

SOCIAL PERMACULTURE BEST PRACTICE MANUAL AND PROGRAMME GUIDE

Tools for using Social Permaculture Principles
and Activities for working with vulnerable adults



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1. INTRODUCTION TO THE SOCIAL PEAS PROJECT

The Social PEAS project (Social Permaculture: Empowering an Active Society) is an Erasmus+ project funded by the EU. The project is focused on creating permaculture training for professionals working with vulnerable adults, such as people suffering from mental health issues, people with physical and intellectual disabilities and (former) drug or alcohol users.



Project aims

The aims of the project were to:

1. Develop and promote a permaculture-based curriculum and educational programme that will help vulnerable communities and experts tackle the issues around physical and mental health.
2. Create opportunities for adult educators to continue their professional development through a training program using a train-the-trainers approach and the use of an online platform.
3. Provide certification for the participants at the completion of their training for their learnings in nature and social permaculture.
4. Increase awareness amongst adult educators on the interconnectedness of environmental and social issues and how their work can be a vehicle of transformation in both respects.
5. Develop key competencies amongst vulnerable adults around self-care, self-reliance, active social participation, community work, social skills, co-design, food autonomy and green entrepreneurship to have the ability to participate in modern society.

About the Project Partners

The project partners are established organisations that have relationships with the target groups as well as established networks with stakeholders.

Friends of the Earth (FoE) Cyprus, leader of the project, is an environmental non-profit, non-governmental organisation participating in capacity-building programmes for local communities, marginalised communities, adult and adult educators focusing on environmental issues, agroecological issues, active citizenship and participation, and European citizenship.

Friends of the Earth Malta (FoEM) is a non-governmental organisation active in the environmental field in Malta. FoEM has diverse educational methods to reach out to youths and adults especially focusing on marginalised groups, empowering them to work together for a more sustainable future.

Hekate Conscious Ageing Foundation (HCAF) is a community-based organisation working towards social, environmental and economic sustainability based in the Netherlands. The organisation builds its work on permaculture ethics: Earth Care, People Care, and Fair Share.

Promimpresa Società Benefit srl s.r.l. is a private enterprise providing training and services to individuals, public entities and companies based in Italy. Promimpresa integrates environmental, ethical, consumer, and human rights concerns into its business strategy and operations, disseminating good practices by integrating CSR into education, training, and research activities.

Institute of European Certification of Personnel (ICEP) based in Slovakia has a mission to certify the verifiable formal and non-formal competencies of professionals and individuals, through a set of standardised requirements, procedures and quality assurance measures, in accordance with International Standards.

INTRAS is a non-profit organisation in Spain working on research and intervention in the mental health field. Their main aim is to support people in the achievement of their own life projects and to improve the quality of life of people living with mental health challenges, despite that some symptoms may persist.

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Organisations that participated in the project piloting

Friends of the Earth Cyprus has collaborated with the **ITHAKI Daycare Institute for Elder People** with Dementia, located in Limassol, Cyprus.

Friends of the Earth Malta has collaborated with **Aġenzija Sapport**, the National Agency for support for persons with disabilities and their families, and **Sedqa**, Malta's national agency offering Prevention and Treatment services for drug and substance abuse.

INTRAS is a Spanish non-for-profit organisation, founded in 1994, dedicated to high-quality research and intervention in the mental health field. INTRAS has a pilot with their own users, adults with chronic and severe mental health problems.

Hekate Conscious Ageing Foundation targeted its pilot training to therapists, coaches, social workers, and community developers.



Purpose of this guide

The purpose of this Social PEAS – Social Permaculture Best Practice Manual and Programme Guide is to provide guidance, tools and methodologies for adult educators to:

1. Learn about social permaculture and its applications in social, care and therapy work.
2. Create accessible and inclusive spaces that support people of various needs, including people with disabilities, physical restrictions and mental health issues.
3. Co-create permaculture gardens and social permaculture as means of empowerment, acquisition of skills and building social networks and community development.
4. Learn about best practices from the aspect of taking care of the environment, utilising natural resources well, creating gardens that are good for wildlife and pollinators, growing healthy food without synthetic agrochemicals, soil

We hope this is a useful tool and resource for adult educators and care workers, to enrich their care and therapy work. To apply social permaculture, let nature be your guide.

2. SOCIAL PERMACULTURE AS A TOOL FOR WORKING WITH VULNERABLE ADULTS

Introduction

The term 'permaculture' is a contraction of the words 'permanent agriculture' for that is what it was: the design and implementation of permanent (sustainable) agricultural systems. Systems designed in this way are modelled on natural ecosystems and aim to have closed, circular energy and material cycles. For many years, permaculture was seen mostly as an agricultural or gardening approach, based on a framework provided by the Permaculture Ethics, the Flower of Permaculture and a set of permaculture design principles.

