


The title text is enclosed in a large, thin black circle. The text is centered and reads: 

**THE NEW  
NORDIC  
EDUCATION  
FOR  
SUSTAINABILITY**

The text is enclosed in a smaller, thin black circle. The text is centered and reads: 

*Inspiration  
from an innovative  
course in further  
adult education*



NVL 2016

© Nordiskt nätverk för vuxnas lärande

Editor: Caitlin Wilson

Authors: Tove Holm, Kirsten Paaby,  
Miriam Sannum, Ellen Stavlund, Caitlin Wilson

Photos: Private

Layout: Marika Kaarlela/Gekkografia

ISBN 978-952-7140-26-0

This publication has been financed by  
the Nordic Council of Ministers  
through the strategic means of NVL.

[www.nvl.org](http://www.nvl.org)



# CONTENTS

Foreword: Dagfinn Høybråten	4
Foreword: Charles Hopkins	6
Executive Summary	8
Introduction	10
Sustainable development and the Nordic region	10
The educational concept	14
When and how did it start?	15
The framing of the educational program	16
Coaching groups	24
The 8 Success Factors	27
Participants' experience and perspectives	30
Evaluation	38
Report from the Future	40
Afterword: Tapio Kosunen	44
References	46
Contact	47

# FOREWORD:

## Dagfinn Høybråten



**Dagfinn Høybråten**

Secretary General  
of the Nordic  
Council of Ministers

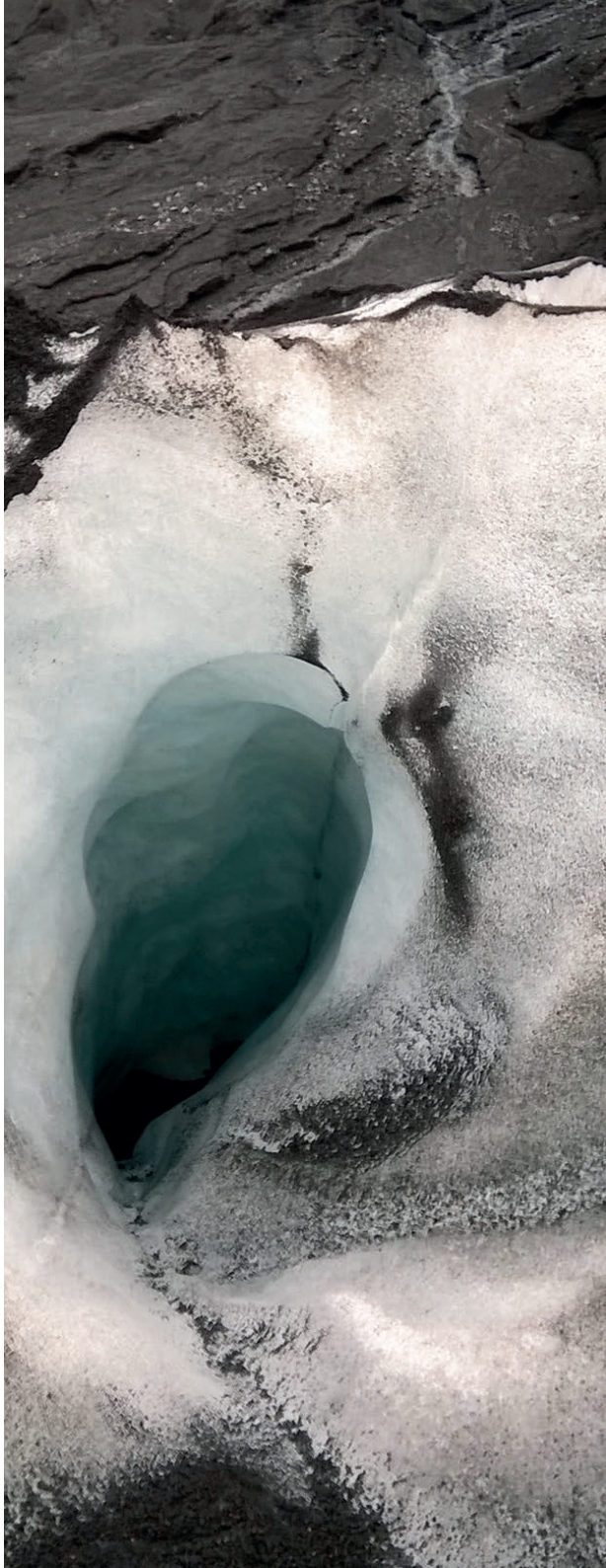
**T**he Nordic Council of Ministers has for several years developed strategies and taken initiatives in order to actively contribute to the fight against climate change and global poverty, including the programs Green Growth and Nord-Bio sustainable development, and now actively implementing the UN sustainable goals in the 2030 Agenda.

**THE NORDIC COUNTRIES** have a long and rich tradition of general education and lifelong learning. NGOs and civil society play an important role in this development. Our society is characterized by trust - to each other and to politicians. Knowledge and experience have been disseminated and distributed in an informal and innovative way. This has contributed to social innovation and robust environments - which in turn are important foundations for a well-functioning democracy. Because of this the Nordic region has a unique basis for actively involving citizens in the Nordic local environments and communities in the implementation of the United Nations' 17 sustainable development goals, and a unique basis to be a leading region in the work for necessary changes of our consumption and lifestyle.

Through cross-sectorial cooperation, dissemination of knowledge and good examples, the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL) has supported the citizens in the Nordic region in green restructuring and taking responsibility for sustainable development in the Nordic region and globally. The Nordic further educational project Education for sustainable development presented in this publication is an exciting and innovative development work that shows how it is possible through practical projects and knowledge to make sustainable choices possible, both individually and collectively.

*Oslo, Norway, July 15th, 2016*

*Jaagim Heibrod*



## FOREWORD: Charles Hopkins



**Charles Hopkins**

UNESCO Chair on  
Reorienting Teacher  
Education To Address  
Sustainability

Advisor to the  
United Nations University  
on Education for Sustainable  
Development (ESD)

Advisor at National  
governmental Boards  
of Education

Developer of their  
Regional Centres of  
Expertise in ESD

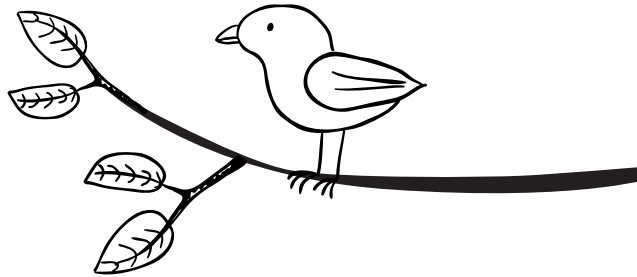
Founder and co-chair  
of the Sustainability and  
Education Academy  
(SEdA) Canada.

York University

**T**he year 2015 will be remembered in the future as a crucial turning point in the sustainability movement.

Governments realizing that globally concerted actions were necessary mobilized to create the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The private sector agreed to collaborate and called for regulation to ensure a “level playing field” for sustainable approaches to commerce. Institutional leaders including religion, social justice, and labor urged a renewed global approach to creating a more sustainable future. To enable this effort there is a specific call for Education for Sustainable Development in the SDGs, Goal 4.

