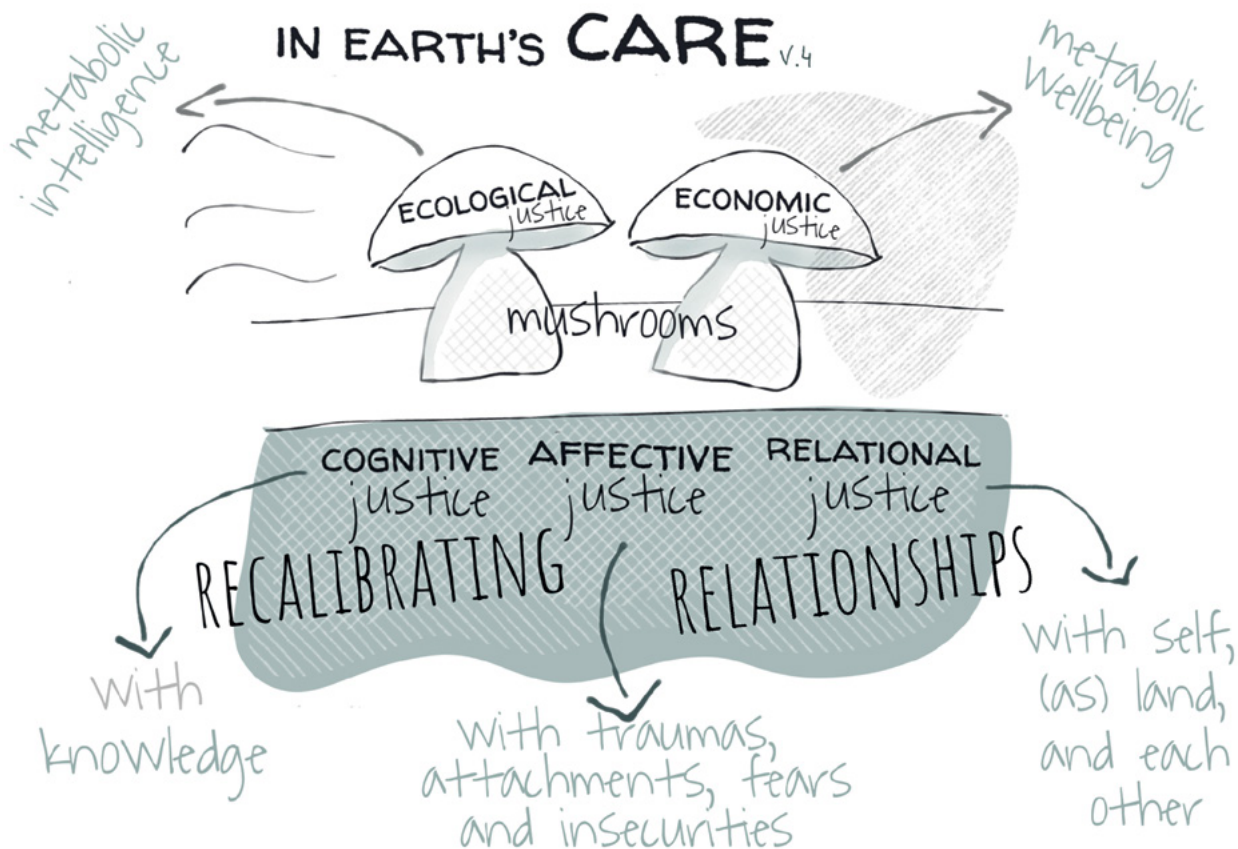
When pursuing these ideals of social progress and development, the comforts of the few happen at the expense of the many: other humans, non-humans and the planet. The network offers a critique of the ways in which Western societies see sustainability as hope for the continuity of a lethal system for the planet and for humanity, where the most vulnerable are continuously exploited or

Indigenous peoples make up only 4% of the world's population, but they are responsible for the protection of 80% of the world's biodiversity.

exterminated. For the network, this happens because of the false belief that modernity represents the best or even only possible choice for us all to live well.

