



# Theorising Education in Intentional Communities

## (An Integrated Social Movement Learning and Education Framework)

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A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'V. Raywar', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Date:

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## ABSTRACT

Conventionally, educational theory examines formal institutions or informal learning, leaving an underexplored educational space: intentional communities, which are residential groups organised around shared values and purpose. This research addresses this gap through a qualitative case study of the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland, which explicitly positions itself as an educational community demonstrating alternative ways of living.

The study develops an Integrated Social Movement Learning and Education (I-SMLE) framework, synthesising field theory (Bourdieu), social movement learning theory and theory of education to capture how intentional communities function simultaneously as distinctive social fields with specific rules and capital requirements, social movements demonstrating prefigurative alternatives and educational spaces embedding learning in daily life. Through a thematic analysis of founders' memoirs and publications (1960-1980s) and semi-structured interviews, this research examines how founders' visions became institutionalised and how contemporary members experience the educational dimensions of community life, to derive insights for education theory.

Key findings reveal that education operates through distributed educator authority, experiential and collective epistemologies and dissolution of boundaries between learning and living. The research generates three primary contributions: the I-SMLE framework as a transferable analytical tool for studying education in alternative contexts, the Nested Contexts model visualising how members engage across multiple scales from individual spiritual practice to collective movement participation and theoretical insights proposing that intentional communities may, among other aspects, sustain themselves by transmitting the capacity for ongoing field reconstruction rather than rigid preservation.

Critically, while Findhorn demonstrates pedagogical innovations and integrates ecological and community living capacities, it can also be a space of implicit exclusion through economic, cultural, and temporal capital requirements. This research advances understanding of how educational processes operate beyond formal institutions while revealing inherent tensions between egalitarian ideals and inevitable power dynamics in alternative educational spaces.

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*To embody a vision and give it meaningful substance is an invaluable service in the world today. This is the service being provided by the Findhorn community in northern Scotland.*

*It is a centre where the vision of the future into which man is rapidly advancing is very real, where the vision is held of what man is unfolding into and of what he must do to make that unfoldment a balanced and creative one.*

*It is a centre highly attuned to the principles underlying the transformation of the world into a new age of consciousness and expression. Although many centres have this vision of a new age and of the change in man's consciousness now being revealed, the primary role of Findhorn is to prove the reality of this vision.*

*It is a centre where principles are lived and shown to be workable and practical through daily demonstration in the lives and affairs of the people of the community.*

*David Spangler (Vision of Findhorn Anthology, 1976, p.4)*

## Prologue

Education and its importance play a large part in my life. As a lifelong learner, as evidenced by my attempt to start a doctorate at 40, I have always been fascinated by the potential and possibilities of education as a mode of self-growth. As an industry training and development professional, I have seen the benefits and confidence that education in all its forms can provide. While formal education is integral to my life, my interests and curiosity lie in the pathways outside formal institutions, driven by individuals and their goals and aspirations. Having spent considerable time with organisations and institutions planning developmental goals for their teams and designing organisational culture, this has helped me reflect on the process of making learning a socially collaborative experience, grounded in human relationships and the challenges of connection, trust, and teamwork. I then transitioned from the industry to a formal university setting, working for an institute that aspires to develop specific emotional and social skills inspired by the teachings, writings, and philosophy of Sri Aurobindo.

As part of the university, I also spent considerable time as a visitor and observer in Auroville<sup>1</sup>. This 50-year-old experimental community actively strives to live the ideals of its founders, Sri Aurobindo<sup>2</sup> and Mirra Alfassa<sup>3</sup>, while also adapting to the current times and their challenges. My experiences with Auroville led me to reflect on the educational aims and processes within an Intentional Community, which I imagined as a special place, bounded by its own rules, behaviour, vocabulary, and

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<sup>1</sup> For more information and details please see- <https://auroville.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) was an Indian philosopher, yogi, and nationalist who developed Integral Yoga—a spiritual practice aimed at transforming human consciousness and achieving what he called the "supramental" evolution of humanity. Initially active in India's independence movement, he withdrew to Pondicherry in 1910 to focus entirely on spiritual work, producing major philosophical texts like *The Life Divine* and *Savitri*.

<sup>3</sup> Mirra Alfassa (1878-1973), known as "The Mother," was a French spiritual collaborator who joined Aurobindo in 1914 and became his closest associate. After his death, she led their community, founding Auroville in 1968—an experimental township in Tamil Nadu dedicated to human unity and spiritual evolution. Together they established the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and developed a vision of spirituality integrated with material life rather than renunciation.

purpose. It made me think about how the founders' teachings are disseminated over time and whether a community can follow the founders' ideology, almost like a curriculum, and use it as a basis for communal living, community policies, and connections with the rest of the world. I felt like living in an intentional community made every day feel like a school day. My stay at Auroville was filled with conferences, workshops, mealtime discussions on spirituality and leadership, and everyone within the community was eager to discuss their passion projects and how they lived their beliefs. At no point does this curiosity mean that everything was perfect or positive or that they were living those ideals that they attempted or described, but the constant collective energy focused on trying to match the founder's texts and philosophy with architecture, commerce and the actions and narratives of members, felt like I was trying to decode a living curriculum of a social movement.

I then moved to Glasgow, where I pursued a master's degree in Adult Education, Community Development, and Youthwork, which deepened my interest in communities as phenomena and spaces of potential and possibility. Within the field of community development, I was theoretically and practically exposed to community development, social movements and educational efforts that foster critical agency. With this theoretical backing, I wanted to re-examine Auroville and analyse the community from an educational perspective. The travel uncertainties of COVID and a critical reflection on whether familiarity would be a challenge led to exploring communities within Scotland. Serendipitously, I discovered the Findhorn Foundation, which was accessible, had a rich, well-documented history, and self-identified as both a social experiment and a movement.

Thus, the research was an exploration borne of curiosity and a keen interest in the potential of what happens when people think, design, and live in spaces that seem counter-cultural or on the margins and how such spaces are sustained over time in some anchor beliefs, and what role does education have in both people's lived experience and design of the space itself. In a world where information is readily available and access to ideas, theories, and opinions is digitally ever-pervasive, the

importance of physical communities as learning spaces seems almost contrary. Is there still potential and hope in examining the other side of slow connections and learning in the everyday lives and interactions within a community, where experiments and ideas can flourish in practices, conversations, and the community's purpose?

# 1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the dissertation by providing a brief overview of the research focus, the case study, the research aims, and the methodological approach. I start by discussing the role of education in society beyond formal institutions and in social environments, and identify gaps in understanding how communities could function as educational spaces. I then introduce intentional communities as sites for investigating educational dynamics and present the Findhorn Foundation as the specific case study. After outlining the three core research objectives and the Integrated Social Movement Learning and Education (I-SMLE) framework that guides the analysis, I preview the methodological approach and the study's significance for educational theory and practice. The chapter concludes with an overview of the dissertation structure.

## 1.1 Societies and Education

Education is considered a cornerstone of human development, as evidenced by the resources, institutional structures and policies dedicated to its delivery (Kenyon & Rodriguez Santos, 2024). Education is also considered a vital tool and is expected to improve people's lives (Swennen, 2024). Societies today grapple with complex challenges such as the climate crisis, social fragmentation, and political disorientation (Alejandro, 2024), prompting a demand for education to cultivate ecological consciousness and sustainable behaviour. Educational responses are distributed through interventions focusing on climate literacy and global citizenship education, among others. This important work significantly contributes to understanding specific aspects of the problem. Social fragmentation requires efforts to build communities that educate for empathy, belonging, and mutual responsibility (Snower & Bosworth, 2021). Democratic participation may be strengthened by developing capabilities in dialogue and collaboration. However, these interventions largely focus on education within formal and informal

institutional contexts and seek ways to improve the existing system. Building on these insights, we might also benefit from theoretical frameworks that examine how social environments educate and how they might be intentionally designed as collective projects of learning.