**THE WORLD’S POLITICAL** and corporate leaders knew of the need to create a concerted approach for years, however, this new high-level initiative was made politically possible by the groundswell of concern that has arisen in the general public. It is crucial in democracies that we have a knowledgeable political citizenry, a skilled, con-



scientific workforce and informed consumers who are empowered to pursue the common good. These are necessary elements to provide the political safety net for politicians and the purchasing security for the private sector to develop more sustainable products.

**NOW AFTER YEARS** of ESD-oriented education, public awareness, and training programs, the understanding and behavior of the public are shifting. To enable the growth of this shift it is so important to create new techniques of reaching the grassroots of our communities. We must look to new ways of positive messaging to build on empowerment and hope instead of warnings and fear. This Nordic initiative of an ESD course specifically aimed at adults and delivered using an adult-oriented pedagogy is a wonderful example of the innovative approaches we need to create the new informed, globally-oriented citizen with the sustainability skills needed for total well-being of the self, society and the planet. The stories depicted in this document are wonderful examples of human ingenuity, collaboration and practical applications of theoretical aspiration. I am so pleased that this initiative will be shared widely and lead to plethora of similar programs around the world.



*Toronto, Canada, June 8th, 2016*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**S**ustainable development has been a focus area for the Nordic region for decades, and education has been deemed a central factor in creating “a good life in a sustainable Nordic region” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2013). This book presents a cross-sectorial, cross-Nordic education for adults, developed through intersectorial and Nordic cooperation as the starting point. This Nordic education for sustainable development is an answer to the Nordic Council of Ministers’ strategies and programs, the United Nations’ important work for a fair world and is the result of a long term, interdisciplinary, Nordic cooperation under the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NV-L)’s direction.



**Caitlin Wilson**, Editor

Director of Eco-Schools Iceland

Landvernd, the Icelandic  
Environment Association

**IN THIS BOOK** we present experiences, good practices, methods and evaluation of two courses, carried out in 2014, 2015 and 2016. The new further education program for sustainable development described in this book leans on the Nordic tradition of civic formation or “folkeopplysning” geared towards action competence. The aim of the course is to build bridges between formal educational institutions, local administrations and civil society organizations, assisting both formal and informal learning arenas to learn from inspiring local examples.

**THE COURSE** could accept 20 participants per year and consisted of four sessions taking place in four different Nordic countries with coaching groups working between sessions is to broaden and deepen systems vision and to



experience the personal connections between mind, emotions and body and connections between economic, social and ecological perspectives. The overall aim is to inspire and develop transformative leadership for sustainable development.

**PARTICIPANTS' STATED** that the course helped to build capacity and efficacy in their practice by learning new ways, approaches or tools that proved effective in promoting sustainability or learning for sustainability. They cited that transdisciplinarity gave them new understanding of the issues from multiple perspectives, but also posed a challenge in relating to other disciplines. The importance of community as pedagogy was claimed to be integral to a vision of sustainability as social learning, but working with multiple stakeholders was a frequent tension in their work.

The methodology built on **eight success factors** found to be characteristic for successful **educational projects** conducted in the Nordic countries:

- 1) **networking,**
- 2) **getting new groups involved,**
- 3) **sustainable new structures and practices,**
- 4) **focus on needs,**
- 5) **process evaluation,**
- 6) **community as pedagogical strategy,**
- 7) **flexibility, and**
- 8) **new role for institutions.**

**EXTERNAL EVALUATORS** found that participants gained most in terms of learning outcomes from “the attempt to sensualise and concretise the very abstract and complex questions regarding sustainable development, secondly the importance of promoting hope and creativity in the treatment of risks, and not the least linking learning close to action.”

**IN OUR “REPORT FORM THE FUTURE,”** we project our desire and hope to inspire more education for adults, more good examples and more intersectorial work in the Nordic countries to contribute to a lush, viable globe now and in the future.

*Reykjavik, Iceland, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016*


# INTRODUCTION

## Sustainable development and the Nordic region

The Nordic region ranks high internationally in areas such as economic growth, welfare and education, but when we measure our environmental footprint, the Nordic countries also face major challenges. A global and justifiable distribution, which at the same time takes into account the environment and climate change, requires clear measures and changes not least in the Nordic countries.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has for years taken the challenges seriously, through distinct strategies and programs like the program Sustainable Development Strategy – A new course for the Nordic countries (2009–2012) which placed emphasis on knowledge as a necessary basis for a good development. In the call for applications for 2013–2015 to “Green Growth the Nordic Way”, the Nordic Prime Ministers say:

**“To strengthen the region’s international position and inspire other regions to sustainable development, one important task is to learn from, cooperate and disseminate knowledge and experiences from ongoing efforts in the Nordic region.”**



**THESE NORDIC** programs follow up global challenges. “Learning to change our world” was the introduction of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. The goal of the Decade was to strengthen action competence and promote knowledge and experience, and thereby trigger actions. The target group was schools and educational institutions, but also society as a whole.



“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

*Gro Harlem Brundtland, 1987*





World governments urged promotion of public awareness and broad participation in the Decade, including cooperation with civil society.

**FOLLOWING THE DECADE**, in September 2015 the United Nations adopted 17 sustainable development goals as linchpins for development policy to 2030. One of the goals is education for all, but because all the goals should influence policy, there

is a need for knowledge. Knowledge must contribute to new thinking, innovative collaboration between different learning venues, a more visible link between theory and practice, and as a result: new solutions.

**EDUCATION IS** thus a central factor to succeed in creating “a good life in a sustainable Nordic region” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2013) and at the same time contribute to global sus-



tainable development. Civic formation or “folkeopplysning” and adult education have a strong tradition in the Nordic countries and together with formal educational institutions play an important role in the necessary restructuring process.

**THIS BOOK PRESENTS** a cross-sectorial, cross-Nordic education for adults, developed through intersectorial and Nordic cooperation as the

Our desire and hope is to **inspire** more education for adults, more **good examples** and more **intersectorial work** in the Nordic countries to contribute to a lush, **viable globe** now and in the future.

starting point. The Nordic education for sustainable development is an answer to the Nordic Council of Ministers’ strategies and programs, the United Nations’ important work for a fair world and is the result of a long term, interdisciplinary, Nordic cooperation under the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL)’s direction. The goal is, through theory and practical examples, to see new contexts and new opportunities which in turn can be communicated to communities and work life in the Nordic countries.

**THE EDUCATION AIMS** to contribute to a fundamental change in the way we live, as the UN calls for by placing education in focus and that sustainability goals aspire to. In this book we present experiences, good practices, methods and evaluation of two courses, carried out in 2015 and 2016.

# THE EDUCATIONAL CONCEPT

The new further education program for sustainable development described in this book leans on the Nordic tradition of civic formation or “folkeopplysning”. Both in former and present Nordic strategies for sustainable development, formal and non-formal education is emphasized as one of the important ways to succeed with the transition needed towards a sustainable society.