In this context, modernity is understood as a set of dangerous illusions based on the alleged separation between man and nature and a single story of progress, development and presumably superior form of civilization. The network perceives these illusions as the roots of our collective disease that is harming both the planet and its people. They understand that, before we can imagine a

better future within formal education, we need to confront the damage these illusions have created. Indigenous communities which are part of the Teia emphasize that we need to understand how our greed, arrogance and human vanity are causing loss of biodiversity, exhaustion of soils, poisoning of the water and air we breathe, changes in climate processes and extinction of plants and animals which are our relatives, and how all of this is leading us to our own extinction. They believe we need a different kind of education that can help us understand how we got to where we are now and how this path is taking us to the abyss. They believe we need to wake up to the reality



that our planet is sick, that we are part of the disease and that it is our responsibility to learn how to heal. For this to be possible, people need to learn that it is we humans who are in Earth's care, not the other way around.

At best, in Western societies, economic and ecological wellbeing are seen as the focus of our efforts for positive change. The network sees it differently: it sees ecological and economic wellbeing as a result of other forms of healing and wellbeing that need to precede it. They use the metaphor of mushrooms and mycelium to illustrate this point. Mushrooms are the fruits that grow from the mycelium. If there is no healthy mycelium, there are no mushrooms. For the network, economic and ecological wellbeing are like mushrooms dependent on the healthy mycelium, which represents cognitive, affective and relational wellbeing. If our thinking, feeling and relating are diseased and unhealthy, there can be no economic or ecological health, wellbeing or justice. In order to produce healthy mushrooms (metabolic wellbeing and intelligence), we need to learn how to nurture a healthy mycelium. This requires a specific form of recalibration of relationships, which are represented in the image below.

If our thinking, feeling and relating are diseased and unhealthy, there can be no economic or ecological health, wellbeing or justice.

For the network, the Earth itself and the global challenges we are facing are our teachers: we will have to learn with and through the struggle itself. They pose it as a choice: we can start this by willingly confronting education now and make different choices, or we can expect things to get worse and start when we no longer have the option. They warn us that to do this we will need a lot of courage, stamina, compassion, humility and patience. We will need to reactivate forms of connection and responsibility that we have forgotten, but that are latent within

us. The five modes of healing, which are grounded on teachings from land-based spiritualities, can recalibrate our intentions in that direction. A summary of each mode of healing according to the network is provided next, based on an interview with Ninawa Huni Kui.

In order to **heal our ways of thinking**, we must learn that we cannot understand everything and that our existence on Earth is a sacred mystery that needs to be respected. We need to realize that no one owns the truth, no one group has all the answers, and the Earth itself is a living being whose bio-intelligence is larger than and incomprehensible to our limited intelligence. We also need to change our relationship with stories, realizing that no story is the whole story and that there are healthy stories, but there are also stories that are sick. The healing of our thinking means learning to differentiate between stories that can help us to grow wiser and healthier and stories that lead us to hurt each other and other beings.

In order to **heal our ways of feeling**, we need to change our relationship with both pain and joy. We need to learn not to run away from pain, but to learn from it. The focus on pleasure in modern societies creates the fear of pain and offers us a shallow and cheap version of joy. This cheap version of joy is unfulfilling and creates insatiability which drives our addiction to consumption. We need deep forms of joy so that we can have the strength to feel individual and collective pain, including the pain of the land itself. This pain needs to be witnessed before its lessons can be processed and integrated. We cannot skip this step.

In order to **heal our ways of relating**, we need to interrupt the idea that we are individuals who are separated from each other. We have to realize that we are not only interdependent, but entangled with each other. It is not possible to heal only individually; we need to heal collectively. We need to remember that we are part of each other, and we need to integrate our gifts so that we may walk in the storms that are coming without releasing anyone else's hand.

In order to **heal our ways of exchanging**, we need to understand that accumulation, greed and fear of scarcity are symptoms of the disease that deprives part of our collective body of the possibility of survival. We need to learn to distribute the different forms of work and sustenance in fair and healthy ways, so that everyone can play their part in healing humanity and healing the planet.

In order to **heal the cycles of Mother Earth**, we need to realize that the Earth is not an extension of our bodies: we are an extension of the Earth; we are a point in a continuum much larger than the life of the body we inhabit today. We need to realize that our bodies are also land, and that violence we inflict on the land is also inflicted on our bodies and the bodies of the children to come, both human and non-human. To heal our sense of belonging to the Earth and its cycles, we need to face life and death differently. We need to learn both to live and to die well and to face aging and death healthily, because these are fundamental parts of life.