The permaculture ethics provide the foundation of permaculture projects, in that they should respect the following ethics:

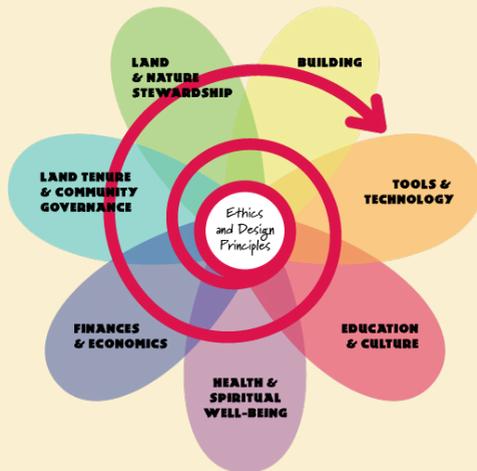


Figure 1: The Flower of Permaculture

www.permacultureprinciples.com



1. **Earth Care:** Maintaining and regenerating biodiversity and nature's capital
2. **People Care:** Providing and exercising sufficient care for self and community
3. **Fair Share:** Setting limits to consumption and reproduction, redistributing surplus

The flower of permaculture (see Figure 1) represents the different areas of human life and community structures that permaculture projects can include and touch upon. The red spiral represents the interconnectedness within the whole system.

However, the Ethics of Permaculture, the Flower of Permaculture and the Design Principles, which are described in detail in the training material developed for the Social PEAS project, incorporate not only the natural ecosystems and the agricultural practices, but many other aspects of human life, such as buildings, education, health, governance, and more. The social implications of permaculture, or in other words social permaculture, have become an important focus of the movement only recently and is the focus of this manual and the material developed under

The History of Permaculture

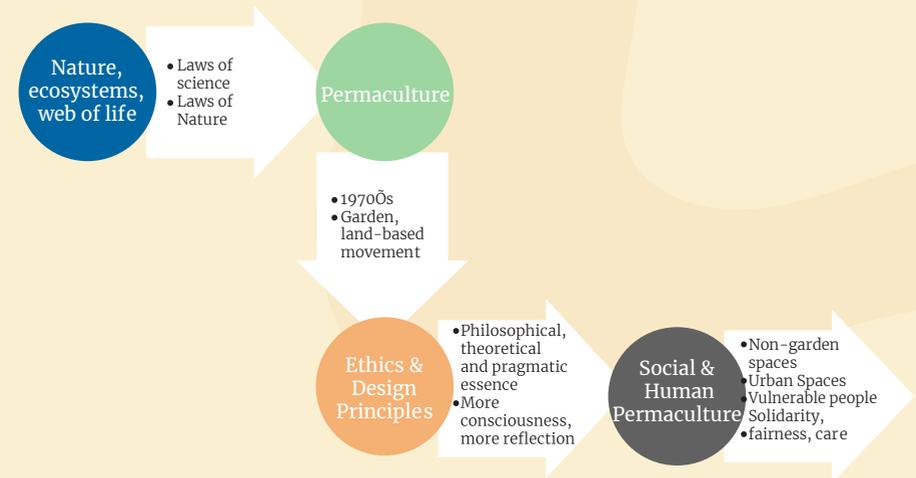
The methods and approaches used in permaculture are historically well known and applied in poor rural communities, for example food production and energy or water capturing methods that require low energy input. However, the term 'permaculture' and its systematic approach only came into being in the 1970s, when it was introduced by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren. These were the times when permaculture became a movement of mostly white, English-speaking people (e.g. in Australia, UK, US). But even Mollison and Holmgren credited traditional cultures for their knowledge that was fed into their systematic approach.



Since the last few years there is a growing debate within the permaculture movement itself to reflect on the question: to what extent 'permaculture' has been appropriated from indigenous and poor rural cultures. In fact, the permaculture movement is evolving, developing, and spreading. It is happening partly because the Ethics, the Design Principles, the focuses, the approaches, and the solutions of permaculture are offering theoretical answers and practical solutions to all sorts of social and economic problems of our current times.

At the beginning permaculture was focusing mostly on natural ecosystems and food production. By now it is getting more and more popular among experts and communities that are trying to solve other social, economic and human problems, such as the mental health crisis.

The Ethics of permaculture, the Design Principles, and the Flower of Permaculture are offering narratives and technical bases for designing methods and interventions used in both garden and non-garden setups.



Permaculture-theory-based solutions are now used in community design and also in therapy for example. The terms 'social permaculture' or 'people permaculture' are also gaining momentum and many permaculturists are working hard to create more and more suitable solutions for social, economic, and health-related problems.

By now, it is fair to say that permaculture is an approach to organising our societies and shaping our interactions with natural systems. It places care and connection at the heart of system design and management. Permaculture seeks to create sustainable and regenerative systems that prioritise the well-being of both people and the environment.

In essence, permaculture extends beyond traditional environmental concerns to encompass social and cultural dimensions, recognizing the interconnectedness of human societies with the natural world. It encourages a thoughtful and intentional approach to living that aligns with principles of sustainability, community, connection and care for the Earth.

2.1.2

Social context, social change, and its impact on mental health

Deep, structural changes are happening, the climate is changing very fast and social systems are changing too. Social systems, such as education, health care, and social care are not sufficient enough anymore to support human societies. In the past two decades, we have lived through a series of crises, such as the financial, the care, the climate, Covid-19, and the housing crisis, just to name a few. The old systems are dying, the new ones are in the making. That fact and the rapidly growing global population results in a growing number of people struggling with their lives and living in precarious circumstances.