Conventional institutional education has faced sustained critique for its limitations in addressing these challenges (Goodman, 1964; Illich, 1971). Scholars often criticise mainstream formal education for operating within frameworks of “massification, marketisation, restitution and geopolitics” (McFarlane, 2024) or for being contradictory, as it promotes competition, consumption, and individual achievement, which Giroux terms “bare pedagogy” (2010, p. 185) rather than collective responsibility or ‘community spirit’ (Goodman, 1964, p.25). Thus, global challenges require more than new knowledge; they need new ways of living collectively, and understanding how entire social systems function educatively becomes crucial.

The broader view of societal role in education requires expanding the scope. As Sidorkin comments, “educational theory should understand how education is distributed throughout the society, and how it can be distributed better” (2011, p.527). While educational discourse largely focuses on formal education and institutional efforts, which is only one aspect of education, the need for the “discipline is to use as a unique lens to view the entire social world” (ibid., p.521). Here, education encompasses both intentional teaching and the shaping of dispositions, values and capabilities through social environments, whether formal or informal. Although we believe we are educated in schools, universities and other such spaces, we also develop and are shaped by our worldviews, identities, and values through interactions with families, communities, workplaces, and the media. Yet, educational theory in informal and non-formal learning remains relatively underdeveloped (Johnson & Majewska, 2022). Even when scholars examine learning beyond institutional settings, the frameworks they employ often privilege individualistic perspectives. Lifelong learning discourse, for instance, typically emphasises personal agency, self-directed development, and the acquisition of



individual skills across the lifespan (Biesta, 2006). These approaches position the learners as agents of their own growth and development. While useful, this selective view may obscure how communities and societies function as educational environments that shape members through the socialisation of norms, cultural transmission, shared practices, and collective meaning-making. Thus, when education theory centres on individuals, it may often overlook the less visible educational forces embedded in communal life and collective contexts.

Historical precedents for this expanded view exist but remain underutilised. Among others, Fred Clarke's prescient concept of "educative societies," meaning a "society which accepts its overarching purpose as the production of a given type of citizen" (1948, p. 13), attempts to position the influence of social structures outside of formal education on the formation of individuals. His conception of the state was not 'a competitor among educating institutions', but 'the means of sustaining, stimulating, and co-ordinating the real institutions that educate' (Clarke, 1923, p. 40). Dewey (2016) also recognised that communities educated through shared and participatory experiences, though his work centred on democratic schooling rather than intentionally designed environments.

Clarke's concept of educative societies focused on the national-scale project of post-war Britain and examines the distinction between community and state and their roles in education. While Clarke's vision of an educative society remains obscure, applying his logic at a smaller scale may perhaps reveal educational dynamics, prompting the use of an '*educative community*' specifically understood in this dissertation as the localised, relational manifestation of society's broader educative function.

Thus, can small-scale, bounded intentional communities function as integrated educational micro-systems? The analytical advantage of examining such communities lies in the possibility of making their educational processes more visible through their explicit purposes, designed environments, and coherent membership, which are unavailable or diffuse in larger contexts. This theoretical gap

and analytical opportunity motivate the central inquiry of this research, which begins by asking whether an 'educative community' is possible and valuable, and whether pursuing this ambition could offer insights for broader educational theory. Such an investigation could involve observing how education occurs (or might occur) in various social contexts, allowing its educative features to emerge from practice rather than predetermined frameworks.

### 1.1.1 Intentional Communities as an Alternative Social Arrangement

Intentional communities (IC) represent one such alternative. Defined as "a group of people who live together or share common facilities and who regularly associate with each other based on explicit common values" (Foundation for Intentional Community(FIC), n.d.), these communities differ from mainstream society in several key aspects. Drawing on the FIC definition and further elaborated in Chapter 2, intentional communities can be understood as social arrangements featuring (1) an explicitly stated purpose (intention) (2) deliberately designed social environment structured to embody particular values, (3) selective membership processes that attract and retain individuals attracted to the goals of the community and actively work towards their vision both internally (through community practices) and externally. As Rubin et al. observe, they "seek to make a claim about how society should be through creating their own living example" (2019, p. 11).

This explicit intentionality distinguishes them from both conventional institutions and organic communities. Unlike mainstream society, where educational influences are diffused and often implicit, emerging from layers of interactions among institutions, media, markets, and others, ICs operate at a smaller scale, with more direct connections between their stated intentions and practices. Also, unlike formal schools, which serve diverse populations with varied goals within policy and political constraints, intentional communities can align membership, purpose, environment and practices more deliberately. If we understand an intentional community as a social structure with explicit goals achieved through shaping member development, then the community's success depends partly on how effectively it designs the

norms, rules, rituals, daily practices and material arrangements to support its goals. The interplay among members, purpose, and processes becomes visible and, crucially, subject to ongoing reflection and revision. This bounded, intentional quality makes such communities tractable sites for examining how social environments function educationally, offering what Clarke envisioned as 'educative society' at a scale that permits detailed observation and analysis.

### 1.1.2 Intentional Communities as Sites of Demonstration

Building on the positioning of intentional communities as a social arrangement, this section examines how they represent conscious attempts to create comprehensive educational environments. Intentional Communities have existed throughout human history, from monastic orders and utopian experiments to even dystopian nightmares. These communities often emerge as responses to perceived societal problems, offering alternative models of living and social organisation (Metcalf, 2005; Kanter, 1972). While diverse in shape, form, and structure, they share a common characteristic of intentionally designing their social arrangements to embody particular aspirations and visions.

Scholarship on Intentional communities presents them as sites of social movement learning, political and ecological innovation, or even sociological experiments (elaborated in Chapter 2). The educational dimension of intentional communities, while fundamental to their change-oriented existence, is rarely framed explicitly as such in the academic literature. More specifically, a holistic examination of these communities as integrated educational systems, including their social structures, the pedagogical roles of various actors, and how education interweaves with daily life, remains underexplored. This theoretical gap in studying intentional communities is significant because understanding how intentional communities function educationally requires an analytical framework capable of revealing both the complexity and coherence of these environments as educational ecosystems.

Theory's role in this study is thus of an explanatory framework that organises concepts and their relationships to guide understanding of educational phenomena

(Ravitch & Riggan, 2017; Anfara & Mertz, 2015; Maxwell, 2013). Applied to theorising education within intentional communities, such a framework would specify the relationships among key constructs, namely the educational purpose, the roles of the actors involved, the values guiding practice, and the designed environment in which learning occurs (Moore, 2012). I elaborate on these components in Chapter 3. Educational scholarship in ICs spans multiple domains (ecological, political, anthropological, and educational). However, existing scholarship in education (Pisters et al., 2023; Rubin, 2019, among others) tends to examine specific educational practices within intentional communities rather than theorising the community itself as a holistic educative environment.