Modern societies are not designed to generate responsible and mature wise elders because the sustainability of consumerism requires everyone to want to remain young. But many people, young and old in their chronological ages, are starting to realize they have been short-changed. This is where these five modes of healing can help recalibrate learning and unlearning towards responsible eldership.

Ninawa Huni Kui explains that these five healing modes were mapped to contribute to healing our planet: these are the first steps we need to take for another possibility of existence. He states that there is no way to move forward without dealing with what happened in our past. We need to wake up to the reality that our planet is sick, that we are part of the disease and that it is our responsibility to seek healing in order to help ourselves and our own planet. This process is difficult and painful, but without it we will not be able to understand why the house that was built by colonialism and human arrogance (with reference to the house of modernity of GTDF) is now falling apart.

Indigenous elders around the world have warned us for several generations that there would come a time when the Earth would collect the debt we have incurred with it. The Earth is a living organism that has consciousness and we are part of it. The Earth is not an object of ownership or a natural resource to be managed. The land is our mother and as part of it we are a huge family of human and nonhuman relatives. Many Indigenous people still carry this sentient practice, but it is important to emphasize that, in Indigenous traditions, these are not concepts that can be written in books. This is rather a way of life that involves the intellect, but that is also much broader than the intellect. The ways of living that respect and care for the earth and that care for future generations are not just beautiful words, they involve feelings and actions that promote sobriety maturity, discernment, accountability, which have the power to stop the individualism, arrogance, vanity and greed that put us on the path of extinction. We have to be clear about that. (Ninawa Huni Kui, Teia das 5 curas)

The Indigenous curriculum that the Teia das 5 curas network is developing involves land-based practices and exchanges in areas related to education, food security, sovereignty and traditional culinary practices; ancestral health and healing; collective mental health; rituals and rites of passage; alternative economies; arts, and language, culture and identity revitalization; Indigenous land governance; zero waste and a framework for ethical engagement with Indigenous communities.

More information about the work of the Teia (in Portuguese) is available at:
<https://blogs.ubc.ca/teiadas5curas/>.

Our Bodhi Project – approaching systemic transformation through the metaphor of living (and dying) organisms in need of collective healing and palliative care

In our work, we do not see systems as machines, but as living, breathing, dying organisms. In modern terminology this is referred to as social biomimicry, or the capacity and tendency of social systems to replicate the behavioral and organizing patterns of living organisms. Learning from different Earth-centered approaches, we wanted to explore how to embody ways of being that resonate with seeing ourselves, and the systems that we are embedded in, as collective, inseparable beings. The ancestral traditions that ground our work speak to the truth that our freedoms are interconnected, that our spaces are interconnected. Our Bodhi Project came into being through this life-long search, which is both deeply spiritual, but also deeply political. (Sonali S. Balajee, Our Bodhi Project)

OUR BODHI PROJECT is a political and spiritual organizing project, working in the field of racial, social, cultural, gender and environmental systemic collective healing. Bodhi is led by women of colour with roots from across the globe who live and work as settlers on the lands of the Molalla, Multnomah, Cowlitz, Coast Salish and other Indigenous nations, in what is known today as Portland, Oregon in the US. Bodhi members come from diverse professional backgrounds, with decades of experience in large governmental, non-governmental and corporate institutions, grassroots community efforts, philanthropy, education, arts-based initiatives, and health programmes.

Members of Our Bodhi Project are committed to carrying forward their ancestors' practices that focus on collective health for all living systems and often describe their work as that of social doctors, social healers or social naturopaths (natural, non-Western/allopathic healers). In the understanding of ayurvedic, naturopathic and other healing and spiritual traditions that ground and guide the work of Bodhi, healing is not understood as merely a process of restoring biophysical health of individual bodies or their organs, but as a holistic, collective process in which all bodies, human and other-than-human are seen as always entangled with one another. As such, the processes of restoring collective health are understood as being about restoring balance to a complex web of human and more-than-human relations at many different levels, cognitive, affective, relational, physical and spiritual.