Considering all these factors it is easy to understand that many people experience a growing amount of anxiety and worry. Mental health experts, healthcare professionals as well as politicians are now talking about the mental health crises as an important issue in today's societies, especially among younger generations. Addiction and substance use are also major problems affecting human's health. Not to mention that in Europe the population is ageing, elderly care needs are huge and unmet, dementia and dementia care are major burdens on both paid and unpaid carers, who are mostly women.

Thus, the question arises: *How can we, as individuals, communities and professionals, respond to such changes and their impacts on both vulnerable adults and mental health issues?* One possibility is to use social permaculture as a tool, as it offers pragmatic solutions in several areas of our lives, as shown in the petals of the Flower of Permaculture.





2.2.1

2. SOCIAL PERMACULTURE

What does social permaculture add to nature permaculture?

Social permaculture is evolving at a fast speed at the moment. One definition is this: “Social Permaculture is the praxis of permaculture methodology applied to social relationships. This method of social relating and community building draws inspiration from the intelligence and cycles of the natural environment. Social permaculture is a concept by which communities look to natural environments to model co-existence and co-creation”. In the next sections we delve deeper into the social permaculture approach and principles.

The social permaculture approach

Social permaculture is an approach that applies permaculture principles to social systems and human interactions. Permaculture, originally developed as a design system for sustainable agriculture, has evolved to encompass a broader perspective that includes not just ecological design but also social and economic systems. Social permaculture recognizes that sustainable and regenerative practices should extend beyond the physical environment to include the way humans organise and interact within communities.

Applications of social permaculture can range from individual mental health interventions to community organising, and from governance structures to communication strategies and conflict resolution. It seeks to create social systems that are not only sustainable but also nourishing, just, and adaptable to change.

Principles of social permaculture

Care is in the centre

Social permaculture aligns with the permaculture ethics of Earth Care, People Care, and Fair Share. This means that social designs should prioritise the well-being of people, respect for the environment, and equitable distribution of resources. Based on the Ethics of Permaculture care and fairness are the core and central values of the approach. Other than that, there is no additional ideological storyline, myth or prerequisite, therefore in its theory it is inclusive and discrimination-free.

Observation and Interaction

Similar to ecological permaculture, social permaculture emphasises the importance of observing and understanding the patterns and dynamics of

human relationships before designing interventions.

Cooperation and Collaboration

Encouraging cooperation and collaboration is fundamental to social permaculture. It seeks to build strong, resilient communities by fostering positive relationships and interdependence.

Cultural Diversity

Recognizing and celebrating cultural diversity is essential. Social permaculture seeks to honour and integrate various cultural perspectives, valuing the unique contributions of different individuals and groups.

Feedback Loops

Social permaculture considers feedback loops in human systems, promoting adaptive and responsive behaviour. This involves learning from experiences, adjusting strategies, and continuously improving social designs.

Resourceful Design

Just as in ecological permaculture where designers aim to create systems that require minimal external inputs, social permaculture encourages the development of social structures that are resource-efficient and self-sustaining.

Community Empowerment

Social permaculture aims to empower individuals and communities, fostering a sense of responsibility and agency. This empowerment

can lead to more resilient and self-sufficient communities.

Regenerative Practices

Beyond just sustainability, social permaculture aims for regenerative practices that contribute to the restoration and enhancement of social systems over time. This includes the overall mental health improvement of the individuals and the communities as well.



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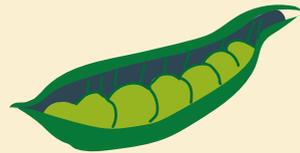
PERMACULTURE AS A TOOL IN CARE AND THERAPY FOR WORKING WITH VULNERABLE ADULTS

In the Social PEAS project we set out to develop training material and programs to apply social permaculture as a tool in care and therapy for working with vulnerable adults. In this project, we considered and worked with professionals caring for and working with a wide variety of vulnerable adults, from people with a physical disability, mental health issues, abuse victims, people with substance abuse issues, refugees, elderly people, people with dementia, people with distance to the labour market, and more.

As we can see, there are various vulnerable groups and individuals in society. One could argue that by placing care at the centre of organising societies and developing social structures in a conscious and educated manner, it becomes an inevitable consequence that solutions will be more suitable for all members of society. In this logical framework, all individuals are considered vulnerable, and it is the responsibility of the designer to create new structures and solutions that are inclusive and accessible enough for their target groups. Permaculture, and social permaculture in particular, can offer the design framework for that work.

How can social permaculture help to tackle the mental health crisis?

Social permaculture can contribute to addressing the mental health crisis in various ways by promoting supportive and regenerative social systems. Here are some ways in which social permaculture principles can be applied to improve mental well-being:



a. Community Connection and Support

Design for Connection

Foster community spaces and events that encourage positive social interactions, collaboration, and mutual support.