## The roots of Nordic civic formation

go back to the Danish priest N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783–1872). Since the early 1800s, democratic formation and empowerment have been central goals of the pedagogy. Grundtvig saw dialogue between equals as the basic principle of civic education: “Not telling people what to think, but stimulating them to creative reflection about life and thus qualifying them to become real participants in democracy” (Læssøe, 2007). Grundtvig’s concept of civic formation addresses the deep connection between formation of the individual and formation of the community; the pedagogic platform therefore embraces formation as an individual, as a member of society and as world citizen. It would be hard to find an approach better suited to addressing today’s goals for a sustainable world – from individual life quality to sustainable local communities to global and intergenerational equity.



### When and how did it start?

Since 2006, the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL) has had Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) on the agenda for addressing how global sustainability challenges can be worked with at the local level by identifying possibilities for making the changes needed – both individually and in communities. NVL arranged a series of Nordic seminars with participants from a wide variety of Nordic non-formal and formal educational organisations, in cooperation with the Norwegian Association for Adult Learning (NAAL) and the Ideas Bank. Thematically the seminars focused on the connection between civic formation, democracy and sustainable development. In addition to the seminars, a series of best practices in ESD at the civic formation level were pub-

lished at the NVL website (Paaby, 2012). Based on these seminars NAAL and the Ideas Bank studied the possibilities for adults in the Nordic countries to learn about both the challenges for sustainable development and how to act and gain competence for action. This was done in cooperation with NVL on behalf of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

**IT WAS FOUND THAT** in spite of clear policy documents on ESD, the implementation and practical follow-up were missing at the civic society level. Local sustainability is more than just planning. It is about everyday attitudes and actions, and about outcomes that can be enabled, but not produced, by planning. Competence must be broad-based. There is a necessity for civic mobilisation because change occurs through social and technical innovation – in the hands



of individuals and groups. In this way, public action is at once a supplement to political governance and a prerequisite for good local governance. To strengthen civic mobilization there is a need for integrating a thematically broader perspective in further education by including innovative arenas and methods for learning in the spirit of the UN Decade for ESD (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2011). To follow up the recommendations from the report, a Nordic cross-sectorial group was established that discussed what kind of approach is necessary to promote changes in our mindsets and behavior. The result is the development of this Nordic cross-sectorial, post-qualifying education which the Nordic Council of Ministers decided to support as one of several projects under the pro-

gram “Green Growth the Nordic Way,” first as a pilot during the academic year 2014–2015 (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2015) and then as a second course during the 2016 calendar year.

### **The framing of the educational program**

The education program emphasizes learning geared towards action competence, an approach involving a high level of knowledge combined with practical action (Mogensen and Schnack, 2010). The aim of the course is to build bridges between formal educational institutions, local administrations and civil society organizations, assisting both formal and informal learning arenas to learn from inspiring local examples. The ambition is to explore ways





The special **strengths** of the non-formal learning set up are based on its more **flexible frames**.

in which we can incite change in local communities. The target group is pedagogues engaged in sustainable development and adult learning in diverse sectors.

**THE COURSE COULD** accept 20 participants per year and consisted of four sessions taking place in four different Nordic countries in addition to participants' own project work throughout the duration of the course. It corresponds to 15 credits (ECTS). The conditions for being accepted as a student are:

- Participation must be anchored in an organisation and an articulated strategy for ESD
- Participants present and work on a concrete project during the education
- Each participant has to systematically communicate with a local network of at least 5 persons
- During the education participants take part in a coaching group – across the Nordic countries

**The learning outcomes are as follows:**

After having fulfilled the educational program, participants should have

- Knowledge about and competence in the concept of sustainability – the ecological, social and economic perspective – as well as awareness about local and global societal challenges.
- Acquired educational methods and skills transferable to own educational practice.
- Insight into a variety of Nordic examples in education for sustainable that transfer to own practice.
- Knowledge about and competence in the strengths of working in a Nordic network – the New Nordic sustainability.

**20  
PARTICI-  
PANTS  
PER YEAR**

**HELSINKI**

**SAMSØ**

**OSLO**



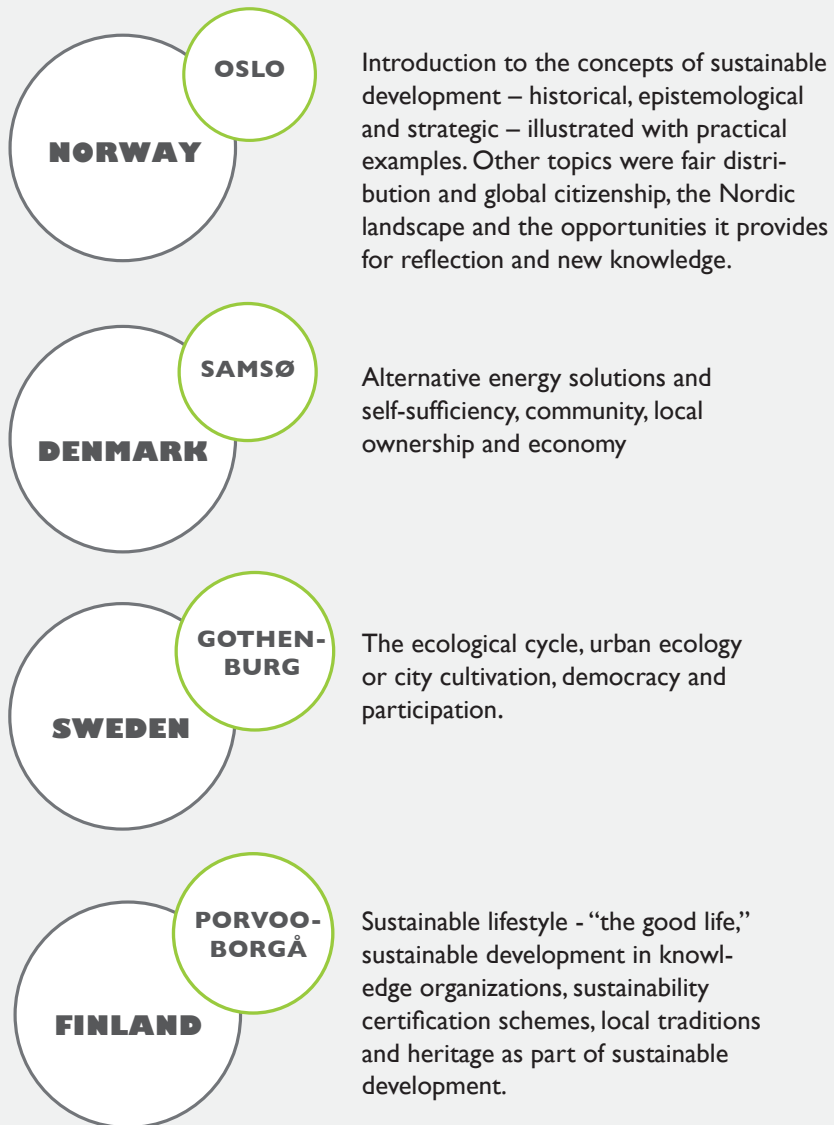


**REYKJAVIK**  
**(SOLHEIMAR)**

**FOUR**  
**SESSIONS**

**FIVE**  
**NORDIC**  
**COUNTRIES**





---

Figure 1. The sessions in the pilot course, realized in 2014–15.