This commitment to restoring collective health of all living systems not only provides the main ethical compass for Bodhi's work; it also grounds Bodhi's critical analysis of transformative processes – the project's theory of change, as well as the socially, culturally, organizationally and personally transformative practices that the collective uses in their work with individuals, groups and organizations. The key

insight permeating the whole work of Bodhi is that when systems are seen as dynamic, mutually entangled, living beings rather than as inanimate machines, the analysis of what constitutes problems and solutions changes profoundly.

For instance, when systems, which can be either organizations, movements, shared cultural patterns or any other collective formations, are seen as machines, they are approached as inanimate, separate devices whose malfunctioning can be fixed through introduction of specific policies, normative standards, allocation of additional human, financial and other resources or any other technical means imaginable to solve the current problem in the machine's functioning. While these are all important strategies that can have beneficial or harmful real-life consequences for a large number of people and other beings whose lives are intertwined with the systems', such a mechanistic view often does not allow for a deeper examination and addressing of systemic imbalances, violence and other issues that may have led to the emergence of existing problems. One of the reasons for this is that when systems are seen as lifeless mechanic entities, most transformative efforts will be either directed at restoring the machines' originally intended functionality or improving their particular functional shortcomings, rather than exploring how the health of systems influences the health and wellbeing of other life forms, human and other-than-human, with which they are interrelated. From a collective health-oriented perspective, a mechanistic view of systems only enables addressing singular, particular issues (symptoms) of larger systemic problems, rather than the root causes (disease) which have led to the emergence of the symptoms.



What does it mean to center the Earth and other beings that are not human in the sense of them providing guidance for our movements, for the ways we work and organize ourselves? What changes in our questions, if we center the collective well-being of all living systems? (Sonali S. Balajee, Our Bodhi Project)

The experience of Bodhi members shows that the analysis of problems and solutions changes profoundly when systems are (re-)imagined as living beings. What changes perhaps, even more, is the horizon of imagined, possible and relevant interventions. When, for instance, instead of as machines, systems are imagined as trees, from a holistic perspective, one needs to consider that trees not only have leaves, branches, trunks and roots, but also that they are grounded in the soil, draw their energy from the sun, and engage in exchanges with the air and the countless other organisms that surround them. When systems are approached as living, breathing and dying organisms, from a naturopathic, holistic, health-informed perspective, questions about how we understand the nature of systemic problems (their root causes) and what the imagined solutions are, take on a distinctly different flavour. Instead of trying to fix specific problems of malfunctioning or dysfunctional systems, one can instead begin to explore why and how these systems found themselves in the situation in which they are now. What gave birth to them, from what kind of seeds did they sprout, in what kind of soil are they growing? How do they interact with other living beings and systems, and at what stage in their life cycle are they? Are they still young saplings

Instead of trying to fix specific problems of malfunctioning or dysfunctional systems, one can instead begin to explore why and how these systems found themselves in the situation in which they are now.

that need help and support to grow up or are they mature trees that need extra nutrients to bear fruit when the season is ripe? Do they need support from other micro-organisms and mycelial networks? Who finds their fruit tasty and nutritious, and for whom is it toxic and dangerous? Whose nutrients are they depleting so that they can feed themselves and other beings? Are they perhaps old trees, already decaying and dying? Should we be thinking about preparing the soil to receive them as a source of nutrients for new life? What is our role, as micro-organisms, in the metabolic processes of these larger beings and systems? What is our role in contributing to the collective health, not just of individual systems, but of the larger, planetary metabolism?

Questions that become possible when we see systems as living beings embedded in the much larger metabolism of the Earth can deeply transform the perspective we have on our work and on our role as members of organizations, movements, initiatives and other collective associations. That is because engaging with living systems in such a holistic way, above all requires a commitment to deep and radical relationality. According to the experiences of Bodhi members, questions of personal and institutional complicity in reproduction of systemic harm start to play a much more important role when people begin to learn to embody this perspective in their everyday life. A holistic, Earth-centred worldview makes it very difficult to see particular problems such as poverty, discrimination, racism, gender violence and environmental unsustainability as separate issues that can be addressed in isolation, without considering their broader implications for the wellbeing of all, human and other-than-human beings. Such a shift in perspective can be both personally and professionally disruptive, because it can lead to disenchantment and disillusionment with the strategies and solutions that have previously been considered effective, sensible, or, at the very least, good enough.



