



**EURASIA LEARNING INSTITUTE
FOR HAPPINESS AND WELLBEING**
SOCIAL INNOVATION & GLOBAL CARE

**GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS
AS AN ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM
AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR COMMUNITY LIVING**

HA VINH THO





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"In the course of history, there comes a time when humanity is called to shift to a new level of consciousness, to reach a higher moral ground. A time when we have to shed our fear and give hope to each other. That time is now."

The late Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Laureate

My Path from Camphill to Vietnam and Bhutan over the War Zones of our Time

Together with my wife Lisi and our two children, we lived for many years in a Camphill community in Switzerland - Perceval. I consider these years of community practice, sharing our life and work with people living with intellectual disabilities, as some of the most formative experiences on which all my later work and social understanding are built. After Camphill, I worked for the International Committee of the Red Cross and spent time in most of the conflict areas of the beginning of the 21st Century: from Afghanistan to Palestine and from Darfur to Pakistan. These experiences led me to the conclusion that the physical violence that I was witnessing was but the tip of the iceberg and that I had to uncover the underlying root causes that were not addressed in the humanitarian response to these tragic events. It became more and more obvious that systemic or structural violence was the deeper cause of the outer events and that we had to try and understand these systemic problems if solutions were to be found.

This led me to develop a critical view of the current economic and development paradigm and to search for alternatives. On a local community scale, my experience in the Camphill Movement seemed to offer a valid model of a different way to organize work, finances and a social organism. Nevertheless the question remained to find a model that would be applicable on a much larger scale, such as a country. This is how I encountered the Gross National Happiness framework in Bhutan.

At the end of 2011, the Prime Minister of Bhutan decided to create a Gross National Happiness Centre as a learning institute and community to teach and experiment GNH in action. They were looking for a Program Director for the new centre and posted an international recruitment offer. I applied and was selected and this is how I moved to Bhutan at the beginning of 2012. At the same time, since the 1990's, my wife and I had set up an NGO¹ in Vietnam - *Eurasia Foundation*.

¹ NGO: A non-governmental organisation is an organisation that is neither a part of a government nor a conventional for-profit business.

Here we started our work in the field of special education. During the war many children had been affected by the consequences of Agent Orange² and as a result there was an unusually high percentage of children with disabilities; at the same time, the government lacked the resources and the expertise to offer appropriate support and education to these children and young people. Gradually our work expanded from special education to general education, to embrace ecology, community building and social entrepreneurship. We built many schools and workshops, trained the first generation of teachers in the field of curative education and social therapy and, in 2009, we created the Peaceful Bamboo Family, an intentional working and learning community inspired by the Camphill Movement and the Gross National Happiness Framework in Viet Nam.

The Challenges of our Time and the Need to Transform the Current Development Paradigm

“The crisis of our time isn’t just a crisis of a single leader, organization, country, or conflict. The crisis of our time reveals the dying of an old social structure and way of thinking, an old way of institutionalizing and enacting collective social forms.”

Otto C. Scharmer

Otto Scharmer has identified three major challenges that we face as a mankind. He calls it the three divides³:

1. The Ecological Divide
2. The Social Divide
3. The Spiritual-cultural Divide

It seems appropriate to add a fourth one that is a consequence of the three previous ones:

4. The Leadership dividee



1. The Ecological Divide: the Alienation between Self and Nature

Since the beginning of human history until the late seventies, mankind used far less of the abundant natural resources that Planet Earth so generously provides than was available. But this changed dramatically during the last three decades of the 20th century.

Modest UN scenarios suggest that if current population and consumption trends continue then by the 2030s we will need the equivalent of two Earths to support us. And of course, we only have one. Turning resources into waste faster than waste can be turned back into resources puts us in a global ecological overshoot, depleting the very resources on which human life and biodiversity depend⁴. As a consequence, one third of our agricultural land has disappeared over the past 40 years.

According to a World Bank report⁵, dramatic climate changes and weather extremes are already affecting millions of people around the world, damaging crops and coastlines and putting water security at risk. There is growing evidence that warming close to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels is locked into the Earth’s atmospheric system due to past and predicted emissions of greenhouse gases, and climate change impacts such as extreme heat events may now be unavoidable. As the planet warms, climatic conditions, heat and other weather extremes which occur once in hundreds of years and considered highly unusual or unprecedented today would become the ‘new climate normal’ as we approach 4°C - a frightening world of increased risks and global instability.

These are only some examples to illustrate the unprecedented ecological challenges we are currently facing. The inner dimension of this challenge is the fundamental disconnect between humans and nature. This alienation is a side-effect of the current materialistic worldview that has become predominant over the past centuries: the idea that our planet is but a heap of matter ruled by merely physical and chemical laws. Without reclaiming the spiritual dimension of Nature, mere political agreements will fail to address the fundamental crisis that underlines these issues.



² Agent Orange: One of the herbicides and defoliants used by the US military as part of its herbicidal warfare programme.

³ Scharmer, O. & Kaufer, K. (2013) *Leading from the Emerging Future: from eco-system to eco-system economics*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

⁴ http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFN/page/world_footprint/

⁵ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/climatechange/publication/turn-down-the-heat>



2. The Social Divide: Alienation between Self and Others

Two and a half billion people on our planet subsist on less than \$2 per day. Although there have been many attempts to lift people out of poverty, this number has not changed much over the past several decades. In addition we see an increasing polarization in society in which the top 1% has a greater collective worth than the entire bottom 90 %.