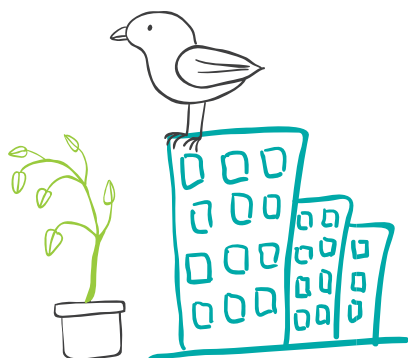


**BECAUSE** transdisciplinarity is essential for ESD, the aim is to encourage the participants to cooperate with different stakeholders. The sessions are planned based on local examples, to show that local examples can be found everywhere. The added value from having the sessions in the Nordic countries is to show different practical and pedagogical examples from different regions in different cultures other than the one that the participants are used to. The other aim with having such a variety in the programme is for ensuring that all participants can bring examples to their work.



**DURING** the four sessions we strive to cover in theory and practice all aspects of sustainable development – social, economic and ecological – as well as various practical approaches to sustainability, including presentation and practicing of different creative methods. The aim is to develop the students' self-learning and problem solving abilities and to foster creative and critical thinking.

The sessions in the pilot course were organized in Oslo/Norway, Samsø/Denmark, Gothenburg/Sweden and Porvoo-Borgå/Finland with the main themes in Figure 1.



**IN THE SECOND** course the sessions were organized in Oslo/Norway, Samsø/Denmark, Reykjavik and Solheimar/Iceland and finally when this book is launched in Helsinki and Kiljava/Finland (see Figure 2).



**LANGUAGE.** For the pilot course we decided that the spoken language will be all Nordic languages, because this was a Nordic course. During the pilot course we discussed the language at each session and tried different methods for making it possible for participants and lecturers to use their own Nordic language. Still, we always had to have a corner where someone translated what was said into English, because not all participants could understand everything that was said. In the second course we decided to use English as a common language, and asked all that presented to have their presentation in either English or that the host

would need to translate it. During the second course we have not had any questions about the language.

**IN FINLAND** we applied for financing a national course that was supposed to be held with the same methodology. We succeeded in the application, and planned the marketing of the course well, but only got 5 participants of expected 30. This course was in Swedish, which only about 5% on Finns speak as mother tongue. The reasons for not getting enough participants might have been that in the Nordic course the added value from the Nordic perspective is the key success factor.

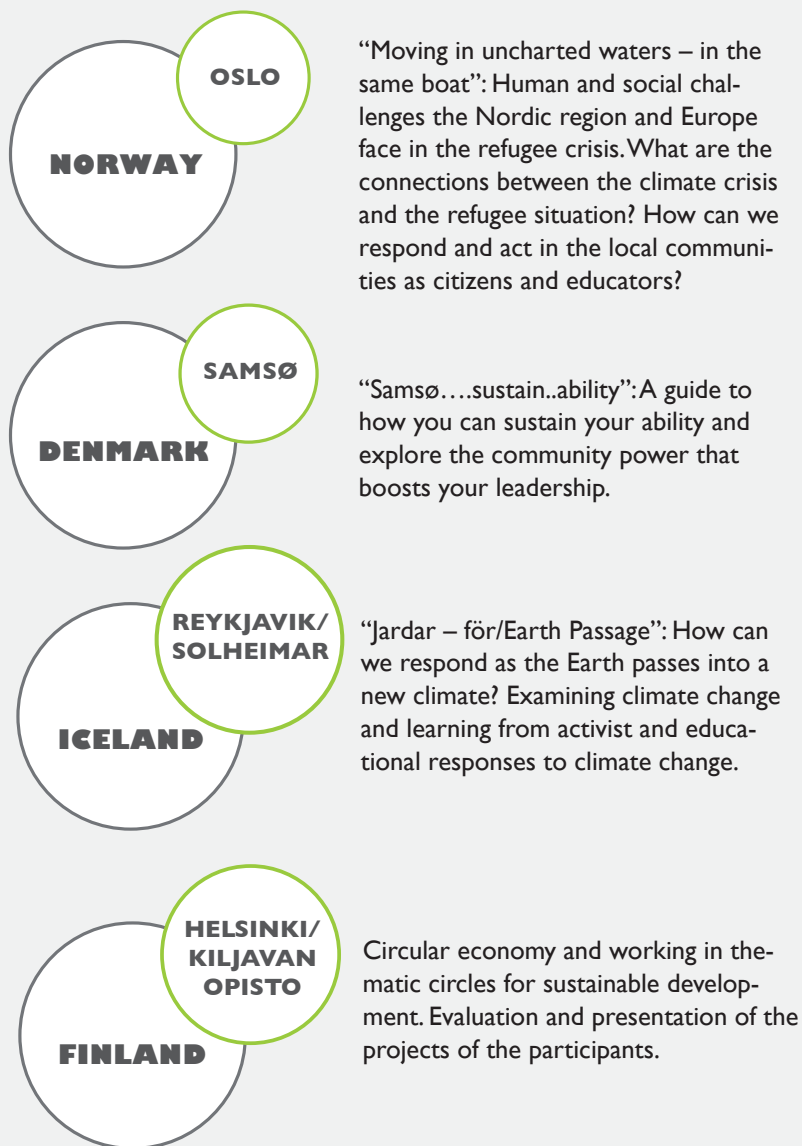


Figure 2. The sessions in the second course, realized in 2016.

## Coaching groups

**IDEALLY THE GROUPS** will have representatives of different and broad perspectives, different knowledge and experiences, but also have things in common.

**DURING EVERY** physical meeting there is space for peer coaching in these groups and the participants are also expected to communicate in between the meetings to listen, support and challenge each other.

**THERE ARE** several purposes with the coaching groups;

- To get support and feedback on the individual project from people with different perspectives and deep insight in the project yet not involved in it.
- To get hands-on tools on how to coach and sometimes get a specified focus for the coaching although the projects are at the center.
- To train the participants' skills to coach and empower others and themselves, and skills to use in the project, the workplace, in the local community, etc.
- To learn to know each other personally on deeper levels as well as get deeper insight in a handful of other projects than one can possibly do with all participants and their projects.

Each participant in the Nordic course is **encouraged to take part in a coaching group together with a handful of fellow participants.**

- To follow and learn from a variety of processes over time.
- To create a community of learners for sustainability that will last long after the Nordic course is over.

**EMPOWERING COACHING** is very much about asking good questions with good timing – something easier said than done. In the coaching sessions we work with inspiration from the Regional Center of Expertise West Sweden where the fact of “We don’t know...” is considered a profound and ethical approach for how to deal with sustainability. This open attitude and curiosity are important when coaching and helping each other to find out more and become wiser together. The aim is to become proactive co-creators of sustainable futures and reflect on different pathways and their consequences.



**Playfulness & humour are important aspects.**



**ONE PURPOSE** with the coaching is to broaden and deepen systems vision and to experience the personal connections between mind, emotions and body and the analogue collective connections between economic, social and ecological perspectives. The overall aim is to inspire leadership for sustainable development that can make transformative leaps and bridge gaps without getting torn apart.