Such a reorientation in perspective can be particularly difficult for those who are meeting with the questions of personal and collective complicity in systemic harm seriously for the first time.

Bodhi's experience suggests that in order to go through these processes of difficult learning in generative ways, it is very important that participants not only understand, but also feel that the processes that centre collective health also centre their own health and wellbeing. For this purpose, Bodhi's members employ a wide range of creative and embodied practices such as mindfulness, yoga and various meditative techniques, whose purpose is not only to ensure participants' physical wellbeing, but also to build trust within the group and in the learning processes that unfold beyond the cognitive level. On the cognitive level, Bodhi's members work with participants to develop more nuanced maps and analyses that can help them create more accurate and relevant solutions and emergent plans. The participants often show increased interest in these processes when they begin to realize that the added complexity of holistic understanding can help them do their work more effectively and with a better sense of direction.

When you think about things that can crack open a person's mind and heart and cut through the pretense, arguably the most important thing you can tell them is: The reality is that the organization that you are in, is dying. (Sonali S. Balajee, Our Bodhi Project)

The biggest difference between mechanistic and collective health-oriented perspectives on systems is, that in the first case systems are unconsciously seen as permanent and undying, while from the second perspective death plays an integral, perhaps even the most important, role in their life. Conversations about death and dying are often unwelcome and dismissed in modern, permanent youth-oriented societies, but Bodhi's work shows us that we are robbing ourselves of much analytical, interventive and healing power when we discount its presence. Seeing systems first and foremost as living beings makes it possible for us also to see systems and ourselves as

dying beings, allowing us to explore strategies on how to make it possible for them and us, not only to live, but also to die well, so that their and our good death can provide healthy soil for new kinds of life to emerge.

Many would argue that, although modern systems have in many ways already exceeded the limits of planetary sustainability and long-term viability, they have now entered a phase in which they are actively resisting their own demise, trying to extend their lives past their intended time at an increasing cost to the wellbeing and health of human and all other beings. There are even those that would suggest that the entire centuries-long project of Western modernity, based on infinite growth, expansion and exploitation, has been grounded in a desire to conquer death and the fear of death from its very onset.

From a holistic, Earth-centred perspective, the structural violence of heteropatriarchy, racism, ableism, consumerism, colonialism, capitalism, neoliberalism, anthropocentrism and many other -isms may be considered as collective symptoms of a much bigger struggle, the struggle of modernity refusing to accept its imminent demise. In this sense, the work of Bodhi can be considered as twofold. On the one hand, its role is to provide holistic, naturopathic health services to systems in ways that contribute to the collective health of all living beings. On the other hand, its role is to provide palliative care for dying systems, so that in their struggle they do not cause even more unnecessary harm. This difficult but potentially immensely liberating process begins with the dying systems being supported in recognizing and accepting the truth of their own mortality.

More information about the work of Our Bodhi Project can be found at:

<https://www.ourbodhiproject.com/>.

Ten lessons from ten cases

THE TEN CASE studies presented in this publication feature markedly different understandings of and approaches to social change and transformation. The diversity of these approaches, which in themselves represent only a tiny fraction of the initiatives and movements that are working and emerging worldwide, has an inherent value of its own. For those who are new to this work of social, organizational and personal transformation, but perhaps even more for those who have been doing this for a while, it is important to remember that there is always so much we do not know and have not tried yet. It would be impossible, and in fact counterproductive to draw universal conclusions or suggestions for how individuals and organizations and movements alike should approach their work on social change and transformation. As this publication demonstrates, we may all be part of the same struggle for a different, more just, sustainable and wiser future, but that does not mean we enter the struggle through the same door.