Community Gardens and Shared Spaces

Create communal spaces, such as community gardens, community care centers, community kitchens, etc. where people can come together, engage in shared activities, and build a sense of belonging.

b. Holistic Well-being

Integrate Mind-Body Practices

Design social structures that integrate mind-body practices

like meditation, yoga, or other wellness activities, promoting holistic well-being.

Cultivate a Culture of Health

Encourage a culture that values and supports mental, emotional, and physical health equally.

c. Inclusivity and Diversity

Celebrate Diversity

Foster an inclusive environment that celebrates diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, reducing stigma and promoting understanding.

Accessible Support Systems

Design support systems that are accessible to everyone, regardless of their background or abilities.

d. Empowerment and Agency

Community Empowerment

Build structures that empower individuals and communities to take an active role in decision-making, problem-solving, and shaping their environments.

Skills Development

Support skill-building initiatives that enhance people's capabilities and confidence, contributing to a sense of purpose and accomplishment.

e. Reducing Social Isolation

Create Gathering Spaces

Design public spaces that encourage social interaction and reduce feelings of isolation.

Community Engagement Programs

Develop programs that involve residents in community projects, fostering a sense of connection and shared responsibility.

f. Conflict Resolution and Communication

Effective Communication Strategies

Implement communication strategies that promote understanding, care, empathy, and constructive dialogue, reducing conflicts and misunderstandings.

Conflict Resolution Structures

Establish caring, fair and effective conflict resolution mechanisms within communities to address issues promptly and prevent prolonged stress.

g. Education and Awareness

Mental Health Education

Integrate mental health education into community programs to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and provide tools for self-care.

Accessible Resources

Ensure easy access to mental health resources, information, and professional support within the community.

h. Regenerative Practices

Promote Regenerative Living

Encourage lifestyles and housing infrastructure that support mental health, including sustainable practices that connect individuals to nature and promote a sense of purpose.

By applying these principles, social permaculture seeks to create environments, spaces, housing, services that support mental health and proper care at both the individual and community levels. It emphasises the interconnection between personal well-being and the health of the social and natural systems in which people live.

How can social permaculture help in psychotherapy?

Social permaculture can be integrated into psychotherapy to enhance the therapeutic process and support individuals in their journey towards mental and emotional well-being. Here are some ways in which social permaculture principles can complement psychotherapy:

a. Holistic Approach

Mind-Body Connection: Integrate practices that recognize the interconnectedness of mental and physical well-being, such as mindfulness, meditation, or movement exercises.

b. Community Connection

Therapeutic Community Building: Incorporate strategies for building a supportive therapeutic community within group therapy settings, emphasising connection, care and shared experiences.

c. Empowerment

Client Empowerment: Foster a therapeutic environment that empowers clients to actively engage in their healing process, encouraging self-reflection, goal

setting, and decision-making.

d. Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural Competency: Take into account the cultural and economic background and diversity of clients, integrating culturally sensitive approaches to therapy and recognizing the significance of cultural and economic contexts. Additionally, consider the social and economic impact of patriarchy on women and men, and respond to it in a fair and conscientious manner.

e. Connection to Nature

Ecotherapy Elements: Introduce elements of ecotherapy, such as outdoor sessions, nature therapy, or nature-based metaphors, recognizing the therapeutic benefits of connecting with the natural world.

f. Regenerative Practices

Resilience Building: Help clients develop regenerative practices that contribute to emotional resilience and long-term well-being, emphasising sustainable self-care routines.

g. Social Support Systems

Therapeutic Social Networks: Encourage clients to build and strengthen supportive social networks outside of therapy, fostering connections that contribute to their overall well-being.

h. Conflict Resolution and Communication

Communication Skills: Integrate communication and conflict resolution skills into therapy, helping clients navigate relationships and express their needs effectively.

i. Cultivating Positive Environments

Designing Positive Spaces: Explore ways to create positive and nurturing environments within therapy spaces,

considering factors such as lighting, colours, and arrangement of furniture to enhance comfort and relaxation.

j. Skills Development

Life Skills Training: Offer skills development sessions within therapy to equip clients with practical tools for managing stress, building resilience, and navigating life challenges.

k. Mindful Practices

Mindfulness Integration: Incorporate mindfulness practices into therapy sessions, helping clients develop present-moment awareness and coping strategies for managing emotions.

l. Community Healing Circles

Group Therapy Dynamics: Utilise group therapy settings to create healing circles that emphasise mutual support, empathy, and collective wisdom.

Action-Based Interventions: Organise community actions that contribute to the mental well-being of the participants.



2.4

LESSONS LEARNED FROM SOCIAL PEAS PILOTS

Based on our idea that social permaculture can be used as a tool in care and therapy for working with vulnerable adults, in the Social PEAS project we developed training material and pilot programmes to test this directly with professionals and educators working with vulnerable adults. The material was tested out in pilot projects in five different partner countries: in Malta, Cyprus, Spain, the Netherlands, and Italy. The training material was adapted to the local context and piloted in different formats, depending on the situation, setup and needs of the partner organisations.