The coaching groups, when working well, turn into ensemble learning where intimacy, relations and emotions form the transformative 'dance' between what has been and what is becoming. In this education playfulness and humour are important aspects of taking sustainable futures seriously, to be creative and persistent in transformative leadership.

Figure 3 depicts the interplay among these dimensions.

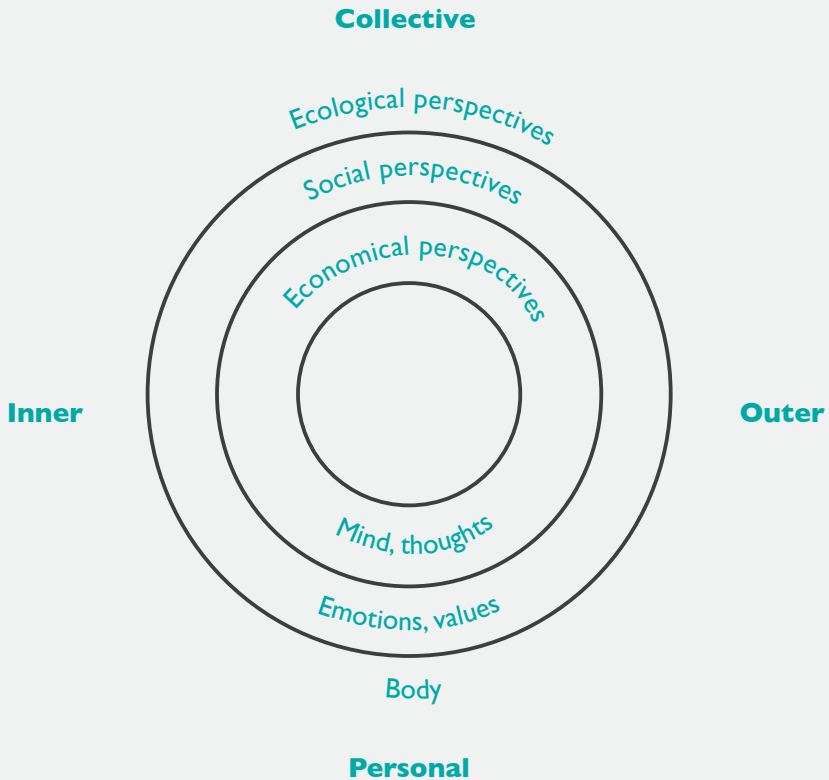


Figure 3. Dimensions of sustainability learning, by Miriam Sannum

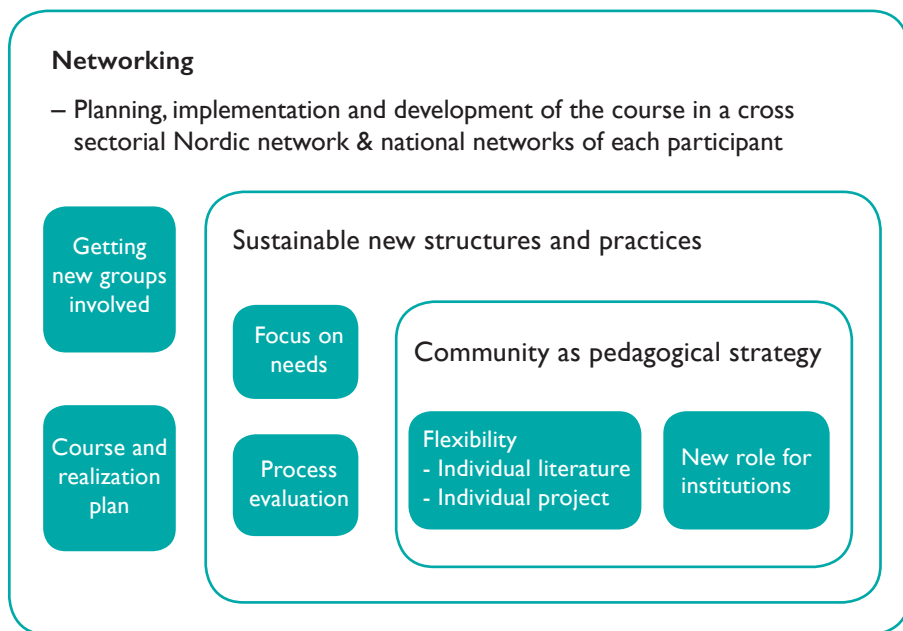


Figure 4. Quality Assurance of the pilot Nordic cross-sectorial further adult education in ESD, adapted from Manninen et al., 2012 in Holm et al., 2014.

## The 8 Success Factors

**MANNINEN ET AL.** (2012) have studied characteristics for successful educational projects conducted in the Nordic countries. Based on their findings, they published a handbook with recommendations on how to prepare and carry out educational projects designed to help individuals, groups or society to meet challenges which align with the goals for ESD. They found eight success factors, which are:

- 1. networking,**
- 2. getting new groups involved,**
- 3. sustainable new structures and practices,**
- 4. focus on needs,**
- 5. process evaluation,**
- 6. community as pedagogical strategy,**
- 7. flexibility, and**
- 8. new role for institutions.**





---

The aim is to develop sustainable new practices and structures at the institutions where the participants are working.



---

The participants learn together from each other by presenting and discussing their practical projects that they work on.



---

The practical projects are based on new needs that the participants and/or their institutions have identified.



---

The education is based on the participants' needs; that is, they can themselves choose the practical project they are working on and choose literature that is useful for their project and learning.



---

Both the course and the work of the participants are evaluated during the course and when finalized. The evaluation is based on action research because as this is a pilot, the only way to study it was to make it happen. In the next course the results of the evaluation was implemented and that course evaluated as well.



---

Through the practical projects the institutions in which the participants are working can find new roles.

**WE HAVE DIVIDED** the factors as seen above in figure 4. In the evaluation of the projects of the participants we evaluated their work according to the three main headings networking, sustainable new structures and practices, and community as pedagogical strategy.

## PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE AND PERSPECTIVES

The participants' perspective is critical to understanding the learning process in any educational endeavor. The purpose of this section is to give the participants a voice, to let them tell their story of how they experienced the course, and not least to learn from challenges encountered in the course. Participants from both courses (about one third of the total) responded to questions with written and oral answers; these responses are presented here in relation to themes from the eight success factors and the elements of the pedagogical model the course employed, presented above. These responses are separate from the responses from participants in course evaluations which were conducted by external evaluators and a summary of which is presented in the next section.