In fact, several important differences can be observed between transformative practices that emerge from contexts of high-intensity struggles, where people's lives and livelihoods are directly threatened by modern/colonial violence, and practices that emerge from contexts of low-intensity struggles, where people are still enjoying the relative protection and comforts of modernity that are made possible through the externalization of violence elsewhere. The most visible among these differences is the fact that transformative practices emerging from contexts of high-intensity struggles, especially those in the countries of the global South, place a much greater emphasis on developing people's capacities for alternative ways of living and sustaining themselves than those coming from contexts of low-intensity struggles, which mostly originate from the global North. Where market-based jobs are scarce or non-existent, and where state-sanctioned violence, which can manifest either through physical coercion, through legally sanctioned disenfranchisement and dispossession, or through culturally destructive forms of schooling, is an everyday reality, people need to find other ways of sustaining themselves and their communities. For this, they need different kinds of skills and capacities than those of us who can still rely on the existing systems to provide at least the most basic services. In many ways, movements and initiatives that emerge from these kinds of struggles are not so much trying to change the system, as they are trying find alternative ways of living and learning that are less dependent on the continuity of modern/colonial structures, or what the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures collective calls the "house of modernity".

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When engaging in any kind of transformative practice, be it engaging in efforts to de-colonize formal and non-formal education, trying to change an organization's model of governance, seeking to transform the way harmful cultural patterns are being reproduced, developing new models of social entrepreneurship or trying to heal the metabolic wound of our common, living and breathing planet, as members of Teia das 5 curas invite us to do, it is important to be mindful of the importance of contextual differences. There do seem to be a few things that present themselves as important aspects across the spectrum of these diverse efforts and activities. This concluding section presents a non-exhaustive list of ten key lessons that have been observed in the different approaches to transformation presented in the ten case studies that are featured in this publication.

(1) LEARNING AND UNLEARNING. The experiences of individuals as well as of organizations and movements reported in the case studies suggest that continuous engagement in deep, (self)reflexive learning and unlearning are central to virtually all kinds of transformative practice. This applies equally to those initiatives that directly engage in educational work, as to those that engage in other types of transformative work. It is impossible to initiate deep change by trying to do the same things over and over again. Examples of initiatives that aim to transform the practices of certain organizations, either their own or those of their clients, such as Engineers Without Borders, Fail Forward, Tamarind Tree Associates, Our Bodhi Project and Sociocracy For All, suggest that learning and experimentation are crucial for long-term viability and relevance of the work of organizations with explicitly socially engaged missions. This is even more evident in the work of initiatives whose work is centred around practices of transformative education.

(2) RELATIONSHIPS. All the interviewees suggested that the most crucial element of success in their work is paying attention to the quality and depth of relations they engage in. Given the experience of the initiatives presented in this publication, no deep change is possible without a deep change in the relationships we have with each other. Developing relations based on trust, reciprocity, respect, accountability, consent, and humility was listed as the necessary pre-condition for everything these initiatives are trying to achieve. The more radical the change we are trying to implement, the more we are pushing the boundaries of what is seen as acceptable and desirable within any given set of socio-cultural parameters, and the more trust, reciprocity, respect, accountability, consent, humility, maturity, wisdom, selflessness and other related qualities become central to this work. Initiatives that work on practices of transformative leadership in particular emphasized the importance of leading with humility, and developing the capacity to lead from the side, in self-decentred ways. The ways we engage and relate are often more important than the imagined goals we are trying to achieve.

(3) WORKING TOGETHER. All interviewees agreed that no deep change can happen in isolation, as a singular project of one interested individual. There is very little a single individual can do, and sometimes two seem to be much more than just one plus one. This is especially important in contexts where organizations work on educational and other transformative practices that invite people from other organizations to come for a learning seminar, a workshop, or even a longer course. In most such cases, participants come as single representatives from different organizations, and when they return to their home institutions they often feel isolated and unable to bring to life the learning and insights they acquired elsewhere. In this sense, no transformational effort should be considered as an event, but always as a process that begins before the actual activity happens and continues after everyone leaves. This process of after-care and peer- or mentorship-support is often underappreciated not only in transformative education practice, but also in other practices of social or organizational change. The initiatives featured in this publication each approach this subject differently. The TAIGA programme, for instance, always invites two participants to their seminars and courses, because the programme's authors have learned from personal experience how difficult it is to try to introduce change in isolation, especially in contexts where one has to fight the existing oppressive power structures. In Sociocracy, all circles have two members who are, at the same time, also members of other circles. When important decisions are being made concerning matters that exceed the mandate of one specific circle, it is these two people who are tasked with reporting and negotiating with other circles. The EWB volunteers who came up with the first Failure Reports would never have mustered

the individual courage to speak out about what they saw as a deeply problematic and uncomfortable truth if they had not found support in their own peer group.