Understanding this gap requires recognising an important distinction. While existing research applies various educational (and other) theories to intentional communities, what remains underdeveloped is a theory of education that accounts for how communities themselves function as an educative system. Educational theories can be broadly categorised based on their primary focus. Some theories examine learning processes, others pedagogical approaches, and still others institutional structures or curricular content. While studies of intentional communities draw on these various aspects of education, for instance, frameworks that examine individual or group learning processes (Malusa, 2019), specific curricular contributions like eco-pedagogy (Wahl, 2018), and other diverse educational theories, they tend to illuminate particular dimensions rather than the holistic integration of education and community life. For example, Papenfuss, Merritt et al. (2019) used Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory, which positioned Findhorn Foundation's learning environments as contexts fostering critical reflection and perspective transformation, in which storytelling, ritual pedagogy, and collaborative approaches led to shifts in participants' worldviews.

Similarly, Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy offers insights into how community members might develop critical consciousness and challenge dominant social structures. Roysen and Cruz's (2020) study of a university-ecovillage partnership in Brazil, which aimed to promote sustainability through horizontal knowledge sharing,

is an example. By creating an opportunity for consciousness-raising and dialogue between university students and eco-village members, focused on what the students learnt, it did not fully capture the holistic lifestyle integration of members or the founders' intentionality that characterises living in intentional communities. Also, Mychajluk's (2023) study of four North American ecovillages demonstrates that learning in these communities involves everyday experience across multiple domains, suggesting educational processes that transcend single theoretical frameworks. Mychajluk shows how learning is dynamic, inseparable from the place and context, and is both individual and social, supported by others within the community. This multi-dimensional understanding comes closest to recognising intentional communities as holistic educational environments. Nevertheless, even this account does not provide an overarching theoretical framework that specifies the relationships among educational purpose, actor roles, environmental design or values, the theoretical scaffolding needed for a theory of education. Thus, I propose that intentional communities are more than just contexts for transformation. They consciously curate the environment in which founders and members serve as educators in a purpose-built setting designed around a shared understanding of what it means to participate in and live in the community. Rather than education emerging as a byproduct of social interaction, these communities deliberately integrate intentionality and purpose into everyday interactions and social structures, embodying perhaps a version of Clarke's vision of educative societies/communities at a scale amenable to study.

### 1.1.3 The Findhorn Foundation: Intentional Community & an Educative Community?

I hope to show that the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland exemplifies an intentional community as an '*educative community*' in action. As an intentional community (Forster & Wilhelmus, 2005) that explicitly positions itself as educational, through its vision statement and narratives, Findhorn offers a unique opportunity to think of an '*educative community*' in practice.

Findhorn Foundation was established in the 1960s, when Peter and Eileen Caddy, along with their friend Dorothy Maclean, settled in a caravan park near the village of Findhorn in Northeastern Scotland (as detailed in Chapter 5A). What began as a personal spiritual journey guided by Eileen's *inner listening*<sup>4</sup> practice, Dorothy's communication with nature and its entities<sup>5</sup> and Peter's execution gradually evolved into a globally recognised Intentional Community at the helm of conversations about ecology, spirituality, and Communal living. Their website describes Findhorn Foundation as a “community of wildly different souls who are trying to live the vision of creating a better world by starting with ourselves” (Findhorn Foundation n.d).

Organisationally, it has evolved, and the governance and the holding structure have changed over time. From the 1970s until 1993, it was a centrally run community. It has since expanded beyond the geographically defined area of the Findhorn Park ecovillage, encompassing businesses, individuals, and Nonprofits that subscribe to the Findhorn Foundation Community. The New Findhorn Association (NFA) functions as the central hub for the members and visitors (Home–NFA, n.d.). Interestingly, the founders have often shared in their autobiographies and interviews that they never started with the intention of forming a community (Findhorn Foundation, n.d.) but, over time, it evolved into one, attracting diverse individuals to its shared purpose of “actively living and sharing our spiritual practices every day” (Findhorn Foundation, n.d).

Founded explicitly as a “centre of light” (Caddy, 1991) for demonstrating alternative ways of living, Findhorn has consciously designed various aspects of its social organisation like physical environment, governance structures, work arrangements and community culture through shared rituals, vocabulary and narrative frames to

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<sup>4</sup> a core meditative practice at Findhorn Foundation, where individuals quiet their minds to receive spiritual guidance from what they understand as their “inner divine source” or “higher self.” Practised both individually and in groups before meetings or work activities, it involves sitting in silence, centring oneself, and listening for intuitive insights, feelings, or inner promptings about decisions or actions.

<sup>5</sup> Dorothy Maclean claimed to be able to communicate with the essence of nature spirits, which she called ‘devas’

function as an “educational spiritual ecovillage” (Findhorn Foundation, 2025), further elaborated in Chapter 5B. Unlike some intentional communities where education emerges as a byproduct of community living, Findhorn has positioned itself explicitly as an educational community. The community’s development was shaped by three core principles derived from the founder’s practices: *Inner listening* (an inward focus on spiritual guidance), Co-Creation with Nature (a partnership with the natural world), and Work as Love in Action (the spiritualisation of everyday tasks). While these principles were initially framed within Eileen and Peter’s Christianity-influenced spiritual guidance, they have now broadened to accommodate diverse spiritual perspectives, which I discuss further in Chapter 6.

The Findhorn Foundation is now a registered Scottish Charity (Findhorn Foundation, 2025) and is associated with the United Nations Centre for Habitat Best Practice.<sup>6</sup> It attracts thousands of visitors annually and maintains a core community of several hundred core residents. A multifaceted eco-village and educational centre, it offers formal educational offerings, including an Experience Week<sup>7</sup> and various workshops on ecology, community life, and spirituality-based lifestyles<sup>8</sup>. However, this research will explore education at the Findhorn Foundation that extends beyond outreach workshops and programs, focusing on the fabric of community life as an educational experience and how the community functions to make that experience possible for its members. This distinction between providing education and being educative positions the community not just as a provider of education but as an educative community itself.

This study thus aims to examine how education operates within the Findhorn Foundation as a community, specifically, and how education is integrated into everyday interactions and social structures rather than confined to formal programs. The community’s longevity, extensive documentation and continued evolution

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<sup>6</sup> <https://celebratingoneincrediblefamily.org/united-nations-and-findhorn-foundation-partnership>

<sup>7</sup> Experience Week is the first educational program of Findhorn since 1974 and is an introduction to the community and its ideas and ambitions.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.visitecovillagefindhorn.uk/calendar> for current workshops

provide an opportunity to examine how such an educative community, where social organisation itself performs educational work, was formed, maintained and how it achieves its vision over time. Findhorn also presents a particularly compelling case for understanding the fundamental tensions in education. It faces the ongoing challenge of integrating diverse knowledge systems, from scientific ecological practices to varied spiritual traditions, while maintaining its core educational approach. On the one hand, the community must navigate between individual development and collective goals, while also balancing the preservation of founding principles with adaptation to contemporary needs. The community also functions as a space of prefigurative politics (Fians, 2022), meaning that community members aim to embody the social changes they seek to promote, making it an ideal laboratory for understanding how educational environments can serve as catalysts for broader social transformation. By examining these tensions, this study aims to perhaps understand how the Findhorn Foundation functions as an 'educative community'.