Implementation of the Social PEAS pilots

The pilots took the following formats:

In Malta, Friends of the Earth Malta collaborated with two local organisations working with vulnerable adults: Aġenzija Sapport who work with adults with mental and/or physical disabilities, and Komunita Santa Marija, a centre managed by Sedqa, for adults recovering from drug and alcohol addiction. The aim was to offer training and support to their staff to set up a permaculture garden and/or permaculture activities in their day centres. The training material was delivered as a 12-part training course, with two lessons per module of 3 hours each,

with a theoretical part and a practical exercise, and time for time for discussion and reflection at the end of each lesson. Practical exercises included a variety of different activities, from learning about planting and taking care of seeds, how to set up a compost and how to design a permaculture garden, to learning about yoga and meditation. The training sessions took place at different locations, including in centres managed by the partner organisations, over the period of half a year, from autumn 2022 to spring 2023.



Figure 3: Pilot training sessions in Malta by Friends of the Earth

In Cyprus, Friends of the Earth Cyprus organised their pilot training for professionals and caretakers working with marginalised adults, with ITHAKI, a Daycare Institute for Elder People with Dementia, as well as participants from other entities working with vulnerable people, such as a special needs education centre. During the training participants learned about the principles of social permaculture, discussed ideas on what a permaculture garden would look like in their premises, and understood how to apply permaculture skills and practices to serve the needs of vulnerable adults. The training material was delivered as a 3-part training session, of 3 hours each on three consecutive Wednesdays.



Figure 4: Pilot training sessions in Cyprus by Friends of the Earth Cyprus

In Spain, INTRAS had created a permaculture garden in a previous project. The Social PEAS pilot training built on this experience. INTRAS is a foundation providing support and services for people with mental health problems. In this pilot training, its staff was trained on the social permaculture approach, they already had previous experience on Permaculture but through this pilot the staff expanded on their knowledge. INTRAS educators received one day training (3 hours in the morning and 2 in the afternoon), and some weeks later they started to test the social permaculture approach with their service users (people with severe mental health problems) by creating an edible garden during.

Service users started the garden at the beginning of the summer, in June. They received a first introductory session about the principles of permaculture, and in the following sessions they made a collaborative design of it. They met once a week (Friday mornings) and the sessions lasted 2 hours or 2 hours and half, and they were mostly practical, but all of them started with a little theoretical part on permaculture. The sessions in the orchard were interrupted during several weeks in the summer due to the high temperatures, but they re-started in September, and some users still keep working in the garden till today.



Figure 5: Pilot training sessions in Spain by INTRAS

In the Netherlands, the online pilot training by Hekate focused on mental health and conscious ageing based on social permaculture, and how the Social Permaculture Design Framework (SPDF) can be used in non-garden setups to support the mental health of vulnerable adults.



In Italy, Promimpresa piloted an online training session on Permaculture and Local Permaculture. During the one-day Social PEAS pilot session, participants engaged in a dynamic and comprehensive exploration of the

interconnectedness between sustainable social practices and psychological well-being. Attendees, including caregivers and professionals working with vulnerable adults, actively participated in training sessions from the Social PEAS modules developed within the partnership, brainstorming activities, and reflective exercises. The workshop facilitated the exchange of knowledge and experiences among diverse stakeholders.

Practical tools and exercises were introduced and piloted, aiming to deepen the understanding of the profound linkages between social permaculture principles and mental health outcomes. This collaborative and interdisciplinary approach fostered a rich environment for learning, dialogue, and the development of strategies to enhance the holistic well-being of vulnerable adults within social care settings.



2.4.2

Feedback from the Social PEAS pilots

As the Social PEAS training material was implemented in a variety of contexts, each with their own specificities in terms of climate and geography, partner organisation needs, and experience with permaculture, many lessons were learned throughout the process. These insights can aid other organisations and educators working with vulnerable adults to implement the training material and apply social permaculture principles and tools in their work. Feedback was gathered from participants of the pilot training through evaluation forms and/or focus group sessions, to discuss the implementation of the pilot and the use of the training material and activities, as well as lessons learned and recommendations for future use of the training material.

The lessons learned from the evaluation of the Social PEAS pilots can be used by other organisations, professionals and educators working with vulnerable adults, to learn about teaching social permaculture in garden and non-garden settings, to adapt this material to specific target groups and to create a permaculture garden together. The insights are discussed along four main themes, alongside direct quotes from participants, and the 'learning seeds' which are based on comments from the feedback session with participants from the pilot in Malta.

a. Learning about social permaculture

The Social PEAS Training Material taught participants about social permaculture such as observation, curiosity and patience. Learning and growing together also enabled participants to co-create, share experiences and knowledge, and better communicate together. It also enabled participants to build relationships and create trust. One participant summarises it very nicely: *“Social permaculture teaches us how to apply permaculture principles to human communities. It emphasises cooperation, communication, and building sustainable relationships within communities”* (participant, pilot Italy).

Participants also commented that they learned that permaculture can be more than an ecological gardening approach. One participant says: *“I had experience in permaculture gardening, but through this training I learnt that there are many ways to understand permaculture,... even without a garden!”* (participant, pilot Spain), whereas another commented that *“the social permaculture framework enabled us to see the connection between personal mental health and community health”* (participant, pilot NL/online).