Other initiatives, such as Swaraj University and Unitierra Oaxaca, have spent decades building extensive support networks for their learners, so that they have someone to turn to for work experience and opportunities for making a living after they have finished their self-designed learning programmes. The more alternative one's approach is, the more support and after-care the practice requires. Similar experiences have been reported by members of the GTDF collective who work with topics and approaches that can deeply challenge people's previously held beliefs, assumptions, and investments. They argue that establishing pedagogical containers where anger, frustration, sadness, pain and desperation, but also joy can be expressed safely without relationships falling apart is crucial for the success and depth of their work.

(4) PERSONAL EXPERIENCES. Intimate personal experience with the struggle in which one is engaged is invaluable for developing deeply transformative practices, especially in initiatives that seek to empower marginalized individuals or communities. Most initiatives that hold the deepest transformative potential grew out of difficult and challenging lived experiences of people who went through that particular struggle first themselves. More importantly, in order for them to continue to stay relevant, they need to cultivate an awareness that their learning has not been completed yet. Whatever people are engaged in now, virtually all the interviewees who work in initiatives with a horizon of empowerment have reported that they are engaging in the kind of work they do because it speaks directly to their deepest personal, not just professional, concerns. This kind of visceral connection to a specific issue cannot be engineered because it is related to embodied knowledge for which there is no intellectual replacement. Depending on the kind of work one is engaged in, this may be more or less significant, but when working on uncomfortable and difficult topics such as racism, patriarchy, intersectional systemic discrimination and other similar issues, no amount of theory and critical reflection alone can help people sense and understand the subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle ways this violence affects a person's body, if they have not been subject to it themselves. This is not to say that critical reflection and deep theorization are not important. Far from it: it is just to say that in and of themselves they are often insufficient for building the kind of connections that are relatable enough also to be truly transformative for others.

(5) HOLISTIC APPROACHES. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of adopting holistic approaches to transformation, and especially to transformative education. Some of the initiatives presented here, such as TAIGA or Our Bodhi Project, refer to their work explicitly using this terminology, but many other initiatives, such as Teia das 5 curas, Swaraj University, the GTDF collective and others, also adopt educational approaches that could be considered holistic. Holistic transformative education can be understood in many ways, but most of the initiatives involved in such work use transformative practices that engage a person's intellect, body and spirit (or head, heart and hands/guts), rather than merely their intellect. Indeed, many holistic educational approaches challenge the mainstream notion of educating the mind first so that the heart and the rest of the body can follow. Members of the GTDF collective, Teia das 5 Curas and Our Bodhi Project explicitly state that deep transformation begins by changing our guts first, and the heart and the mind follow. These and many other initiatives, especially the ones that draw on non-Western ways of being and knowing, also emphasize that personal transformation and healing are not possible without collective transformation and healing, because they do not uphold the notion of modern individualistic separability.

(6) IT IS DIFFICULT. Deeply transformative work is inherently difficult, challenging, unpleasant and, depending on its political (il)legibility, potentially even personally dangerous. Those that engage in the kind of work that directly challenges any of the structural elements of the house of modernity or its accompanying violence, such as patriarchy and racism, can easily find themselves subjected to multiple forms of often state-sanctioned violence. Perhaps the most visible examples of such direct physical and non-physical violence can be found in examples of documented violence against women, and especially women of colour, reported by members of Our Bodhi Project, Unitierra Oaxaca, Tamarind Tree Associates, and the TAIGA programme. Much of this violence is hidden and almost invariably distributed unequally in ways that correspond to the given person's level of intersectional privilege. Deeply transformative work does come with a price, and it is often possible to assess an individual's and an organization's depth of impact by how much it costs them to continue to fight for what they believe in.

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(7) RENUNCIATION. Deep change of the kind that can truly contribute generatively to collective wellbeing, though intrinsically rewarding, above all involves renunciation. Depending on the context and the kind of change we wish to enact, renunciation can mean very different things, but here it is generally understood to refer to voluntary, noncoercive release of harmful desires. Although the word is usually associated with renunciation of our addiction to material possessions,

deep change also requires renunciation of other things. A non-exhaustive list would include our continued, and often unconscious, investments in certainty, coherence, control, choice, consumption (of knowledge, sensations, experiences, relationships), success, separability, perceived self-interest, intelligibility, multiple forms of systemic privilege and externalization of the costs of our learning.