According to Barack Obama, income inequality is the « defining challenge of our times », while Pope Francis states that « inequality is the root of social ills ».

Human beings have deep-seated psychological responses to inequality and social hierarchy.

The tendency to equate outward wealth with inner worth means that inequality colours our social perceptions. It invokes feelings of superiority and inferiority, dominance and subordination – which affect the way we relate to and treat each other.

Research shows⁶ that, as well as health and violence, almost all the problems that are more common at the bottom of the social ladder are more common in more unequal societies – including mental illness, drug addiction, obesity, loss of community life, imprisonment, unequal opportunities and poorer wellbeing for children. The effects of inequality are not confined to the poor. A growing body of research shows that inequality damages the social fabric of the whole society. The health and social problems are between twice and 10 times as common in more unequal societies.

Although mankind produces more goods and services than ever before, even when taking into account the current size of the world population, there has been hardly any progress in terms of fairness and equity in the distribution of wealth. Some 795 million people in the world do not have enough food to lead a healthy active life. That's about one in nine people on earth. Poor nutrition causes nearly half (45%) of deaths in children under five (3.1 million children each year). Sixty-six million primary school-age children attend classes across the developing world, hungry⁷.

These figures are a sad expression of the level of alienation between oneself and others and a devastating outcome of our current economic system: our fellow humans being perceived as competitors, rather than sisters and brothers.

Cultivating altruism, compassion and solidarity is not a mere ethical imperative, it is the very condition of the survival of mankind.



3. The Spiritual-cultural Divide: Alienation between Self and Self

Our current economic system is based on an assumption about human nature: the so-called *homo economicus* or economic man. This concept portrays humans as narrowly self-interested agents always trying to maximize their benefit as consumers and their profits as producers. In other words, we have a heartless egoistic being only pursuing material benefits without any consideration for values, ethics or simply human relations based on love and friendship.

No wonder that this implicit assumption creates an economic system that manifests as a self-fulfilling prophecy, resulting in a massive institutional failure and collectively creating results that nobody wants. This is not to pretend that these tendencies do not exist but traditional wisdom saw them as the shadow aspect (C. G. Jung), as the 'double' (R. Steiner) or, according to Buddhist psychology, as the 'poisons of the mind'.

Moreover, if we internalize and identify with this distorted view of what it means to be human, we disconnect from our highest potential and true nature. This is fuelled by the illusion that material consumption can fulfil our deeper aspiration for meaning, identity or self-actualization. Some of the results of this alienation are obvious in today's world, from growing suicide rates, to epidemics of depression and stress-related illnesses becoming the major factor of morbidity in the developed countries.

Moreover, some of the latest scientific research⁸ clearly demonstrates that the notion of the "*Homo Economicus*" has no scientific foundation, its is merely an ideological construct. Therefore, promoting in education, from Kindergarten to University a true understanding of what really means to be human is of crucial importance to meet this challenge.





4. The Leadership Divide: Alienation between Self and the Greater Good

On a personal level, the leadership divide manifests as a lack of self-leadership leaving the individual to fall prey to all sorts of manipulations, from marketing to numbing media influence, and substance abuse, from compulsive consumerism to Internet and technology addiction⁹.

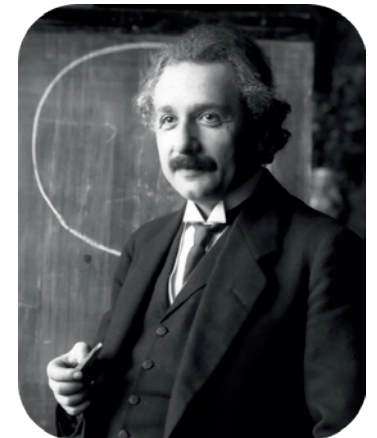
On the collective level, it manifests as the helplessness of most world leaders who are unable to overcome narrow national interests to live up to the global challenges that we are facing as a mankind; they restrict the horizon of their thinking to the next electoral deadline and not to mid or long term goals.

It appears that the current economic and development model has come to its limits. Change is bound to happen; the only question is whether we - as mankind - can lead the change consciously or if we passively undergo the changes because outer circumstances force us to do so. It also appears that the most vulnerable will be the first victims and this holds true globally: the poorest countries will be the first to bear the brunt of the negative impacts and this is also true within developed countries. Obviously, people living with intellectual disabilities belong to the most vulnerable segment of society. This is one of the reasons why I believe that rethinking about community living, inclusion and intellectual disability should be done within a larger context of rethinking of the overall development paradigm.

As Einstein once famously observed:

"we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them".

Gross National Happiness is one of the global frameworks that can help us rethink the overall goals of societal development.



⁹ <http://virtual-addiction.com/>



Gross National Happiness: A New Development Paradigm

In 1968 Robert Kennedy pointed out that:

“Even if we act to erase material poverty, there is another great task; it is to confront the poverty of satisfaction - purpose and dignity - that afflicts us all. Too much and for too long, we seemed to have surrendered personal excellence and community values to the mere accumulation of material things...”