Understanding the educational dimensions of the Findhorn Foundation requires examining the two dimensions embedded in its identity as an intentional community. First, the qualifier 'intentional' marks the community's placement within a sociological tradition of collective experiments in alternative living (Kanter, 1972; Sargisson, 2000). Scholar's position is that intentional communities are not merely residential arrangements but are nodes within broader social movements (Sargisson, 2004; Bohill, 2010; Lockyer & Veteto, 2013; Firth, 2019) (further elaborated in Chapter 2). However, using Jasper's (2020) definition of social movements as "sustained and intentional efforts to foster or retard social changes, primarily outside the normal institutional channels" (p. 627), social movement theory conceptualises these collectives as engaged in action oriented toward demonstrating social alternatives, characterized by explicit framing of change, mobilisation of committed actors, and prefigurative politics wherein desired futures are enacted in present practice (Melucci, 1996; Polletta, 2002). At Findhorn, examining the movement dimension illuminates the community's educational



purpose or WHAT transformative outcomes it seeks and how it frames these as demonstrations of alternative social possibility.

Second, the term 'community' points to the establishment of enduring social structures and institutional arrangements. Drawing on Bourdieu's field theory, a social field can be understood as a structured space governed by its own logic, rules, valued knowledge and authority (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Fields are also understood as dynamic containers within which individuals have their motivations and strategies for staying in the field and building capital. Crucially, fields are formed through ongoing processes of institutionalisation where founding visions become sedimented into institutional arrangements, habitual practices, spatial configurations and unequal distributions of power and authority that structure ongoing social reproduction (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008; Swartz, 1997). For intentional communities, field theory could illuminate how founding intentions crystallised into educational environments, meaning the material, social and symbolic conditions that simultaneously enable and constrain what can be learned, who can teach and what knowledge is valuable (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Examining Findhorn through this lens might reveal WHY the community's educational infrastructure is set up, maintained, and reproduced over time.

Thus, theorising Findhorn as an educational space requires examining the relationship between intentionality (the social movement dimension articulating the WHAT FOR) and institutionalisation (the field dimension articulating the WHY) with pedagogical dynamics as the mediating processes or HOW through which collective visions shape individual development and individual participation reproduces or transforms communal structures.

## 1.2 Research Aims

Given the ambition to understand how educational communities could be designed and function, this research examines the Findhorn Foundation as an educational space, exploring how its founding principles are enacted in community practices and how these practices contribute to the development of its members. Rather than

studying education as separate from social organisation, this research explores how the Findhorn Foundation operates simultaneously as a **social field** (with its own rules, practices and forms of capital), a **social movement** (seeking to demonstrate alternative ways of living) and an **educational space** (where formal and informal learning shape individual and collective development)

By analysing the interconnected dimensions within the Findhorn Foundation, this study aims to contribute theoretical frameworks for understanding how intentional communities create and sustain an 'educative community' that may offer insights about forms of collective learning and social co-operation.

### 1.2.1 Research objectives

1. To understand how the founders' vision and educational aspirations became institutionalised in community practices, social structures and member experiences.

This objective will examine the establishment of Findhorn as both a social field and a social movement. Field theory (Bourdieu) might reveal how founding beliefs crystallised into distinctive practices, rules and forms of valued knowledge within the community. Social movement theory (Melucci, 1996) would illuminate how the community's purpose was framed to attract members and sustain commitment. Educational theory would help examine how educational aims, role of actors and methods and systems are established.

2. To explore how commitment is mobilised and sustained through community participation and how this participation shapes member development.

This objective focuses on lived experience within the educative community. I will explore how members develop investment in community goals and embodied dispositions through participation in community practices. Social movement learning theory would also illuminate how participation shapes both individual transformation and collective identity formation. I would also analyse the pedagogical relationships among members as learners and teachers, and the

capacities or knowledge being developed, and the evolution from the founding intentions.

3. To generate theoretical insights about how intentional communities function as '*educative communities*' through the analysis of the Findhorn Foundation.

This objective synthesises findings to generate a theoretical understanding of the design of an educative community from the Findhorn Foundation. It integrates insights from field theory (how educative societies establish and maintain their distinctive characteristics), social movement learning theory (how they mobilise commitment and demonstrate alternatives and educational theory (how they structure learning relationships and processes) to develop frameworks applicable to other contexts seeking to become more educative.

### 1.3 Overview of Methodology

Understanding an educative society and its functions necessitates methodological approaches capable of capturing the complex interplay between social organisation and ambitions, educational practice and individual transformation. This research employs a qualitative case study approach grounded in a bounded relativist ontology, as discussed in Chapter 4, focusing on how the Findhorn Foundation operates simultaneously as a social field, social movement, and educational space, as briefly established in Section 1.2 and further detailed in Chapter 2.

#### 1.3.1 The I-SMLE Framework

To aid theorising about education within the complex dynamics of intentional communities, I have developed what I call an Integrative Social Movement Learning and Education (I-SMLE) framework specifically for this research. This framework answers questions about the educational purpose, the roles of the actors involved, the values guiding practice, and the designed environment in which learning occurs (Moore, 2012). whilst simultaneously understanding the intentional community as both a social movement and a social field, as I establish in Chapter 3. These positions are examined through the following analytical tools.

Bourdieu's field theory concepts provide tools for analysing the social structures that shape education. The field examines the community as a structured space with specific rules and positions established by the founders. Habitus investigates how members develop embodied dispositions through participation, and *illusio* and capital analyses why members are invested and what resources members accumulate within the community. This is further detailed in Chapters 2 and 3 and answered in Chapters 5A and 5B.

The social movement learning is analysed through Engeström's (2001) expansive learning questions: Who learns, and why they learn? What do they learn, and how do they learn? Through these questions, I aim to examine the motivations for joining intentional communities and the reasons members remain in them. This is further detailed in Chapters 2 and 3 and answered in Chapter 6.

Finally, I use the pedagogical triangle embedded within an understanding of ICs as fields and social movements, which provides the analytical structure for mapping pedagogical relationships among the educator, learner, and content within the community, and for understanding the influences of these elements on both achieving the objectives as an intentional community and sustaining the social field. The above tools are thus integrated to provide a multidimensional analysis, in which the triangle reveals the pedagogical architecture, Engeström's (2001) questions illuminate the collective evolution, and Bourdieu's (1992) concepts expose the underlying influences, power, and assumptions enacted within the intentional community.

### 1.3.2 Research Design

The I-SMLE framework guides both data collection and analysis, allowing me to study the framing of the founder's intentions and principles, and how they were enacted within community practices and experienced by its members. This approach enables a systematic investigation of who educates within the community, what is learned and how by its members, and how the broader social field, embodied practices, and motivational factors shape educational experiences. This

bounded case study treats the Findhorn Foundation as a distinctive social field with implications for the design of an educative community. For this research, I adopt a bounded relativist stance, recognising that the community creates a shared reality within its specific community context. I further elaborate on the research design and method in Chapter 4.

Data collection is through multiple complementary methods, including thematic analysis of the founders' memoirs, early publications, and documents, as well as interviews with members and personal observation through an experience week to see the community's educational practices in action, thereby enabling triangulation of historical intentions with contemporary experiences. The data analysis uses both inductive and deductive coding to identify emergent themes and to apply the theoretical framework of the I-SMLE. This dual approach helped me select and analyse relevant data and group members' experiences within the larger framework, thereby guiding my understanding of educational dynamics within the community.

This methodological approach, centred on a customised framework, offers not only insights into the Findhorn Foundation as an intentional community but also provides a transferable analytical tool for other intentional communities and social movements.

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

In the quest for new approaches to collective learning, collaboration, and the handling of complexity, this study aims to understand how educative communities can be theorised.

### **Advancing Educational Theory Beyond Institutions**

By examining how the Findhorn Foundation operates as a comprehensive educational environment, this study aims to develop analytical frameworks that could illuminate educational dynamics in contexts beyond formal institutions, potentially applicable to other social movements, grassroots organisations or alternative communities. It aims to provide a way of thinking about education that

might add to or refine existing assumptions of what counts as education and where educational theory should direct its attention.