(8) INTERNAL TRANSFORMATION. For organizations to enact meaningful change in the world and communities around them, they often need to change internally first, which usually requires that the leadership of these organizations needs to be open to supporting deeply transformative work. Experience of Tamarind Tree Associates, Engineers Without Borders and Fail Forward, and Sociocracy For All and, to some extent, of Our Bodhi Project and TAIGA, suggest the tantamount importance of the willingness and openness of organizational leadership to support internal organizational transformation first, especially in terms of dismantling internal hierarchies and inequitable power relations. Alternatively, in situations where the official leadership is not open to change, it is possible to develop strategies of leading from the margins, but such strategies require a disproportionate amount of labour and service from those who do not hold positions of power, and such engagements can often be extractive, as Teia das 5 curas points out.

(9) EMPOWERMENT IS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD. Not all strategies and approaches work equally well in all contexts. Indeed, sometimes they can be counterproductive. This is especially relevant for those who engage in educational and other types of transformative work that seeks to empower people. For instance, while pedagogies of empowerment that are often learner-centred can be important in contexts of high-intensity struggles, as they seek to counteract the negative effects of systemic disempowerment, disenfranchisement and discrimination, they can harm people who

come from contexts of low-intensity struggles and already embody a relatively high level of structural privilege. When already-privileged learners are further empowered it does not help bring about greater equality and justice, but can instead exacerbate existing problems and increase entitlements to acknowledgment of their perceived superiority, authority and exceptionalism. When this happens, the discourse of horizontal, participatory learning can be easily mobilized to further anyone's personal agenda at the expense of collective learning. In such context, pedagogies of disempowerment that decentre both learners and teachers hold much greater transformative potential.

(10) NOT EVERYTHING IS FOR EVERYONE. Not every transformative practice is suitable for every person, irrespective of the potentially shared broader context, such as class, gender, race or cultural affiliation. Because deeply transformative work is also deeply personally challenging, the sensibility and relevance of different transformative practices largely depends on the extent to which the person already feels an intrinsic need to change. Again, this need is often connected to the position of structural privilege and the level of comfort people feel with their own social positions. The greater the intrinsic discomfort, the greater the transformative potential. However, this potential can always be mobilized in both generative and non-generative ways. The greater the potential, the greater the risk. Experience of such divergent initiatives as the authors of the HEADS UP toolkit, the members of Sociocracy For All and the GTDF collective suggests that people will have either very positive or very adverse responses to proposed transformational practices, depending on how comfortable they are with the current state of affairs.

There is much more that can be learned from the case studies presented in this publication, such as how external conditions like relationships with donors and funders influence the transformative potential of different organizations; how general socio-economic and cultural climates in different contexts make certain kinds of change seem imaginable or unimaginable, necessary or unnecessary and relevant or irrelevant; or how different kinds of unconscious denials influence our individual and collective capacity for realistic self-assessment of the true reach of our perceived transformative impact. This publication invites readers to sit with the list of ten lessons presented above and come up with their own list of other lessons that can be learned, either from the case studies presented here or from personal experiences with transformative practices from other sources.

This publication invites readers to sit with the list of ten lessons presented above and come up with their own list of other lessons that can be learned.

To conclude, as we face the unprecedented global challenges before us and as we learn to learn and unlearn with each other, it is extremely important to document our stories of learning and unlearning so those coming after us do not have to repeat our mistakes or start from scratch. In this sense, the most relevant thing we can pass on to younger generations is what we have been taught by facing humanity's wrongs and from our own failures. As one of the interviewees remarked, elders acquire wisdom not by accumulating stories of success, but by integrating what they have learned from their mistakes. If Western culture, with its focus on success and youthful consumption, has limited its capacity to produce mature and responsible elders, maybe the most important transformative task is to regard the world as a teacher and allow it to teach us to grow up and show up differently. The case studies in this publication offer some entry points for that to happen.

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