*Gross National Product counts air pollution and cigarette advertising...
It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for the people who break them.
It counts the destruction of the redwood and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm and nuclear warheads...
It counts the television programs that glorify violence to sell toys to our children.*

*Yet, the Gross National Product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages...
It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our compassion...
It measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.”*

“Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National product”.

With this famous declaration made in the 1970s, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the 4th King of Bhutan challenged conventional, narrow and materialistic notions of human progress. He realized and declared that the existing development paradigm – GNP (or GDP) – did not consider the ultimate goal of every human being: happiness.

Gross National Happiness: A New Development Paradigm

Inspired by age-old Buddhist wisdom in the ancient Kingdom of Bhutan, the fourth King concluded that GDP was neither an equitable nor a meaningful measurement for human happiness, nor should it be the primary focus for governance and thus the philosophy of Gross National Happiness was born.

Since that time this pioneering vision of GNH has guided Bhutan’s development and policy formation. Unique among the community of nations, it is a balanced ‘middle path’ in which equitable socio-economic development is integrated with environmental conservation, cultural promotion and good governance.

The Folly of the GDP Obsession!

The folly of an obsession with GDP, as a measure of economic activity which does not distinguish between those activities that increase a nation's wealth and those that deplete its natural resources or result in poor health or widening social inequalities is so clearly evident. If the forests of Bhutan were logged for profit, GDP would increase; if Bhutanese citizens picked up modern living habits adversely affecting their health, investments in health care systems would be made and GDP would increase. All of these actions could negatively affect the lives of the Bhutanese people yet paradoxically would contribute to an increase in GDP.

Four Pillars and Nine Domains



The intuitive guiding principle of Gross National Happiness led to a practical conceptualization of the concept. The foundation is made of four pillars:



1. Environmental conservation as an antidote to the ecological divide

Environmental conservation is considered a key contribution to GNH because in addition to providing critical services such as water and energy, the environment is believed to contribute to aesthetic and other stimuli that can be directly healing to people. Bhutan is absorbing three times more CO₂ than it produces and has pledged to remain a carbon sink and to become 100% organic by 2020¹⁰.



2. Fair and sustainable socio-economic development as an antidote to the social divide

GNH economics is a spiritual approach to economics. It examines the functioning of the human mind and aspires to transform ignorance, greed and violence that direct most of the current economic activity. It aims to clarify what is harmful and beneficial in the range of human activities involving production and consumption, and tries to support people in making ethical choices. It strives towards a middle way balancing economic development and human values.

It holds that truly rational decisions can only be made when we understand the nature and the functioning of the mind. When we understand what constitutes desire and craving as a cause of suffering, we realize that all the wealth in the world cannot satisfy it. We become aware of the importance of contentment and of leading a simple but dignified life.

GNH economics challenges the vision of *homo economicus* that underlies current economic models: from a GNH perspective, attributes such as altruism and compassion are innate qualities of the mind. Economic development is important but it must be fair in terms of distribution and sustainable in order not to deprive future generations of their right to a good life.



3. Preservation and promotion of culture as an antidote to the spiritual-cultural divide

Culture, includes science, arts, and spirituality. All three elements are important and must be equally promoted and developed for a society to thrive.

If culture is reduced to its economic dimension and when it is determined by financial indicators only, a society gradually loses its identity and values and individuals are reduced to economic actors: producers and consumers. Bhutan is a good example of a country that has been able to preserve and to further develop its unique Buddhist heritage and values.



4. Good governance as an antidote to the leadership divide

Good governance is considered a pillar for happiness because it determines the conditions in which people thrive. While policies and programmes that are developed in Bhutan are generally in line with the values of GNH, there are also a number of tools and processes employed to ensure the values are indeed embedded in social policy. Bhutan is also a unique example of a peaceful transition from absolute monarchy to democracy initiated by the King himself.

Nine Domains



The four pillars are further elaborated into nine domains, which articulate the different elements of GNH in detail and form the basis of GNH measurement, indices and screening tools.