### **Bridging Educational and Sociological Analysis**

This research applies Bourdieu's concepts of field, *habitus*, and *illusio* to educational processes, aiming to reveal how educational communities can establish distinctive cultures (fields), develop embodied practices (*habitus*), and sustain member commitment (*illusio*). This integration could offer new analytical tools for understanding how educational environments and social dynamics mutually influence each other.

### **Understanding Social Movements and Educational Vision Implementation**

The study also aims to study how founders' educational intentions become institutionalised and adapted over time, offering insights into how social movements can deliberately design for habit formation and commitment maintenance, which could be crucial knowledge for educational innovation and social change initiatives.

### **Methodological Innovation**

Finally, by visualising the Findhorn Foundations' educational approach through the ISMLE, this study seeks to demonstrate a methodological innovation for representing complex educational environments that could be applied to other settings. The ISMLE aims to contribute to educational research methods by providing a theoretical and analytical tool for capturing the multidimensional nature of learning in alternative contexts, such as learning organisations, activist communities, and neighbourhood initiatives, that seek to enhance their educational capacity.

### 1.4.1 Research Contribution: Framework for Educative Community Design

Collectively, these contributions seek to advance understanding of education beyond traditional institutions, offering perspectives particularly relevant to education theorists, intentional community members, social movement leaders and anyone who wishes to approach education more holistically. These insights would contribute particularly to adult education and lifelong learning scholarship by demonstrating the educational significance of intentional community participation.

Thus, by understanding how Findhorn Foundation operates as an '*educative community*', from its founding vision through contemporary practices, this research aims to generate insights applicable to understanding educative social environments across various contexts, whether it is organisations seeking to become learning communities, neighbourhoods working to support collective growth or other Intentional communities starting as experimental social alternatives. Beyond academic understanding, this research aims to make educational possibilities both theoretically visible and practically accessible.

## 1.5 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is organised into eight chapters that progressively unfold the case study and the educational significance of the Findhorn Foundation.

**Chapter 1:** Introduction establishes the research focus, context, and significance, introduces the Findhorn Foundation as a case study, and outlines the research objectives and questions.

**Chapter 2:** Intentional Communities as Educative Communities positions the Findhorn Foundation by situating the research within the intersecting fields of education theory, social movements, intentional communities, and social fields, providing conceptual frameworks to guide and establish the research questions.

**Chapter 3** introduces the I-SMLE, explaining its relevance to the case study and its use as a theoretical and analytical framework for this research. It discusses how different theoretical perspectives have been understood as complementary for examining the community, and the analytical frameworks that enable this.

**Chapter 4:** Research Methodology elaborates on the decisions made during the research process and explains how the philosophical orientation, case study method, data collection, and analysis are informed by the research aims and the I-SMLE framework.

**Chapters 5A and 5B:** The Background of the Findhorn Foundation addresses Research Question 1 and collates the story of the founders, their intentions, and formative influences, which are essential to understanding how the community was established, thereby situating the reading for the following chapters. Chapter 5B focuses on the educational intentions and understanding as derived from the early publications and the founders' ambitions.

**Chapter 6:** Members' Educational Experience addresses Research Question 2 and provides insight into how contemporary members frame their journey to Findhorn and how they have understood, learned, and remained part of the community. The chapter also focuses on the continuity and evolution of the process from the Founders' ideas to the words of members.

**Chapter 7:** Theoretical Insights and Discussion addresses Research Question 3 and builds upon an educational theory for the Findhorn Foundation, bringing together all the elements to focus on insights and contributions to educational theory, social movement learning, and understanding the community as a field.

**Chapter 8:** Conclusion synthesises the findings from the case study, articulates theoretical insights beyond the research, discusses the implications of understanding education within intentional communities, and addresses the limitations of my research and directions for future research.



## 1.6 Conclusion

This chapter previewed the dissertation and presents a vision of identifying how intentional communities, or more specifically, the Findhorn Foundation, could be theorised as an educative community. Building on this introduction, the next chapter examines the theoretical foundations for understanding education within intentional communities by exploring key tensions in educational theory. It establishes a conceptual understanding of ICs and their positioning, which will guide the analysis throughout this dissertation.

## 2. Theorising Education in Intentional Communities: A Multi-Dimensional View

### 2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 establishes the ambition to understand how ‘educative communities’ function and understand Intentional Communities as a form of ‘educative community’ in practice. Thus, this research is situated at the intersection of education, social movements, community studies, and sociology, seeking to understand the educational significance of Intentional Communities as alternative social arrangements by examining how educational theory and practice manifest within this specific social configuration and, in turn, how they function as sites of collective learning and social transformation.

This chapter first situates my understanding of education and its role in society through the tensions between individualism and collectivism, continuity and change, and how these tensions are connected and conceptualised beyond formal institutions. I then elaborate on the understanding of an “educative community” and position education as a “necessary utopia”, and specifically within Intentional Communities as ‘educative spaces.’ Next, I define Intentional Communities to establish their distinct characteristics, positioning them as “working utopias” (Crossley, 1999) and as sites of prefigurative politics (Fians, 2022; Yates, 2015) and social change.

The following section turns to the applicability of these frameworks to the Findhorn Foundation and how they manifest within this specific, intentional community through its historical development, governance structures, and community characteristics through a theoretical positioning using Bourdieu's (1992) concepts of field, *habitus* and *illusio*, social movement learning (English & Mayo, 2012; Hall &

Clover, 2005; Kilgore, 1999) and analysing the educational aims of qualification, socialisation and subjectification (Biesta, 2015).

This chapter thus brings out the multidimensional theoretical positioning of Intentional Communities. It builds the case for an integrated analytical framework to examine the educational significance of the Findhorn Foundation as a case, thereby providing the rationale for my theoretical framework in the following chapter and the foundational blocks for this research project.

## 2.2 Education and Society - Theoretical Foundations

*“Every individual is therefore in a two-fold sense predetermined by the fact of growing up in society: on the one hand, he finds a ready-made situation, and on the other hand, he finds in that situation preformed patterns of thought and conduct” (Wirth, 1951, p.3)*

The above observation by Wirth portrays the fundamental relationship between society and individuals that perhaps underlies educational processes. Educational systems function through pivotal institutions that reflect and reproduce broader societal structures, values, and power relations (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). While recognising the role of formal institutions and the challenges they pose as contested arenas where different social groups struggle over social reproduction and potential transformation (Apple, 2004), this research extends beyond formal structures and education in these spaces. This study explores education as a social and dynamic process of knowledge creation, transmission, and transformation that occurs through everyday social interactions, cultural practices, and community engagement, moving beyond institutional boundaries to examine how societies educate their members and how both societies and the communities within which they occur shape one another. It builds on Karl Mannheim's (1976) understanding of knowledge as inherently positional and historically situated, arguing that educational practices and content cannot be understood apart from the social locations and the interests of those who produce and transmit them. Thus, education and its practices both emerge from and are sustained by the social

contexts, making education not merely a transmission of information but an active social process. This theoretical grounding requires a more explicit conceptualisation of education in this study, along with an examination of the inherent tensions within education arising from this conceptualisation.