**PARTICIPANTS WROTE** and spoke the most about sustainable new structures and practices, one of the eight success factors the course emphasized particularly. For participants, this meant gaining capacity and efficacy in their practice by learning new ways, approaches or tools that were effective in promoting sustain-

ability or learning for sustainability. One participant described this: *“I was totally surprised by how our learning accelerated when we met at the four course sessions, and I tried to replicate some of these ways of interacting and learning in my own teaching.”* Another wrote: *“Along the course I feel that I’ve been strengthened in some thoughts and ideas when it comes to what works well with education for sustainable development (and what doesn’t work).”* This strengthening of participants’ self-efficacy is an important part of making new approaches sustainable themselves; or in the words of one participant: *“This course is part of the change process. It won’t stop. This course adds ballast.”*

**SEVERAL PARTICIPANTS** cited the use of best practice examples as a sustainable new practice they would take into their work. One wrote about how this approach adopted in the course carried over into his project: *“I have come to the conclusion that we should strongly emphasize a positive attitude in informing the primary target group. Rather than pointing a finger at any unsustainable behavior, the project should shed light on possibilities and potential.”* Another described how she had changed her approach in her practice: *“Without this I may have just taught the things, but now I use exploration, review, evaluation, interaction, and revisit my ideas. I critically reflect on my practice: It pushes my practice.”* One participant from a traditional formal education institution described how her eyes were opened



### Questions posed to the participants include:

**What has been your experience of learning and change on a personal level?**

**What has been your experience of learning and change on a professional or organizational level?**

**How has this course supported learning and change for you personally and professionally?**

**How do you think we can learn and change as a society for a sustainable future?**

**What have you gotten out of this course?**

by what she had experienced in the course: *“It has been a step out of my comfort zone to work with others outside my field and in ways of working different from my field. It is a nice piece of a jigsaw I didn’t see before.”* Another participant related the idea of best practice as a sustainable new practice to fostering transformation: *“Show and tell about our own transformations – maybe this opens up the possibility for transformation.”*

**THE NEW WAYS OF** working introduced in the course were not always well-received. One participant described how he felt that some of these new approaches and tools were not relevant to his work. For example: *“Some things do not relate to me...the downfall of having a mixed group, mixed themes, is it’s difficult to learn from each other’s projects because it’s difficult to compare.”*

**OTHERS DESCRIBED** external constraints that challenged the success of their projects in the course; for example: funding, legislation, ownership of projects. Several participants did not complete their projects as intended, some citing this as a failure while others interpret-

ing it as a learning process in itself. One participant wrote: *“While documenting this failure, it is surprisingly easy to identify all the possibilities that are still there.”*

**TWO PARTICIPANTS** saw such possibilities during the course and completely changed their career paths. One wrote of his realization inspired by the best practice examples: *“Haven’t I spent enough time on communication in my life and too little on making something real?”* This provoked him to start up a sustainability business growing mushrooms in waste coffee grounds. Another described how her approach in her work in trying to convince others to change had been dissatisfying, so she decided to create the change she wanted to see and started an organization around food sustainability that reflects in its structure and ideology the ideas of social learning and community as pedagogy she encountered in the course.

**THE NEXT MOST** prominent theme found in participants’ responses is transdisciplinarity. Participants describe how approaching sustainability in a transdisciplinary way gave them new understanding of





the issues from multiple perspectives. One said: *“This is actually one of the most important things I have gained from the course; that is, I have gotten deeper knowledge of diverse aspects of sustainability.”* Another expressed that *“The different projects show difference angles into this field of work,”* and said that this accelerated her work. Another participant who said she struggled with this because of her more traditional field of work, but found that

through the course *“I can go deeper with my ideas, use different points of view. It has made me more creative and open-minded.”*

**FOR OTHERS** transdisciplinarity was key to their way of working on their project in the course. In forming their national networks for their projects, involving different perspectives was a new approach. One participant describes that process:





**I created a national network** around this project which consists of colleagues from Landvernd (The Icelandic Environment Association), members from the United Nations University (both the Land Restoration Programme and the Fisheries Training Programme), the City of Reykjavik and the Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources. Everyone in the group is passionate about environmental issues and sustainability and the conversations were lively and interesting. Most importantly, this group has given feedback on my ideas and brought up new ideas.

Another participant spoke of the tensions this brought up in his work: *“I have difficulty with transdisciplinarity and with facilitating collaboration among different stakeholders and creating dialogue and participation among NGOs, people, public and private.”* Another wrote about how willingness on the part of stakeholders and grounding the issue in a practical example made this easier: *“By bringing together many perspectives and getting something tangible to discuss, there arose a spirit of solidarity and inquiry, this feeling that we were in this together and we could figure out ways forward into an unpredictable future.”*

Working across disciplines and involving multiple stakeholders is a great challenge in addressing sustainability and education that came up again and again in the course and in the participants’ projects. The course model emphasises democratic formation and empowerment grounded in Grundtvig’s philosophy and action competence theory as an approach to create a practical way for enabling pluralism and the capacity to take conscious action.

**MANY PARTICIPANTS** commented on these aspects, describing how it influenced them personally and professionally. One wrote: *“The course forced me to understand: what kind of change do I want to make in the world?”* Another told how the course inspired him directly to create: *“I try to follow new ideas and thoughts. I used the presentation on immigration to make an app.”* Another participant also connected personal and professional competence. He described how this impacted him: *“Watching from a distance and just being highly skeptical regarding the possibilities for the human race’s continued existence is not*

*enough, as I have come to understand. On a positive note, participating in the course has certainly given me ideas, and I believe, worked as a form of personal development training. This also helps my workplace.”* Other participants described how democratic empowerment and action competence influenced their approach in their work. One explained how the course encouraged her to see her project as an opportunity to make a wider impact in her work. She talked about how without the course, her efforts in her work may have been more isolated, but now she saw an opportunity to empower others: *“The course and the project is making my project longer term than it would’ve been.”* Another participant put the same idea another way when he described his work as *“A project with an open deadline.”*

**ONE PARTICIPANT** spoke about how action competence meant a shift in approach in her work: *“I want to try to have more focus on the social part, work much more with things happening between people instead of explaining things to them.”* Another wrote about her understanding of implementing action competence through her project:



**THE COURSE MODEL** uses the success factors networking and community as pedagogical strategy both as part of its educational approach and as guidelines for participants’ projects. These elements are integral to a vision of sustainability as social learning. The importance of being part of a professional community shone through in participants’ responses.

For some, it was significant to be part of a Nordic network through which they could understand and share their work more widely. One wrote that it was one of the most important outcomes of the



How can we place seeds of thoughts on social and environmental sustainability in everyday meetings and interactions?...I’m convinced that we have to talk, discuss, ponder and debate issues of sustainability on personal levels to develop the understanding of the **NEED FOR CHANGE**, and I think that for a person to use that understanding constructively one has to **FEEL** the need for change in order to act constructively.

course, that: *“I am a part of a network of people from the other Nordic countries with knowledge and interest about sustainability in its widest sense.”* Another stated: *“For my organisation and workplace, it has been a possibility to focus on a project in line with the sustainability work that we are doing, and getting to share and get input on that in a Nordic arena. The setting has given a broad context to my and our thoughts and plans for more sustainable actions.”* Similarly, another wrote: *“My ambition was to get in contact with new people (actors) committed to education for sustainable development (ESD). I wanted to be inspired for my own work with revitalizing the ESD efforts in my organization. I can state today that these ambitions were achieved.”*

**FOR OTHERS** the importance of community was in the coaching groups for their projects. One participant wrote that *“It has been extremely inspiring to talk to my coaching group from the pilot, even though our projects are very diverse.”* Another described how she felt the mutual influence in the coaching group: *“I feel reflected in the other projects. I have*

*done a lot already; it is good to get that mirrored.”*

**STILL OTHERS** explain how the interactions in the course strengthened their understanding of social learning and created a collegial spirit. One stated: *“The group is so fond of each other, care about the same thing, have a common purpose.”* Another wrote: *“Both in my project and as a participant in the pilot, the magic formula seems to be some kind of combination of acting deliberately, listening to each other, being open to possibilities, and creating together.”*

**UNDERLYING** the course and the sustainability movement itself is the powerful force of change—change in how we see ourselves, how we understand others, and how we act as individuals and communities. The theme of change was implicit in almost all of the participants’ responses, but some articulated it in such an insightful and inspiring way that only their words can convey. These responses below represent perhaps the greatest learning outcome from the course: a new understanding of change.