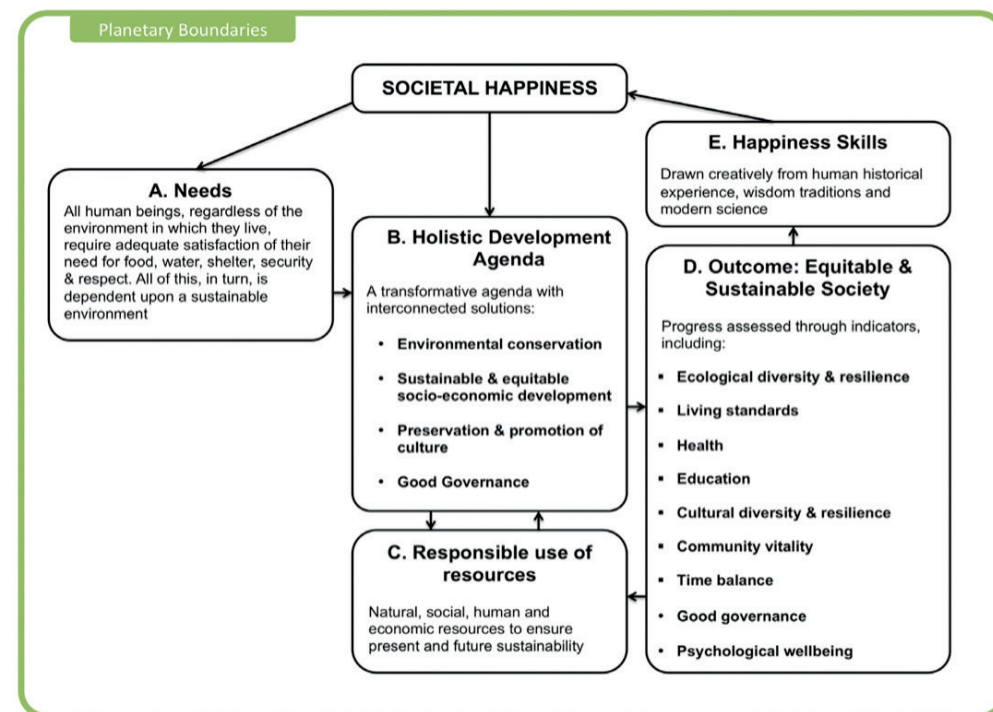
1. Living standards
2. Education
3. Health
4. Environment
5. Community vitality
6. Time-use
7. Psychological well-being
8. Good governance
9. Cultural resilience and promotion

These nine domains, clearly demonstrate that from the perspective of GNH, many inter-related factors are considered to be important in creating the conditions for happiness. Income and material security are obviously part of these conditions, but many other factors must also be taken into consideration.

Similarly, the happiness of human beings is not seen as separate from the wellbeing of other life forms, and ecological diversity and resilience are included in the measure of GNH. The balance between material and non-material development, and the multi-dimensional and interdependent nature of GNH are key features that distinguish GNH from GDP as a measure of a country's progress.

The universal human goal to pursue happiness and the existence of planetary boundaries are the two fundamental premises of GNH. The current economic model, based on the doctrine of limitless growth has resulted in the destructive attempt to use the earth's finite resources to satisfy infinite wants. The envisaged new paradigm differs in essence from the existing one by making sustainability of life on earth the top concern and recalibrating development to ensure that life - of humans, other species and the earth itself - is valued and prioritised.

The GNH Framework



Happiness Skills

The GNH framework seeks to find a balance between the outer and the inner conditions leading to happiness and wellbeing. Seeing happiness as a skill is a relatively new and unusual idea in current western culture, but most traditional wisdom traditions, from ancient Greek Philosophy to Asian spirituality have shared this vision and developed methods to cultivate the inner qualities leading to happiness.

However, there is now a strong convergence between traditional contemplative wisdom and the latest scientific findings - especially in the field of neuroscience - that allows a better understanding of the way we can train the mind to enhance inner qualities such as mindfulness, compassion and altruism, and how these abilities have a strong correlation with happiness and wellbeing. In the field of education, there is a growing awareness of the need to complement intellectual and academic skills with Social and Emotional Learning¹²(SEL) and with the training of attention: Mindfulness practices¹³.

Likewise, there is also a strong momentum in cultivating Mindfulness in many fields of social life, including in the British Parliament¹⁴:

The Mindfulness Initiative is an advocacy project, aimed at increasing awareness of how mindfulness can benefit society. The Initiative is working with parliamentarians, media and policy makers to develop recommendations on the role of mindfulness in public policy and the workplace. Scientific research is generating substantial evidence of the benefits of mindfulness to wellbeing

Likewise, there is an increasing interest in Mindfulness in the business community. Some years ago, it would have been unthinkable to expect the world political and business leaders to sit in meditation in a high level meeting, but this is exactly what is now regularly happening in the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos¹⁵.

These few examples illustrate the fact that the inner dimension of happiness and wellbeing has moved from a marginal interest to a mainstream concern in many fields of society, far beyond specialist concerns of psychologists or spiritual seekers.



From Economic Growth to Happiness and Wellbeing

Whilst the one sided neo-liberal economic ideology and the focus - and even obsession - with economic growth is still powerful, it is more and more challenged and not only marginally, but also in international arenas such as the UN.

On 2nd April, 2012, the Royal Government of Bhutan convened a High-level Meeting on Wellbeing and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm. More than 800 participants including political and government leaders, representatives of governments, international organizations, civil society organizations, media, and business, as well as leading economists, scholars, academics, and spiritual leaders from the world's major faiths participated in the proceedings¹⁶.

One of the outcomes of this meeting was that the 20th of March was proclaimed by the United Nations the International Day of Happiness¹⁷. Many countries, including the UK, Germany and France have developed new sets of indicators to measure the wellbeing of their citizens as a complement to the conventional GDP measurement. Furthermore 20 US States have adopted Genuine Progress Indicators (GPI)¹⁸ as an alternative measurement of their development. Major economists including Joseph Stiglitz (recipient of the 2001 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences and the John Bates Clark Medal) have clearly shown that the current GDP based economic system does not meet the needs of our time¹⁹.

There is a growing tension between the old economic model based on narrow financial metrics and the emerging development paradigm based on happiness and wellbeing and this tension also manifests in the field of social care and especially in the field of intellectual disability.