### 2.2.1 Conceptualising Education - Descriptive, Programmatic and Stipulative

Given the understanding of education as a socially situated process, clarifying its meaning becomes essential. Chazan (2022) identifies three approaches: descriptive (which focuses on the word's meaning and how it must be understood), programmatic (which focuses on the purpose), or stipulative (which refers to the author's specific usage). To illustrate, Lawrence Cremin's descriptive definition of education "the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, provoke or acquire knowledge, values, attitudes, skills or sensibilities as well as any learning that results from the effort" (Cremin, 1976, p. 27) emphasises education as a purposeful, systematic process, focussing on the educator's efforts, but downplays the relationship between learner agency and education. Furthermore, the words deliberate, 'systematic,' and 'sustained' evoke imagery of formal approaches rather than more organic ways and means of education. Of course, one could also critique its lack of emphasis on ethical and moral dimensions and question its cultural biases when considering what knowledge, skills, or sensibilities are desirable.

Kenklies's definition of "Education [...] is the deliberate attempt to engage with the relations someone has in order to change and improve those relations; education is about initiating, guiding, supporting, directing of learning and (trans)formation" (2020, p. 618) provides another conceptual understanding of education. The definition presents education as a process in which the focus begins with an educator's intention, whether directed toward another or toward themselves, engaging both the content and the learner to achieve an outcome /changed relationship. This relationship between the educator, the learner, and the content accommodates varied settings and contexts, while highlighting education's

inherently social nature. The educator can encompass anyone with influence and intention, including one's own self-directed learning intentions. At the same time, content extends beyond the prescribed curriculum to include all possible knowledge, skills, or beliefs. While learning is probably a complex and diversely interpreted phenomenon, education, in my view, refers to the visible structures, efforts, and actions that contribute to it. However, the above definition does not really elaborate on the outcomes beyond a changed relationship to content; as my own interpretation of education as inherently positive for individuals and the collective, it might also be helpful to consider “change and improve those relations” to what ends.

This brings us to the programmatic understanding of education, which focuses on what education should or can do, raising questions about its purpose or outcomes (Chazan, 2022). Whether it is the UNESCO 2030 tagline of “education transforms lives” (UNESCO, n.d.) or the concept of ‘bildung’ from the German tradition, which emphasises self-formation and cultivation, both speak to the expectations of education as a lever for individual and social change.

Thus, a positional definition that I would like to use for this research is that “Education is the intentional, relational process through which individuals or collectives deliberately engage with knowledge, values, and practices to transform relationships—whether with content, with others, or with oneself. It encompasses the visible structures, pedagogical actions, and social interactions that create conditions for learning, situated within specific cultural, institutional, and temporal contexts, and oriented toward both individual formation and collective possibility.”

This definition presents a broader conception of education, extending beyond individual or institutional parameters, yet it encompasses the organisation of education in all its forms. However, education does not take place in a neutral space. It is embedded within social positions and environments that attract programmatic stipulations based on the space and social structures. It is perhaps constantly

negotiated among competing stakeholders, interests, and worldviews, generating conflicting ideas about the purpose and value of education that create core tensions that influence education in society.

### 2.2.2 Key Tensions in the Purpose of Education

Most educational efforts operate within a complex web of competing purposes and orientations. At a societal level, I would like to elaborate on two fundamental tensions between individual and collective aims, as well as continuity and change, that influence how education is conceived, delivered, and experienced across diverse contexts. These tensions are not technical or operational but represent enduring questions that cannot be definitively resolved but must be continually negotiated. How societies navigate these tensions—whether explicitly or implicitly—fundamentally shapes curricular priorities, assessment regimes, and pedagogical approaches, with tangible consequences for educational equity, innovation, and social reproduction.

#### 2.2.2A *Tension 1-Individualism and Collectivism*

A fundamental tension exists between the belief that education serves individual development and societal needs. On the one hand, education is purported to cultivate each person's unique potential, talents, and aspirations and to emphasise autonomy, agency, and self-actualisation. Simultaneously, a collectivist orientation positions education as a social institution that prepares individuals for the collective goals of an aspired society.

Soares argues that, problematically, the modern Western world is based on a “dominant modern theory of free, equal and autonomous individuals in open and symmetrical competition in a free marketplace of commodities and ideas” (2018, p.11). The Cartesian emphasis on the ‘I’ influenced a rise in the monadic importance of individual consciousness and rational autonomy (Burkitt, 2008). This philosophical individualism evolved through the Enlightenment and later influenced educational theory, and is seen in educational ambitions, where personal development or “a subject with particular knowledge, skills and dispositions” became a central

educational approach (Biesta, 2007). While individualism has its uses, this trajectory has intensified lately, where Giroux describes how the ideology of neoliberalism and its excessive focus on the individuals manifests through “bare pedagogy, which emphasises winning at all costs, ruthless competitiveness, hedonism, the cult of individualism, and a subject largely constructed within a market-driven rationality that abstracts economics and markets from ethical considerations” (2010, p.184). Biesta (2009) identifies this shift as ‘learnification of education which prioritises the individual learning processes over the collective and is institutionalised through ideas like personalised learning pathways, competency-based progression, and rhetoric celebrating individual ‘passion,’ ‘voice,’ and ‘authentic self-expression’ as educational outcomes (Zhao,2018).

Collectivist approaches invert individualist assumptions by positioning the social whole as more than the sum of its parts, which shapes individual development, behaviour and possibilities (Soares, 2018). Mead (1863-1931) believed individual consciousness emerges from social interaction or the ‘I’ develops in relation to ‘me’, making the self inherently social. For Mead, individuals do not enter society as pre-formed subjects who then interact, but consciousness itself arises from participation in the “primordial, practical matrix” of coordinated social action (Biesta,1999, p.94). Education, thus, is positioned not as a process that makes a child social but as a form of social interaction from which reflective subjectivity emerges (Mead, 1910, cited in Biesta, 1999, p. 122). Rather than viewing individual and collective as opposing forces, these perspectives suggest they are mutually constitutive. Giddens's (2013; 1984) structuration theory further develops this by focusing on the dual structure of individual action and social cohesion in a dialectical relationship, reframing individual impulse and society as imposing moral connotations from the outside, not as opposing tensions, but as simultaneously active and necessary. Thus, within education, this reframes the individual-collective not as a trade-off, but as a dialectical relationship where individual development requires collective resources and collective development depends on individual participation.

This integrative approach appears in educational philosophies that resist the individual-collective binary. The German concept of 'bildung', although diversely interpreted, depicts self-formation as inherently socially embedded and views both individual development and citizenship preparation as complementary rather than competing goals (Hopmann, 2007). Humboldt (1769-1859) conceived 'bildung' as the development of individual capacities through encounters with otherness in language, culture and ideas, making personal growth dependent on social and cultural engagement. The significance of individual flourishing for collective growth downplays the neoliberal and capitalist ideology of self-interest. Dewey's vision for democratic education (2016) also rejected this dichotomy, believing that genuine individual growth occurs through participation in democratic community life and democratic societies require citizens capable of individual judgement and reflection.

Some non-Western traditions make this relationality even more fundamental. Ubuntu philosophy views individuals as primarily developed through community, positioning education not only for individual enhancement but also for the community's welfare (Metz, 2023). North American indigenous traditions similarly emphasise place-based, intergenerational knowledge transfer where education must serve ecological balance and sustainable community development (Cajete and Pueblo, 2010). These frameworks do not balance individual and collective concerns; rather, they reconceive individuals through their relations with community, land, and the environment.

The marginalisation of these relational ways of being in mainstream educational discourse also seems to mirror neoliberal imperatives rather than a philosophical disagreement. Thus, when examining alternative frameworks, the individual-collective axis appears to reflect cultural assumptions of societies rather than educational tensions. When examining contexts like the Findhorn Foundation, an intentional community that seeks to draw on both individual development and community living as complementary rather than competing priorities, it offers a setting in which to examine how these tensions emerge and are navigated in practice.