I am also more convinced now that advancing in small steps is crucially important. The project is about ‘awakening’ sustainable decision making among a large number of people. Wider progress and actual sustainability can be reached through small steps and small positive things inspiring a bigger target group.”



I am fascinated by the mysterious and very human processes of learning and change. More often than not I am discouraged by the state of the world and our future prospects, but from this course I got the conviction that the more brains, hearts and souls we can gather in the spirit of creating our future, the more we actually do create a beautiful future, starting now, with ourselves.”

## Questions

1. Looking back at the whole course, what would you highlight as your most important learning/outcome
  - a. regarding sustainable development?
  - b. regarding education/pedagogy in relation to sustainable development?
2. If you should organize the next course, what would you maintain and/or do differently?
3. What are your most important comments regarding this last session?

Questions asked by the evaluators at the last session



Who wants change? Who wants to change? You never arrive at ‘changed,’ so it is okay that you or they never get there. This course is a part of that change.”



I in my project took the angle of learning and changing perspectives on an individual level. How do we ‘get’ people to change – by themselves? How to stimulate change rather than force it? For myself, and apparently some others on the course, the question of how to discuss sustainability without it being too provocative comes up again and again. Thinking about the state of the world and society is in many ways sad and hard. But it can be constructive, developing and kick-ass, too, when we share a context with others and gain inspiration and energy from the combined efforts for change!”

## EVALUATION



The evaluation in its entirety is available in the article *Evalueringen af pilot-kurset "Kunnskap for bærekraftig utvikling"*:

<http://nvl.org/Content/Evalueringen-af-pilot-kurset-Kunnskap-for-b%C3%A6rekraftig-utvikling>



The pilot was evaluated by two external researchers, Professor Jeppe Læssøe and Assistant Professor Jonas Greve Lysgaard, Danish School of Education (Danmarks institut for Pædagogik og Uddannelse), Aarhus University, Denmark, who are currently evaluating the second course as well. The format of the evaluation is a so-called development-oriented, didactic evaluation. According to the eight success factors we have mentioned earlier, it is of great importance for the learning and improvement of the course to have an external view in addition to the systematic internal evaluation we have been conducting during the sessions (number 5: Process evaluation).

**HERE WE INCLUDE** some main points from Læssøe and Lysgaard's evaluation, translated into English:

*"The participants have experienced medium to great learning outcomes within a broad*



*range of themes central to sustainable development...“*

Regarding the pedagogy, it was described by the researchers as example-pedagogy:

*“Looking further from the pilot to the general development of education for sustainable development, this approach – with emphasis on adult education through good, concrete examples – is particularly interesting. It has some resemblance to the experiential pedagogy (...) and it has as such obvious qualities in relation to the cognitive and emotional challenges which are included in the work on promoting learning regarding questions on a sustainable development. Thus we partly think of the quality in the attempt to sensualising and concretizing the very abstract and complex questions regarding sustainable development, secondly the importance of promoting hope and creativity in the*

*treatment of risks, and not the least linking learning close to action. By linking the inspiration from examples to self-reflection regarding own practice – both in relation to sustainable development and to adult education – this pedagogy is not ‘atheoretical’ but aims to support the development of the reflexive practice.”*

*“The Nordic aspect was a very marked aspect in the course(...) The Nordic represents a diversity both in language, culture and in different approaches to practice, but the commonalities are so many that this diversity in this course resulted in productive processes and learning pathways where it was possible to get inspiration and insights across the different nationalities represented in the group.”*

The second course will be evaluated by the same evaluators, and will be finished after it ends in December 2016.



For  
the future

## REPORT FROM THE FUTURE

**A** long journey has led to the educational social experiment you can read about in this book – and we will continue to curiously travel and search. What are the next steps and how do we foresee the future of the new Nordic education for sustainability?

As a part of the strategic planning in the Nordic project group we have several times used "imagine the future-exercises" and back-casting as a working method, methods that were also practiced during the two courses.





## Here are some samples from our report from the future:

The 21st of September 2024 we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the New Nordic Sustainability Education. It took place in the spectacular conference and concert hall Harpa in Reykjavik. Around 500 participants from all over the Nordic region and other regions in Europe joined. The participants represented a wide variety across sectors and disciplines: There were former students, now active members in the alumni network that was formalised after the second course in 2016, and members of other NVL networks. There were adult educational professionals, community development workers and trainers, social service providers, local authorities, community organisers and activists, emerging movement leaders, people from the business sector and several policymakers from different levels—and others.

**THE CELEBRATION** was organised in a series of collaborative workshops and as well we showed films and shared stories from the last 10 years focusing on the changes we had seen as a result of the education:

- We reached out to new target groups in the education such as immigrants, members of neighborhood associations, and employees from entities that work specifically as “Ecolighthouses” such as kindergartens and elderly homes. As well young unemployed people had the possibility to join as students; that year social entrepreneurship and new economy was in focus, one of the results was that 80% of the students got a job, some of them created their own cooperatives aiming at demonstrating “green jobs”.

- Thanks to an Erasmus exchange project during 2018–2020 we had the possibility to share our experiences with adult educators from the Central and Eastern European Region. Through this exchange where our European colleagues applied the New Nordic ESD model according to their context we experienced a high level of “cross-pollination”. The gatherings in the project led to the development and deepening of effective skills, strategies, and tactics that the participants could apply at home.
- In 2017–2019 two national versions of the education were completed as pilots—one in Norway and one in Finland.
- Some of the obstacles we had to work with were to keep it a Nordic education and still to get it financed. But thanks to strong efforts in documenting the results, the cases and hard lobbying, we succeeded in keeping it Nordic and in addition to new funding, participants’ fee, some companies supported with funding as well.
- We kept and developed the flexible cross-Nordic leadership model.
- Over the years we have addressed the challenges we identified in the first two courses: activist vs. mediator approaches; preaching to the choir vs. reaching outside the ‘green’ congregation; education about sustainable development vs. education for sustainable development vs. education about education for sustainable development; Nordic vs. global perspectives; flexibility vs. predictability; academic vs. practical approaches. These ‘frictions’ have been explored as fertile breeding grounds for expanding our understanding.