The Gross National Happiness Framework applied in a Camphill Community in Vietnam

When we created the Peaceful Bamboo Family community in Hue, Central Vietnam, our fundamental intention was not focused on caring for young people with intellectual disability, but rather on creating a conducive environment that would allow these young people to unfold their full potential in a way that would enable them to make a positive contribution to society. And these contributions have been manifold.

When we started our community, it was not yet possible for NGOs in Vietnam to buy land and to run a privately owned Centre. Due to the many years of work in the field of special education, the local government had confidence in our Foundation and granted us an exception so that we could create the first private and free centre entirely based on our values and principles inspired by the Camphill Movement and later by the GNH framework.

¹¹ <https://www.resource-project.org/en/home.html>

¹² www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/

¹³ www.mindfulnessinschools.org/

¹⁴ www.themindfulnessinitiative.org.uk/

¹⁵ <http://www.weforum.org/videos/insights-experiencing-mindful-leadership>

¹⁶ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=617&menu=35>

¹⁷ <http://research.un.org/en/happiness>

¹⁸ <http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2014/sep/23/genuine-progress-indicator-gdp-gpi-vermont-maryland>

¹⁹ Stiglitz, J., Sen, A. & Fitoussi, J-P. (2010) Mismeasuring Our Lives: Why GDP doesn't add up. New York: The New Press.

The youngsters, the teachers and volunteers
are happy gardeners



The manifestation of the four pillars of GNH in Tinh Truc Gia



1. Environmental conservation

Tinh Truc Gia is located on the outskirts of Hue City, in the quiet space of the land situated deep in the bamboo grooves. The total area of Tinh Truc Gia is 15,000 m², in which 60% of the land is used for planting, gardening, and a natural playground for children.

Originally the soil in the area was mostly made of gravel and stone, which was not ideal for gardening; only lemongrass, tea, fig, and locust trees were able to grow. Tinh Truc Gia has been practicing Biodynamic agriculture for the last 10 years to heal and revitalize the soil. Today, the previously damaged land has been transformed into a flourishing chemical-free garden with rich soil quality and an abounding ecosystem with more than 1000 species of native plants.

LISTENING TO THE SOIL

In Vietnam, as in many developing countries, the so-called modernization of agriculture has created a lot of damage to the soil due to the misuse of pesticides and fertilizers. At Tinh Truc Gia, the garden is perceived as a living organism with its living process and rhythm of activity; most importantly, the garden's health is determined by the health of the soil.

Hung – Tinh Truc Gia's gardener & educator, graduated from university with a major in Agriculture and was rooted in the modern methodology of gardening. He has been with Tinh Truc Gia's garden from the beginning, and the garden has taught him many precious lessons.

«I used to think that the job of a gardener is to control the garden, but then I realized that I am only a part of its ecosystem. I dance to its rhythm, it does not dance to mine», says Hung.

The intimate relationship he has with the garden has made it possible for him to listen to the garden's needs.



It took the garden team (including gardeners, teachers, volunteers, and the youngsters) 5 years to reshape the soil's properties by removing the many stones beneath the surface by hand. We simultaneously enlivened the soil with horn manure and biodynamic compost, which energizes all the active microbial life processes and thus supports humus formation.

«There is no soil improvement but only soil nourishment. For me the soil is a Bodhisattva.», said Hung.

THE GARDEN AS THE COMMUNITY'S TEACHER

Learning to care of the soil has been a transformative journey not only for the garden team but for the whole community, which required everyone to be patient and, not to create any pressure to obtain a certain amount of vegetables and fruits. In the early years, we had little variety in terms of fruit and vegetables.

The intention of creating the garden was to give the youngsters a big space to release their energy through curative physical work. Gardening helps the youngsters to hone both their gross and fine motor skills, increase attention span, stimulate cognitive abilities, have a direct sensory contact with nature, and regulate emotions. What the garden can teach the youngsters is significantly rich. A simple task such as moving a wheelbarrow can help them train spatial orientation, their sense of balance, and their attention. The garden always has a wide variety of tasks that are suited to different abilities and needs. Through their work, the youngsters give to the earth and receive healing in return.

Moreover, the garden teaches the whole community about our attitude towards nature. As we eat mainly the seasonal vegetables and fruits from the garden, we are aware of the farm-to-fork process and appreciate more fully the food we have. Before meals, the whole community practices gratitude to all the conditions that have been present for the food to be available.

One of the songs that we sing before the meal is:

*“This rice contains the farmer's abundant love
We send gratitude to the parents, the farmers
This rice contains great compassion
That harmonizes the rain and sun, the cloud and wind.”*

The more we understand the garden, the more we make efforts to take actions to minimize harm to the environment. We have a circular waste management system, in which the organic waste from the kitchen is used as major materials for composting. 15% of current electricity comes from solar power systems. Products for cleaning and washing dishes are created by natural ingredients from the garden like lemon, starfruit, and locust. To minimize the consumption of material goods, the buildings and facilities of Tinh Truc Gia are cleaned and maintained on a regular basis. Most of our appliances and furniture have been used for 10 years without having been renewed.