### *2.2.2B Tension 2 - Continuity & Change*

The second tension in education lies in its dual imperative to preserve cultural heritage, maintain social structures, and prepare the younger generation for an uncertain future. Education, and by extension, educational institutions simultaneously function as mechanisms of social reproduction and as potential sites for innovation and transformation. On the one hand, institutions of education, in general, are tasked with transmitting accumulated knowledge, values, and traditions that provide societal continuity and identity (Durkheim, 1956; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) and on the other, education is expected to cultivate critical thinking, adaptability, and innovation capacities to navigate a dynamic, evolving social, technological, and environmental landscape. While Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) illuminate how education is responsible for the reproduction of social structures through legitimising the social order, Adorno's concept of 'negative dialectics' (1973), meaning the embracing of contradiction, could be used to understand how education systems contain transformation within themselves by building capacity in learners to negate, question, critique, and refuse what they are being taught. Thus, within education, negative dialectics suggests that genuine learning involves cultivating "thinking against oneself", referring to the capacity to recognise the limits and ideological functions of what one has been taught (ibid., p.365). Thus, education needs to transmit existing knowledge and develop critical capacity.

Giroux's concept of "teachers as transformative intellectuals" (1985) builds on this, with educators understood to function within both the "the language of critique and language of possibility" (Nieto, 2020; Giroux, 1985) to help education become fit for purpose. The curriculum, practice, and pedagogical transactions first provide the necessary knowledge and then must offer skills to question and critique the content. "The paradox of education is precisely this — that as one begins to become conscious, one begins to examine the society in which one is being educated" (Baldwin, 1963). This relationship is neither resolved nor opposed, but in constant tension and negotiation.

Our current education system, influenced by both industrial-age educational models and market-based capitalism, emphasises standardisation, compartmentalisation, measurement, and outcome-oriented education, creating a globally successful 'neoliberal imaginary' (Ball, 2012) in education. However, this standardised version is itself problematic because it follows a particular type of continuity valued within the current social structures. Meanwhile, this selective continuity has led to the systematic erasure of indigenous knowledge, whether in the form of languages, ecological understanding, sustainable practices, or relationality with the planet and all its resources. Santos (2015) used the term 'epistemicide' to refer to the death of knowledge in subordinated cultures, erasing views incompatible with dominant modernist conceptions of progress. Thus, the continuity of what knowledge is to be transmitted and maintained on its own is inherently political and recognising that may not just balance continuity and change but also critically examine the relations of power and legitimise diverse knowledge systems.

The continuity-change tension thus reveals education as a site for both philosophical and political tensions. Education simultaneously preserves selective traditions, although selection is ideological (Williams & McGuigan, 2014), while enabling their transformation. Similarly, education transmits knowledge while cultivating the critical faculties that might interrogate it and prepares learners for futures that cannot be fully anticipated or in dominant structures which limit legitimate questioning (Giroux, 2010). While not resolvable, this tension is navigated and requires frameworks that acknowledge and integrate education's multiple contradictory purposes without reducing the complexity.

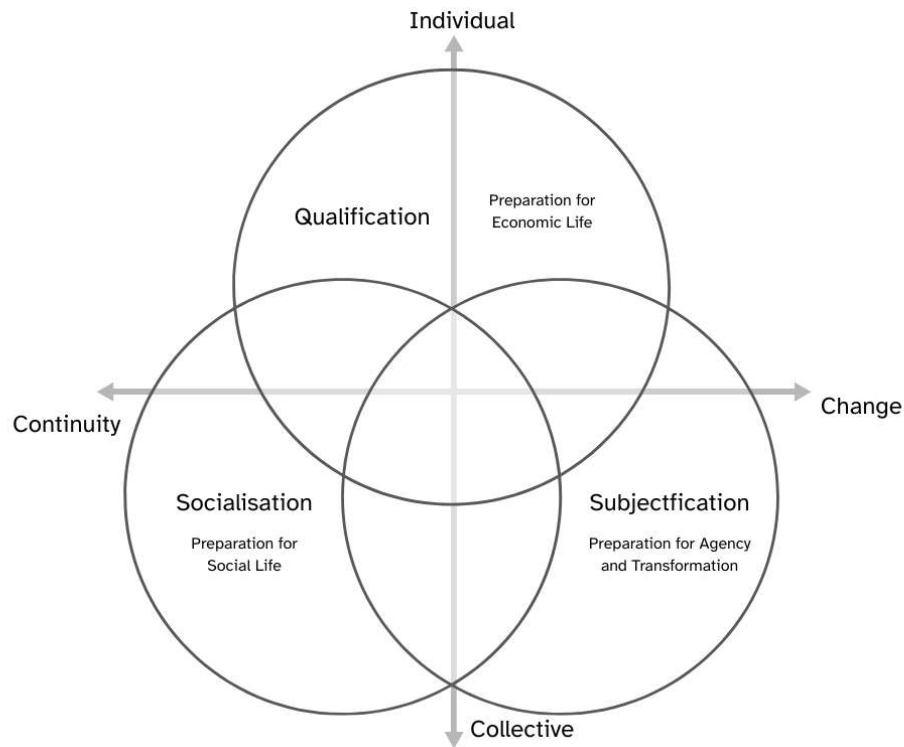


*Figure 1: Gert Biesta's Purpose of Education & Tensions. (Author Generated)*

Gert Biesta's (2010, 2015) popular tripartite model of educational purpose (Fig. 1) attempts to bring the above goals together, and I think on a continuum proposing that education simultaneously serves three interrelated and overlapping purposes: qualification, socialisation, and subjectification. Where qualification addresses the instrumental preparation of people for work, citizenship, and everyday life, socialisation transmits the existing cultures, traditions, and social practices of newcomers. Subjectification, on the other hand, suggests independence and can be seen as a catalyst for change, fostering autonomy, agency, critical thinking, and the capacity to transform society (Guillemin, 2025; Biesta, 2010).

Ball (2012) argues that these neat distinctions may obscure how neoliberal ideas permeate the dimensions where even "subjectification" serves market imperatives or as something that education can do for learners rather than a process, while Guillemin (2025) cautions that subjectification itself is conceptually limited and needs to be understood as a part of the complexity of understanding the purpose of

education. This tension between continuity and change could be evident in communities like the Findhorn Foundation, which must balance stability and adaptation to meet its ambitions while remaining sustainable.

Carrying these complexities of understanding education, it is, however, broadly assumed that the purpose of education, even within the tensions, is always forward-looking and, in some sense, utopian. However, as Jameson (2005) warns, not all utopias are emancipatory, and some may project current inequalities into idealised futures. Drawing on Mannheim's (1936) analysis of how utopian consciousness arises from the gaps and contradictions within existing social arrangements, these educational tensions could be understood as the imaginative space in which alternative possibilities emerge, positioning education as a necessary utopia that seeks to transcend current limitations while remaining grounded in present realities. Further, the unresolvable tensions between the individual and the collective, as well as between continuity/change, suggest that education inherently reaches towards an imagined future, making it perhaps fundamentally utopian.