Figure 6: Feedback on learning about

b. Learning about creating permaculture gardens

Applying the ethics and principles of permaculture in tangible situations really helps people to grasp the concepts. Some of the pilots included practical work to plan, design and work in a garden together with service users. Participants learned how to observe the area through a mapping exercise, and planning and designing a garden. They also considered the available resources, and how to make use of them, such as through composting, collecting water, and harvesting energy. Participants learnt how to create gardens that are good for wildlife and pollinators, and approaches for growing healthy food without synthetic agrochemicals while preserving the soil. They also considered the social elements and specific needs of the target group, thinking about adaptations for special needs, such as a planting table accessible for wheelchair users, which was constructed in one of the centres participating in the Malta pilot project.



Figure 7: Feedback on learning about creating

Through the module on plant growth, participants learned about the life cycle of seeds, how to plant and look after them. As one participant says: *“I learned how to plant different types of plants and how to grow them in a way that does not negatively affect the environment”* (participant, pilot Cyprus). However, their learnings went beyond basic gardening skills, by really understanding the nature of plants and the lessons from the natural world, such as learning from mistakes, creating no waste, and being open to other ideas. The link between plant life and mental health became very clear from the following quote by one of the trainers: *“If we see a plant wilting, we do not diagnose it with ‘wilting-plant syndrome’, but look at what needs to be changed in its environment: light, soil, nutrients, water. We should look at human health problems in the same holistic way”* (trainer, pilot Malta).

c. Relevance of social permaculture for work with vulnerable adults

Giving service users roles and delegating responsibilities to them was mentioned as a key positive aspect of using social permaculture in a care setting. It teaches service users about the value and rewards of taking responsibility, and prepares them for future involvement in employment or social enterprises. It enables service users to develop essential skills, such as self-resilience and patience. It is important to work with the interests of the service users and identify who can and wants to take different roles in the process.

The relevance of social permaculture work with vulnerable people is very obvious from the comments of participants of the pilots: *“The training program is relevant for our work with vulnerable adults because it provides practical skills and promotes physical activity, mental well-being, and a sense of purpose. Additionally, it fosters a supportive community environment,*

enhancing social connections for vulnerable adults” (participant, pilot Italy).

A teacher at a special education school said: *“I can help the pupils create and work in a greenhouse to benefit from everything that gardening has to offer”* (participant, pilot Cyprus). A comment by a health care worker further underlines this: *“Permaculture is relevant for improving mental health. Our service users feel very well after being in the garden”* (participant, pilot Spain).

There were also challenges when trying to implement social permaculture projects and concepts in the organisations’ contexts. Participants of the pilots expressed their difficulties with trying to change mindsets and respond to other people’s negativity and resistance, whether that is from people in the management of their organisation, or from service users themselves. They also shared their fears and uncertainties, such as being worried about wasting time and resources, not knowing when to plant or harvest, or how to find more information to keep on learning. It is therefore essential to have access to the training material online on <https://www.socialpeas.eu>, as developed for the Social PEAS project, and even create a community of practitioners - to support each other and aid further learning, such as on the ‘[Permaculture and Mental Health](#)’ online Facebook group created as part of the project.