SPREADING ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Our garden was the first Biodynamic organic horticulture garden in Vietnam and gave birth to the Empowerment project. School classes have been coming to our garden to learn about ecology and gardening. The students work alongside with our youngsters, thus appreciating how people with special needs not only contribute to society but can even be their teachers in some specific areas. We are now developing educational programs for students in the fields of sustainability, ecology, organic gardening, and Social and Emotional Learning, with the aim of connecting to Self, Others, and Nature.

2000 students from Hue's public schools come to visit the community every year. This gives the youngsters the opportunities to share their skills, knowledge, and way of being and living together. «What the youngsters can give to the students is love, compassion and the will to overcome challenges in life. The students often think that they come here to help the youngsters, but then they realize that the youngsters are helping them», says Mr. Hung, educator and gardener at Tinh Truc Gia's.

Since 2017, the garden holds annual Biodynamic Agriculture courses for those who are interested, especially gardeners, agriculture students, and educators. Tinh Truc Gia gardeners constantly renew their professional skills and practices so that what they can spread ecological awareness in a practical way.

The participants of the annual Biodynamic course organized in 2018





2. Preservation and promotion of culture

CULTURE IS HOW WE LIVE TOGETHER

Life in Tinh Truc Gia is rejuvenated through the diversity of people and activities. A community can only sustain itself if there is the harmonious presence of different generations and professions. Differences are not a divisive stimulus but cultivate mutual contribution to a common goal.

At Tinh Truc Gia, we have more than 80 people including youngsters with special needs, kindergarten children, teachers, and staff who are motivated to contribute whatever they can, for the happiness of others. There are four generations living, learning, and working together, and each generation offers their unique characteristics and contribution. The background of the teachers and staff is a blend of those with bachelor & master degrees in different areas and of gardeners, social workers or skilled cooks who have not gone through a formal education. Though their roles are varied, each of them is a part of Tinh Truc Gia's web of life.

Ms. Sara, a lifelong expert in special education
and Thao Vy a 20-year-old youngster



Since the beginning, many volunteers have been living and working in Tinh Truc Gia. Their age can range from 15 to over 60 years old, with very diverse backgrounds; some are lifelong experts in special education, we also had a french actor, a clowning professor and high school students from America or Germany. The volunteers offer many positive contributions by expressing their life perspectives, expertise and culture in their way of living and interacting, and at the same time it nurtures the spirit of inclusivity in the community.

Their contributions are manifold, from baking recipes that are currently used in the bakery workshop, to working a year long with the gardeners to remove each stone out of the soil. While volunteering, they enjoy immersing themselves in an intense experience that challenges and redefines their understanding of care and connection.

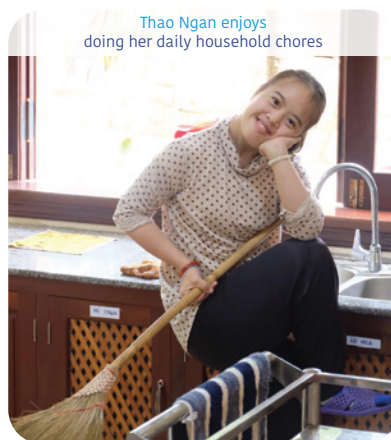
Despite the diversity, the community life in Tinh Truc Gia is always designed to meet the youngsters' needs. The rhythm of the day, the season, and the year is given by rituals, activities and events; this order gives the youngsters a feeling of safety and freedom in their daily activities. Doing the same thing at the same time each day, or each week, helps them to overcome their insecurity or passivity. Their work has become an important part of their lives.

In today's world where individual happiness is believed to be more important than the happiness of everyone, Tinh Truc Gia shows that «living together» as a community is possible and is more important than ever. When living together, interactions do not stop at the level of colleagues, teachers, and students. We have become a family where small daily events are not less essential than what may be considered to be more important matters. Each person is not only a separate individual, but also a part of a larger system. This motivates everyone to overcome the challenging realities of living together on a daily basis. For both those with and without disabilities, 'living together' offers substance and opportunity for profound healing, chances and space for 'giving and receiving' and cultivates a deep sense of caring, trust, and support that helps us grow into full human beings.

WORKING IS A LEARNING PROCESS

Tinh Truc Gia encourages experiential and project-based learning. It has always been a socially innovative project, in which most aspects of community life open up learning opportunities, be it individual or collective learning. Each of us has a favorable context to learn about ourselves, about other people and about our surroundings.

Tinh Truc Gia holds regular seminars and workshops for both co-workers and youngsters in the spirit of lifelong learning for all. Besides annual professional training delivered by experts in special education and social therapy, informal training is even more vital. Working is an informal learning journey, in which each teacher and youngster can reflect and unfold their potential. Every month, we also hold sharing and learning sessions with themes such as mindfulness, compassion, deep listening, and ecological awareness.



What we have learnt is reflected in every simple act of our daily lives. No work is less important than another. Household chores are extremely important, as it helps the youngsters to 'feel at home' and take the responsibility to take care of their home. All chores, from dusting, sweeping, preparing meals and washing clothes offer a chance to improve their motor skills. Furthermore, what they learn in one task can be transferred to another. What they have learnt in household chores about responsibility, meticulousness, executing a task from start to end, etc, will positively impact their skills in their profession. The capacity of attention trained while washing the dishes will have an impact on how mindfully they put their feet on the ground and contribute towards a feeling of stability while walking. The meticulousness needed while folding the clothes will help them make a beautiful lacquer painting.



