

# Case Report: Exploring Relationality



## Case: Exploring Relationality

Based on the identified need to strengthen peer learning and collaboration among teachers and staff – to enable the further development of green skills and sustainability practices, Glokala Folkhögskolan has explored relationality through several activities. Among others a hands-on team building activity to completely re-shape a small overgrown patio outside the main school building.

*Glokala is a Folk high school (Adult education center) based in Malmö, Sweden. Starting from the notion of 'thinking globally and acting locally', the school provides secondary education, vocational training for teaching assistants and courses in film, music, art and social entrepreneurship; all connected to urban culture, social change and sustainability. Glokala is also well connected with local associations in the field of sustainability, asylum rights and community development.*

### Setting the scene: Sustainability at Glokala

In the spring of 2024, we at Glokala folkhögskolan used the SMALEI Sustainability Matrix to collaboratively explore potential ways of developing how we work. This process, set against the backdrop of the current global socio-political landscape, sought not only to address the need for integrating sustainability in an adult learning center as ours, but also to foster a stronger sense of community and interconnectedness among educators and staff. If we are to transition our societies, we need to do it together, and for that we need courage and trust—in each other and in our capacities to form other ways of living and being together. By adopting a relational approach inspired by contemporary research and ecological and social thought as well as a decolonial, Indigenous perspective, we aimed to strengthen our agency as an educational institution in cultivating resilient, sustainable, and cohesive communities capable of navigating the challenges of our times.

This case report focuses on our work with one of the five main areas of the matrix, namely *Green skills of trainers and staff*.

### Introducing a Relational Approach

As a starting point before using the Sustainability Matrix to assess the organisation – a group of the teachers and staff began the work by collectively reflecting on the existential threats to our planet: Climate change, biodiversity loss, war, and economic inequalities. Grounded in the Planetary Boundaries framework from the Stockholm Resilience Centre, we looked at humanity's impact and the urgent need for a paradigm shift. The current state of the world was explored through discussions on the story behind Western Modernity and an envisioning of a new, decolonial and relational, narrative for the future.

Central to the introductory session was *relationality* – a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of all life, drawn from both contemporary scientific theories and from Indigenous knowledge systems. Elizabeth A. Lange refers, in her book [Transformative Sustainability Education: Reimagining our future](#), to quantum relationality, systems thinking and Indigenous knowledge, when she writes that “Earth is alive—a mysterious living organism. Earth is sustainable by nature, with an inherent ability to sustain Life indefinitely. All we need to do as human communities is respect, honour and cooperate with these processes. Such



human communities are life-giving. Transformative sustainability education is learning to live, work and be in a life-giving way.”

## Identified need within Green skills of trainers & staff: Collaboration and peer-learning



To enhance the development of green skills, the Sustainability Matrix suggests, amongst other things, a focus on peer learning – involving team building, collaboration, capacity building and a culture of sharing among staff members. The aspect of “Collaboration; promoting a working environment that facilitates trust and opportunities for mutual sharing of inspiration and experimentation” was selected as an area of focus based on a expressed need for stronger relationships and more informal interactions among ourselves. Following brainstorming and further development of some of the most prominent ideas, a long list of suggested activities was handed over to the headmaster.

### Collaboration activity: Team Building with Växtverket

The ideas around fostering collaboration crystalized into among others a hands-on afternoon workshop with all staff invited, led by our collaborators of the association [Växtverket](#) in Malmö. Växtverket is a team of designers, landscape architects, horticultural engineers and educators passionate about developing sustainable urban spaces, focusing on participatory projects and green learning environments. Glokala and Växtverket have engaged in several projects together before, exchanging knowledge and co-creating social and green urban areas in our neighbourhood, engaging our participants in small-scale building and urban farming-activities.

The workshop was crafted in line with the matrix's recommendations to "get support from external experts in sustainable and circular practices at work" and “facilitate team building activities that deal with green and sustainable issues”, aiming to enhance the practical green skills of Glokala's staff and to embody the principles of relationality through collective action.



Starting with an informal lunch gathering, we set out to completely re-shape a small overgrown patio outside the school building. Equipped with working gloves, rakes, hedge clippers and spades we trimmed the overgrown bushes, cleared the weeds, moved the lavender plants and cleaned up the area. We placed benches built from left over pallet-wood by our participants along the wall, creating a little oasis for us and our participants to sit in on warm days.



## Reflections and Outcomes

The focus on collaboration among teachers and staff has highlighted the ongoing need to get to know each other better, and engage in conversations about our challenging role at this time in history, and the transformative potential of education. While the teambuilding activity contributed both to the relationships among staff and to the learning environment at Glokala, it also links to a broader transformative potential of education grounded in relationality. We hope to continue with more activities in the same spirit, collaborative and hands-on – supporting agency among staff.







**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.