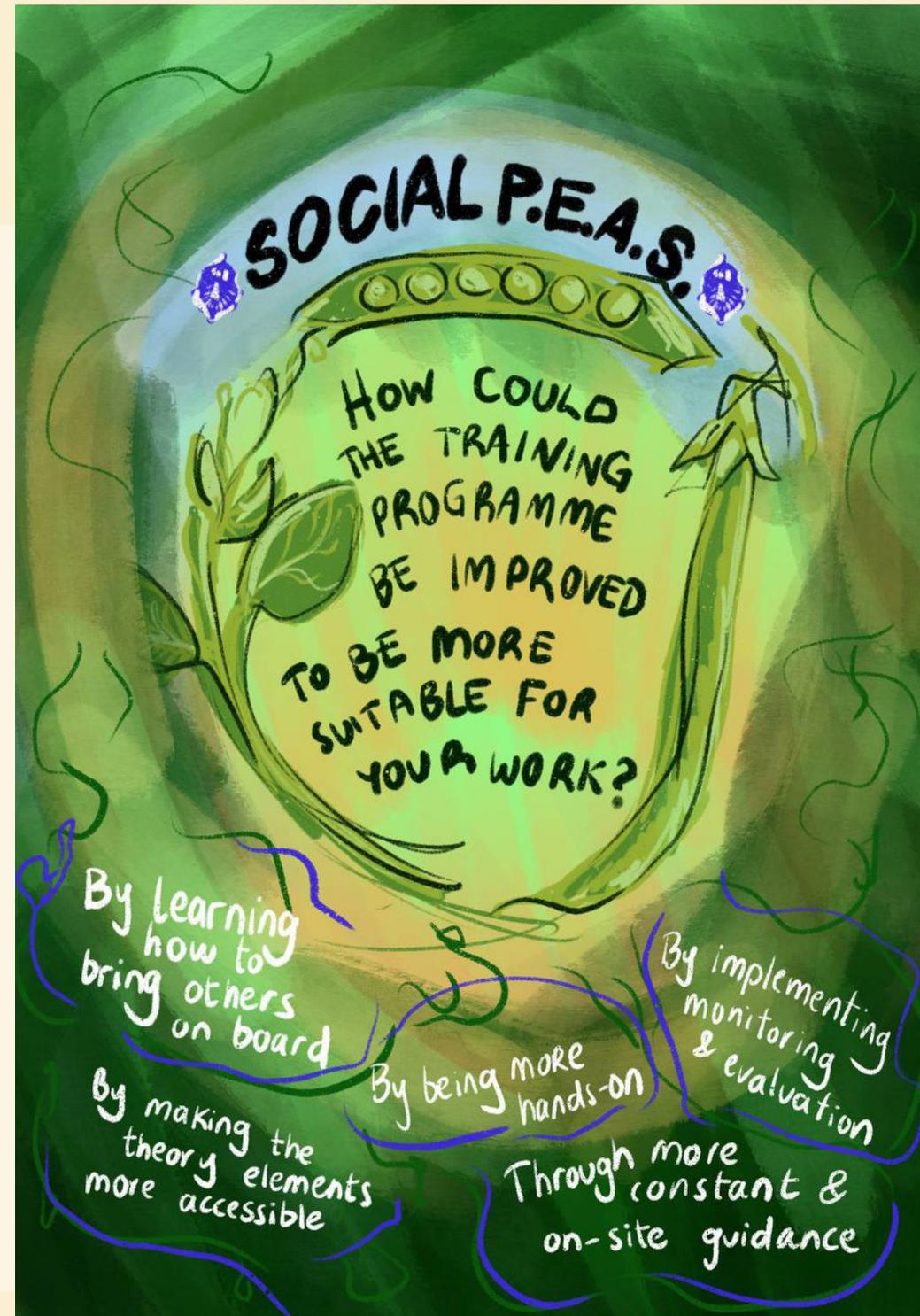


Figure 8: Feedback on learning about social permaculture in work with

d. Recommendations for future use of the Social PEAS training material

A key point of feedback from the participants of the pilots was the importance of learning ‘hands on’, not to focus too much on the theory. *“In my opinion the training material was relevant because we could apply it to gardening, but I am not sure how to do it with users in a different way...they need a practical application of the training material”* (participant, pilot Spain). In fact, participants who took part in the online training sessions delivered by the partner from the Netherlands, highlighted that they would have preferred a ‘real life’ training and would have benefitted from *“making something in a neighbourhood with people and work together with permaculture and then try to integrate some personal development themes, so that you can really feel the ground”* (participant, pilot NL/online). Another participant also echoes this sentiment and says: *“I would suggest including more practical activities, less theory”* (participant, pilot Spain). Suggestions for further enhancement of the training material were also provided, such as *“by including elements of art therapy or sensory gardening”* (participant, pilot Italy).

Participants also commented they would like to learn how to bring others on board, and how to implement monitoring and evaluation in their projects, which could make the benefits of permaculture projects more tangible for their colleagues and upper management in their organisations. A participant also mentioned that to promote the idea of permaculture projects to others, *“you should focus on the therapeutic benefits they provide, such as stress reduction and improved motor skills”* (participant, pilot Italy).



3. PROGRAMME GUIDE

In this section of the guide, care workers, educators and professionals are guided through the Social PEAS learning material, which is covered by 6 Modules. Each Module is briefly described in terms of content and its learning objectives, and there are links to the reading material, accompanying example lesson plans and proposed activities.

Module 1 - Introduction to permaculture and social permaculture

Module 1 covers the history of permaculture, definitions of permaculture, its ethics and principles, the relationships between permaculture and mental health, and examples of garden and non-garden permaculture practices.

The learning objectives are:

- To learn what permaculture and social permaculture concepts are and how they can be applied
- To learn about the permaculture ethics and principles
- To practise thinking about permaculture design

Resources to:

[Reading material-Module 1](#)

Lesson plans:

- [Lesson Plan 1.1](#)
- [Lesson Plan 1.2](#)

Lessons:

- [Lesson 1.1 Introduction to Social Permaculture](#)
- [Lesson 1.2 Permaculture, Ethics, Principles and Design](#)

Activities:

- Activity 1.1 - Ice breaker and getting to know each other
- Activity 1.2 - Visit to a garden
- [Activity 1.3 - Dream and design a permaculture project](#)
- [Activity 1.3 - Worksheet](#)

Module 2 - Natural ecosystems and communities

Module 2 teaches about natural ecosystems and the interactions between species and their environment, as well as about the role of the community in permaculture and integral ecology.