In 2015, we created the '**Eurasia Learning Institute for Happiness and Wellbeing**' (ELI) to share our experience about special education, Gross National Happiness, Biodynamic farming, and bringing happiness and wellbeing in organizations.

We also partnered with universities like Hoa Sen University and Hue University to create year-long programs on inner transformation leading to social innovation. Two main areas of our work are happiness in education and happiness in organisations. In the field of education, in Vietnam, we began with the «Call to Care» project and are currently implementing the Happy Schools project. Happy Schools, as a continuation of Call to Care, brings 3 modules of Care based on mindfulness and social-emotional learning to 9 public schools in Hue. In the field of happiness in organisation, we are currently working with Bitis, a large shoe company and Pizza 4P to deliver a GNH based approach and values to transform their organizations.

Tinh Truc Gia hosts many of ELI's trainings and workshops because it is the place that embodies key values of ELI.

«Tinh Truc Gia offers an environment for learners who are interested in community building, wellbeing, and social-emotional learning to learn in a very practical way. We have all the conditions for an ideal learning environment.», says Mr. Tu, Tinh Truc Gia's director.



ROOTED IN VIETNAMESE CULTURE AND HUE CULTURE

When we started the Peaceful Bamboo Family, we were inspired by the ideals of the Camphill Movement, but we wanted to create a community that was completely embedded in the Vietnamese context. We did not want to import foreign values and cultural practices in a country that has suffered too much and for too long from destructive foreign influence, whether from French colonialism or American imperialism.

At the same time, we knew from our experience in the Camphill community of Perceval the importance of spiritual and cultural practices that structure the life and cycles of time in a community. So, our challenge was to find the essence of the practices that we had experienced in a Western, largely Christian context located in a temperate climate zone, and to recreate comparable forms and rituals born out of the Vietnamese, largely Buddhist and Confucian context, and a tropical climate. We structured our yearly cycle around traditional Vietnamese and Buddhist festivals that are connected to the moon cycle rather than the solar cycle; including ancestor and Earth-spirit worshipping ceremonies which are held on New and Full Moon.

The weekly rhythm is structured with a day of Mindfulness, and an evening called 'Sharing from the Heart' where each member of the community has an opportunity to share how they feel, what makes them happy or worries them. Their sharings are heard in an atmosphere of respect and non-judgmental deep listening.



ART IS A PART OF LIFE

With youngsters who can't speak, or have many barriers to communicate, art is a great doorway for self-expression and connection with others. That was why Tinh Truc Gia's art workshop was born and we have 3 youngsters who after many years of hard work, were recognized as genuine artists. We hold an annual exhibition in Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh city where the youngsters' artworks and stories are shared with the public.

In daily life, we help the youngsters express themselves creatively though dancing, clowning, singing, crafts, candle making and drama. They are true artists, because when they make art, they make it in a fluid flow without putting themselves in a box. Artistic activities are not only fun, but also help us develop self-esteem, give us a refreshing lens to look at ourselves and our place in the world, and create a wonderful space for authentic connections to each other.

Exhibition of lacquer paintings by TTG youngsters, Ho Chi Minh City





3. Equitable and sustainable economy

We aim to become economically and financially sustainable and to generate enough income to gradually become autonomous. The sale of products is very important to the community, as it shows the contribution of the youngsters to society and is a tangible motivation for them to work.

THE STORY BEHIND OUR PRODUCTS

Work is an important part of identity construction for people with special needs, yet their access to work is often very difficult. This was the motivation for Tinh Truc Gia to establish vocational workshops for people living with disabilities. In Tinh Truc Gia, all the workshops were created to respond to the youngsters' needs, in which the work process & tasks are designed based on the youngsters' abilities and aspirations. The workshops create situations where young people living with an intellectual disability can learn useful skills and train for a job, thus contributing to society, and also generating income for the center. Tinh Truc Gia also offers each youngster a vocational training, enabling them to be integrated in professional life and to become as autonomous as possible.

At the time when the incense workshop was created, we saw the need of making something local and handmade. The area surrounding Tinh Truc Gia is very famous for its incense-making, so we visited, did research and invited the artisans to come to the centre to teach the youngsters. A youngster in the incense workshop can make between 40 – 100 incense sticks per day, while an artisan working outside the centre could make 1000 sticks per day. To be able to make that small amount per day, it takes the youngsters and teachers several years of learning to work with the machine, to coordinate the movement of hands, legs and eyes. The preparation of the paste from which the incense is made also provides a tactile experience and requires the youngsters to learn how to dose the correct amount of liquid and powder. Therefore, one single incense stick of Tinh Truc Gia is not only a mere product; it represents human interconnectedness, the joy of working, years of learning to execute a simple task, and true inclusion

The youngsters with their daily curative work
at the incense workshop



Over the years, as the quality of the youngsters' work increases, so does their self-confidence and feeling of achievement. This motivates them and increases their commitment to their work and they consider it as their profession. Working, in this sense, is a curative approach, a process of inclusion, and a way to give their life meaning.