**WE DO NOT HAVE** any “quick-fix-answers” to what the next steps will be. The horizon is open and we look to different possible futures. To create hope by learning from innovative sustainability practices and the sensuous imagination of alternative futures is an underlying value and driving force in the development of Nordic adult education for sustainability, inspired by Robert Jungk, the inventor of the future workshop. In his book *Modets Princip. Stridsskrift mod resignationen/The Principle of Courage. A diatribe against resignation* he states that:



**”Our desires are reality.  
It is not only what is obvious that  
can be felt, that is real, but  
also everything that is  
in its infancy.”**

*Jungk, 1988*

## AFTERWORD: Tapio Kosunen

### Education as a means of striving towards sustainable development in Finland



Tapio Kosunen

Director General

Department for  
Higher Education and  
Science Policy

Ministry of Education  
and Culture in Finland

**T**he sustainability agenda is today as current as ever. Last autumn the United Nations General Assembly approved the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development. It entails a broad vision on the needs of transforming societies globally to meet the challenges of sustainable development. Education remains as one of the key utensils to strive towards sustainable development – a fact that also the Agenda 2030 acknowledges. While the overall global target for education in Agenda 2030 is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all, it also stresses the importance of ensuring by 2030 that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development.

**WHILE THE NATIONAL** framework for implementing the Agenda 2030 is under preparation, the spirit is well captured already in the current Finnish Government Programme (2015). According to the programme *“Finland’s competitiveness is built on high expertise, sustainable development and open-minded innovations based on experimentation and digitalisation. We encourage renewal, creativity and interest in new ideas.”* This means that well-being must be based on sustainable development, also in the years of economic uncertainty. By education and research we build the knowledge base needed to create innovative sustainable solutions for the challenges of today and those of the future.

**SUSTAINABLE** development needs action at all levels – starting from individuals and ending at the systemic national and global levels. The role of the government and political decision-making at large is to provide an enabling framework for sustainable development, but all actors need to contribute.

**IN FINLAND** sustainable development is integrated into the education system from early-childhood education and daycare all the way up to higher education and research and encompassing both formal and informal education. With the introduction of the new core curricula for basic education and upper secondary general education the emphasis on sustainable development will be increased as sustainability considerations are included into contents of various subjects. In vocational qualifications sustainable development is one of the key lifelong learning competences common to all. In addition, degrees also include qualification specific sustainability skills. The four-year agreements between the Ministry of Education and Culture and higher education institutions

set HEIs to consider sustainable development in all their activities. The aim is that all pupils and students have the opportunities to gain knowledge and skills needed to act and contribute responsibly from individual, local and global perspectives.

**THE NATIONAL STRATEGY** for sustainable development was replaced a couple of years ago with the Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development, "The Finland we want by 2050" (<https://commitment2050.fi/>). The commitment is founded on a common understanding of the need for change. Under the commitment, the actors agree on practices and objectives to secure a good life for present and for future generations. Various actors in society commit to taking measures that contribute to the achievement of the common objectives of Society's Commitment. The operational contributions to the Society's Commitment have proven as an excellent means not only to facilitate new actions but also in order to make the actions more visible. At the same time it provides new opportunities for learning and collaboration. It has been a great pleasure to note the activity of the education sector to take the ownership of the Society's Commitment. Kindergartens, schools, higher education institutions, groups of students as well as educators' unions have made their own pledges and the education sector covers more than 20% of all the pledges. The commitment was recently updated to take better into account Agenda 2030.

*Helsinki, Finland, August 12th, 2016*

## References

- Holm, T., Paaby, K., Stavlund, E. (2014). **Piloting Nordic sustainability education**. LLinE Lifelong Learning in Europe 3, [www.elmmagazine.eu/articles/piloting-nordic-sustainability-education](http://www.elmmagazine.eu/articles/piloting-nordic-sustainability-education)
- Jungk, R. (1988). **Modets Princip. Stridsskrift mod resignationen**. The Principle of Courage. A diatribe against resignation. Copenhagen: Politisk revy.
- Læssøe, J. (2007). **"Folkeoplysning om bæredygtig udvikling – en historie om afradikalisering og bagvedliggende uklarheder"** (Civic formation on sustainable development – a history of de-radicalisation and the underlying lack of clarity), in: J. Holm (Ed.): Økologisk modernisering på dansk – brud og bevægelser i dansk miljøpolitik. Copenhagen: Frydenlund.
- Manninen, J., Árnason, H., Liveng, A., Green, I. (2012). **Analysis of Nordic educational projects designed to meet challenges in society: Defining the success factors**. NVL, Nordiskt Nätverk för Vuxnas Lärande. Retrieved August 20, 2014, from [www.nordvux.net/Portals/0/\\_dokumenter/2013/competence\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.nordvux.net/Portals/0/_dokumenter/2013/competence_report_final.pdf)
- Mogensen, F., & Schnack, K. (2010). **The action competence approach and the 'new' discourses of education for sustainable development, competence and quality criteria**. Environmental Education Research, 16(1), 59-74.
- Nordic Council of Ministers (2011). **Kunnskap for Bærekraftig Utviklingen oversikt over tilbud til voksne i Norden** [Knowledge for Sustainable Development- an overview of offerings to adults in the Nordic countries. Retrieved October 20, 2016 from: [http://nvl.org/Portals/0/DigArticle/6232/Kunnskap\\_Baerekraftig\\_Utvikling\\_2012\\_no.pdf](http://nvl.org/Portals/0/DigArticle/6232/Kunnskap_Baerekraftig_Utvikling_2012_no.pdf)
- Nordic Council of Ministers (2013). **A good life in a sustainable Nordic region**. Retrieved October 25, 2016 from: <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:701472/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Nordic Council of Ministers (2015). **Green Growth the Nordic Way**. Retrieved October 20, 2016 from: [www.norden.org/en/theme/green-growth](http://www.norden.org/en/theme/green-growth)
- Paaby, K. (2012) **"Civic formation through action – a contribution to the UN Decade for Sustainable Development"** in Idébanken NOR-DIC Success stories in Sustainability, 72-77.

# Contact

## Responsible team:

### **Kirsten Paaby,**

MA, Director, Paaby Prosess Edu-Action, Norway, responsible for pedagogy and content, paaby.kirsten@gmail.com, +47 909 747 88

### **Tove Holm,**

PhD, Training Manager, SYKLI Environmental School of Finland, Finland, responsible for quality assurance and evaluation, tove.holm@sykli.fi, +358 50 574 6471

### **Ellen Stavlund,**

MA, Project Manager, Voksenopplæringsforbundet, Norway, responsible for administration, es@vofo.no, +47 957 930 86

In the project group have also been involved:

- **Miriam Sannum**, RCE Västra Götaland, Sweden
- **Henrika Nordin**, Bildningsalliansen, Finland
- **Malene Lundén**, Samsø Energiakademi, Denmark
- **Caitlin Wilson**, Landvernd, Iceland
- **Brita Phuthi**, Folkehøgskolerådet, Norway
- **Maria Runonen**, Sykli Environmental School of Finland, Finland

The external evaluation for both courses was made by **Jeppe Læssøe** og **Jonas Andreassen Lysgaard** at the Danish School of Education (Danmarks institut for Pædagogik og Uddannelse – DPU), Aarhus University, Denmark.

Website: <http://nvl.org/hallbar-utveckling>



Nordisk Baerekraft,  
[www.facebook.com/groups/155746077786870/?fref=ts](http://www.facebook.com/groups/155746077786870/?fref=ts)



Nordisk Baerekraft,  
[www.linkedin.com/groups/8496997](http://www.linkedin.com/groups/8496997)



BILDNINGSS-  
ALLIANSEN



Sustainable development