The learning objectives are:

- To learn about natural ecosystems
- To understand more about balance in nature and the interaction between humans and the environment
- To learn about human communities and integral ecology
- To understand the role of the community in permaculture and how they follow natural patterns

Resources to:

[Reading material-Module 2](#)

Lesson plans:

- [Lesson Plan 2.1](#)
- [Lesson Plan 2.2](#)

Activities:

- [Activity 2.1-Start designing your own permaculture space](#)
- [Activity 2.1-Worksheet](#)
- [Activity 2.2-Count to collaborate](#)
- [Activity 2.3-Present permaculture project idea](#)
- [Activity 2.3-Worksheet](#)

3.3

Module 3 - Life cycles

Module 3 introduces life cycles in the natural world, starting with the life cycles of plants, and then looks at life cycles in the human world, including the life cycle of individuals, as well as their place in social groups and communities.

The learning objectives are:

- To learn about life cycles in the natural world
- To understand the life cycle of a plant, from seed, to seedling, to flowering plant
- To learn about life cycles in our personal lives
- To understand the life cycle of an individual, and how individuals engage and participate in social groups and communities

Resources to:

[Reading material - Module 3](#)

Lesson plans:

- [Lesson Plan 3.1](#)
- [Lesson Plan 3.2](#)

Lessons:

- [Lesson 3.1-Lifecycle of the Plant](#)
- [Lesson 3.2-Lifecycle of an Individual and a Community](#)

Activities:

- [Activity 3.1-Let's start planting](#)
- [Activity 3.2-Developing permaculture project ideas](#)
- [Activity 3.3-Mapping our personal ecosystem](#)

3.4

Module 4 - Requirements for growth

Module 4 deals with the requirements for growth, for health and resilience, both for plant life and for individuals and communities.

The learning objectives are:

- To learn about the requirements for plant life
- To learn about the requirements for a healthy life for individuals
- To understand the required conditions for individual growth and community life, considering environmental and social aspects

Resources to:

[Reading material - Module 4](#)

Lesson plans:

- [Lesson Plan 4.1](#)
- [Lesson Plan 4.2](#)

Lessons:

- [Lesson 4.1-Requirements for Plant Life](#)
- [Lesson 4.2-How Individuals and Communities Thrive](#)

Activities:

- [Activity 4.1 Learning about composting](#)
- Activity 4.2 Healthy lifestyle in practice: yoga and meditation session

Module 5 - Permaculture design

Module 5 delves deeper into permaculture design, both in situations with and without land, and what are the requirements for permaculture projects.

The learning objectives are:

- To learn about requirements for permaculture design with and without land
- To understand the required conditions when designing a permaculture space, steps to follow and considerations
- To learn about the process of observing a new green space and designing a permaculture space with a map
- To get ideas and insights about possible community activities in permaculture spaces

Resources to:

[Reading material - Module 5](#)

Lesson plans:

- [Lesson Plan 5.1](#)
- [Lesson Plan 5.2](#)

Lessons:

- [Lesson 5.1-Permaculture Design with Land](#)
- [Lesson 5.2-Permaculture Design without Land](#)
-

Activities:

- [Activity 5.1 Permaculture design in practice](#)
- [Activity 5.1-Worksheet](#)
- Activity 5.2 Sharing progress on permaculture projects

3.5

3.6

Module 6 - Harvesting, sharing and learning

Module 6 wraps up the training programme with lessons about harvesting resources, crops and outcomes from permaculture projects, and gives space to reflect on the course and its learning outcomes.

The learning objectives are:

- To learn about requirements for harvesting from our permaculture gardens with respect to nature
- To understand the required conditions to make the production sustainable and composting practices.
- To learn about water collection systems and how they can be applied in the participants' places of work
- To reflect on the course outcomes and give feedback for improvement

Resources to:

[Reading material - Module 6](#)

Lesson plans:

- [Lesson Plan 6.1](#)
- [Lesson Plan 6.2](#)

Lessons:

- [Lesson 6.1 - Harvest with respect to Nature](#)
- [Lesson 6.2 - Harvest in Social Context](#)

Activities:

- [Activity 6.1 - Water collection and sustainable use of water](#)
- [Activity 6.2 - Harvesting results of the course](#)

4. LOOKING FORWARD



Through the Social PEAS project, our organisations managed to develop, test and implement permaculture training for professionals working with vulnerable adults. With this Best Practice Manual and Programme Guide we hope to have provided you with guidance, tools and methodologies to use social permaculture concepts and its applications in social, care and therapy work.

Along this learning experience, we have found out that permaculture means much more than creating a garden; it is a mindset and a vision for a more holistic way of living, in all areas of life - from land and nature to community organising and financial systems, from buildings, tools and technologies, to education and spirituality. When we look back to the permaculture ethics - Earth Care, People Care, Fair Share - we see the applicability of these values to wider social and community work. This is what this training on Social Permaculture aimed to share: how we can use the thinking, tools and methodologies from permaculture practice in work with vulnerable adults. This teaching material was built on the work of existing projects and initiatives, to enable people working with vulnerable adults, as well as vulnerable adults themselves to increase their knowledge and competencies to be able to use tools from social permaculture and nature therapy for improvement of well-being and social resilience.

We encourage you to use this material in your work and share the resources with other professionals, educators and learners interested in this field. Further information about the project, and access to the online learning material and the certification exam are available on www.socialpeas.eu

COLOPHON



www.socialpeas.eu

Social Permaculture: Best Practice Manual and Programme Guide
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