WHERE OUR PRODUCTS GO

Our current focus is to develop social entrepreneurship in partnership with other like-minded organizations. In the jam workshop, we process tropical fruits from our garden into delicious jam, juice and ice cream. We have a bakery where we produce several types of cookies. We sell these products through a partnership with an online health food store from Ho Chi Minh City. Our lacquer-ware workshop combines traditional techniques with spontaneous creativity allowing the young people to express themselves freely while learning traditional Vietnamese handicrafts. We organize exhibitions to sell the paintings, and it is very moving to experience how proud the youngsters can be when they realize that people appreciate their creations and are willing to buy them. We also have an incense workshop producing high-quality incense made of natural organic medicinal plants according to an ancient recipe.

We have a teahouse in our front yard with a beautiful flower and rock garden; this allows us to sell some of the products of the workshops and the garden, including our own organic green tea. Likewise, it is also an opportunity for the youngsters to learn the skills of the service industry, and to practice useful abilities such as counting, reading, writing, and speaking properly with strangers.



Tinh Truc Gia's products being sold by partners in Ho Chi Minh City

Everyone was working in harmony to prepare the traditional candies for Tet holiday sale



In the past, people used to buy our products out of compassion. Now they buy the products because they recognize their quality. It means that the work of the youngsters is recognized, so are their capacities, their contribution and their autonomy.

This year, the centre was able to generate over 40-50% of its running costs through these activities. Financial transparency is also crucial. The annual report is submitted to all related governmental departments.

The creation of ELI, which allows us to share the fruits of the work done in Tinh Truc Gia, has become an important source of support for Tinh Truc Gia, with 10% of ELI's profit contributing directly to our the running costs. This is a way for us to become gradually less dependent on philanthropy and foreign funding. With time, the situation in Vietnam has shifted and today we also raise an increasing amount of money in Vietnam directly through our network.



4. Good governance

LEADING WITH THE HEART

Over the years, our community has formed a leadership structure that is responsible and accountable.

The pioneer team that founded Tinh Truc Gia shows a visible commitment to the development of the community. They have moved the community forward with endless energy to cultivate the community values written in the community charter and to listen to the evolving needs of the youngsters.

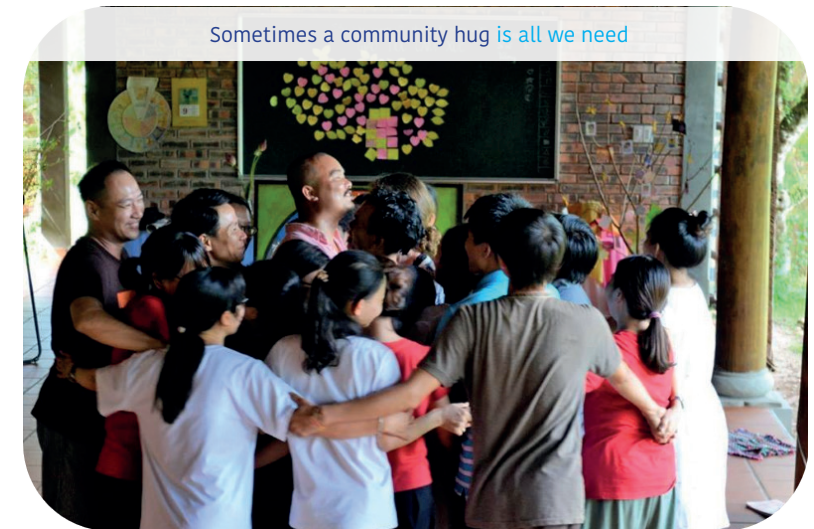
We are progressively developing a participatory leadership style. At Tinh Truc Gia, we consider no position to be superior to another: the director and the gardener each give their contribution; one can be a teacher in the morning, and do cleaning with the youngsters in the afternoon. This creates the conditions for inclusive leadership, which includes everyone, long-term co-workers, volunteers, and the residents alike as a source for decision-making.



We regularly hold seminars to redefine and co-create a common vision and mission that is shared by all, to develop collective strength to step into new structures over time.

When new projects emerge, the whole community is consulted so that they can voice their ideas or doubts. This was done when we created an inclusive kindergarten, a sector for young teenagers with behavioral challenges and when we co-designed the landscaping for the new land of the Empowerment project. Beyond the Four Pillars, we also use the nine domains of GNH as an assessment tool to pilot and improve the functioning of our community.

At Tinh Truc Gia, teamwork is not only limited to the staff circle. It is also the collaboration and interbeing with the experts, youngsters, parents, etc. This is the core essence of the community's resilience. Everyone working together generating collective energy, thinking and will.



Since the beginning of Tinh Truc Gia, we have made great efforts to infuse organizational values with micro-acts of kindness, mindfulness, and generosity.

At the beginning of each month, we have a monthly practice of mindfulness, deep listening, and reflective sharing to improve our understanding of each other and to remind ourselves that compassion and relationships are our most precious wealth. It is the practice of deep listening, recognizing negative seeds and transforming them that helps us to live through and learn from crises and difficult situations.

The life of each co-worker is not separate from the life of the community, in the sense that we care for each other, and we perceive our success not only in terms of work results, but as a manifestation of both where we stand in our own personal life, as well as our connection with the collective spirit of the community.

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**EURASIA LEARNING INSTITUTE
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SOCIAL INNOVATION & GLOBAL CARE



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