### 2.2.3 Education: Utopian Potential?

*"Education in its broadest sense is the means of this social continuity of life. Wherever and whenever life is going on, so too is education." John Dewey*

At its core, education represents the deliberate transmission of knowledge, values, and practices within human society. While educational aims have evolved across time and cultures, the need to provide social continuity remains constant. Critically, this preservation and transmission can be inherently political, as Gramsci (1971) would identify it as cultural hegemony, through which dominant groups maintain power or are contested (Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2011). However, education's dual purpose of preservation and preparation, serving both individuals and the collective, is a contradiction that can only be resolved in an imaginary future.

This dual role of education naturally leads us to consider the kind of future we envision and how education can help achieve it. This forward-looking aspect of education often assumes utopian qualities: a desirable future yet to be realised but

an aspiration nonetheless (Levitas, 1990), and a responsibility of the utopian project in search of human betterment, fuelled by hope for a better future (Webb, 2024, 2009, Milojevic, 2003; Borrelli, 2004; Peters & Freeman-Moir, 2006). Thus, education could be understood as having utopian potential. However, even within these utopian ambitions, neoliberal rationality (Brown, 2015) can be seen. For example, the United Nations framing of education as “a force for change amidst global crises” (United Nations, 2022, p.189), “enabling individuals and communities to flourish together” (United Nations, 2022, p.13), could be interpreted as market-compatible solutions, presented as universal human aspirations while obscuring whose interests such global visions serve.

The relationship between education and utopian thinking is evident throughout history in both theoretical writings and practical experiments. Educational reformers have consistently attempted, in various ways, to articulate their vision of ideal societies or educational environments. Where Plato's Republic laid out a comprehensive educational system for his vision of a utopian society, it was also designed to maintain hierarchical social divisions (Nasaina, 2018), while the influence of John Dewey's progressive ideals are all over the American Education system, they served the expansion of the American industrial capitalism (Bowles & Gintis, 2011). Even Skinner's Walden Two<sup>9</sup> (1948) demonstrates a utopian community inspired by the theory of behaviourism, but shows subtle shaping of subjects to serve particular social orders. The above initiatives often arose as a response to perceived challenges and shortcomings of their present society, and always with some proposed solutions through or within education, but emerged from particular class positions and cultural contexts.

The connection between education and utopia is varied, with studies focusing on the role of Utopia, utopian thinkers such as Bloch and Owens, or the fictional contributions of utopia to education and society. Explicitly, Halpin (2001) explores

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<sup>9</sup> Skinner's Walden Two (1948) presents a behaviourist utopia where positive reinforcement shapes residents toward collective harmony, raising questions about whether engineered consensus constitutes genuine education or sophisticated social control (see Chomsky, 1971)

how education is intrinsically hopeful and future-oriented, while Milojevic (2003) argues that utopian imaginaries inspire most visions of education. Webb (2009) argues that education necessarily has utopian dimensions in fostering social transformation, both by critiquing the present and by cultivating an imaginative capacity for the future. Their collective opinions towards utopian hope as a fundamental need of education position utopia as a necessary component of educational theory and practice. Scholarly caution about utopian thinking in education, given historical associations with totalitarianism and images of More's version of a place that does not exist, or impractical solutions (Levitas, 2013), is equally valid. Thus, Webb (2009) argues that education's utopian function must remain grounded in practical possibility while maintaining its transformative potential. However, one could argue that grounding may also constrain the utopian imagination to what current power structures deem feasible, thereby limiting its potential.

If one accepts education having utopian potential, perhaps educational institutions and ambitions strive to embody these ideals. Whether it is in the form of national policies, institutions of formal education, or even ambitions of UNESCO's 'learning cities' (UNESCO, 2022) or Clarke's 'educative societies' (1948), the ambitions of education and imagined futures play out within their execution. This tension between hope and practicality is also evident in the way utopia is interpreted.

In theory, there is an interesting distinction between static works, such as Plato's Republic or Skinner's Walden Two, which offer a detailed and elaborate prescription of an ideal educational and social system, albeit one that is not realistically viable. In contrast, thinkers like Robert Owen<sup>10</sup> and Charles Fourier<sup>11</sup> inspired experimental

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Owen (1771-1858) established experimental communities (New Lanark, New Harmony) built on cooperative labour and universal education, believing human character was environmentally formed. His schools emphasised practical, non-religious education as a tool for social transformation, though his communities ultimately failed to sustain themselves economically (Harrison, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Charles Fourier (1772-1837) proposed reorganising society into "phalansteries"—self-sufficient communities structured around "passionate attraction," where education would channel children's natural enthusiasms through diverse activities rather than suppressing them through discipline. His vision of integrating learning with productive labour and allowing children to discover their aptitudes

functional utopias, inviting one to attempt what is within reach, learn from it, and adapt as one proceeds. Levitas (2013) refers to this usage of '*utopia as a method*' of facilitating social change, either directly or through the 'education of desire' for a particular change. By opening up space for an imaginary alternative future, utopia can serve as a tool to inspire reform. On the other hand, Harvey describes 'process utopia' as the "catalyst by which the utopian imperative can be realised as an authentic social practice" (Harvey, 2000), positioning utopia as an ongoing, evolving practice of creating a better future. Here, utopia becomes a continuous, open-ended process of experimentation, dialogue and change, with emphasis on participation and iteration.

Utopia within intentional communities can be understood as a combination of the founders' imagination and members' ongoing iterative practice. Unlike static utopian visions, process utopias emphasise the journey of continuous development and adaptation. Thus, communities can be understood as spaces where utopian ideals are taught, actively lived, and tested through daily practices, social interactions, and collective decision-making. Alternatively, they can be seen as acknowledging the problems within mainstream social organisations without fundamentally challenging the systems or the hegemonic structures and remaining constrained by the very systems they seek to transcend (Sargisson, 2007; Kozeny, 1995). Thus, intentional communities, such as the Findhorn Foundation, offer a site for examining how fundamental social tensions between individual autonomy and collective decision-making and between preserving founding principles or utopian visions and adapting to changing circumstances or pragmatic survival are navigated in practice, making them valuable cases for observing how societies negotiate and operate within these tensions.

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influenced later progressive education movements, though no complete phalanstery was successfully established (Beecher, 1986)

## 2.2.4 Educative Communities- Beyond formal institutions.

The understanding of education as utopian raises questions of where such initiatives may unfold. While utopian imaginaries in education, such as alternative schooling systems like Montessori and Steiner, are well-studied, social arrangements like intentional communities as educational spaces remain underexplored. Again, within scholarship, concepts like UNESCO's "learning societies" emphasise lifelong education for economic and cultural success, with Faure arguing that "If learning involves all of one's life, then we must go even further than the necessary overhaul of 'educational systems' until we reach the stage of a learning society (Faure et al, 1972: xxxiii). However, this conceptualisation often seems to emphasise individual skill acquisition and credential attainment, which Biesta (2010) also critiques as a transactional approach of knowledge transfer to passive learners. Additionally, the idea seems vacuous in some respects, as societies are constantly learning and adapting to survive, regardless of whether they hold utopian ideals.

Fred Clarke's 'educative society' (1948, p.9), further contextualised as '*educative communities*' in Chapter 1, offers an appealing idea. The idea that we are shaped by more than just our formal education, by the stories we tell, the work we do, the resources and their distribution, the political machinery and its rhetoric and the built and spatial environment, each contributing in subtle and unconscious ways. Mannheim's work on ideology and utopia also emphasised the role of the community, culture and relationships as constant formative influences (Mannheim & Stewart, 1997). In my conception, the 'educative community' would probably make these influences more explicit and aligned. Rather than confining education to formal institutions, 'educative communities' could acknowledge and actively harness the formative influence of community, cultural practices, and social relationships in shaping their citizenry in line with their ambitions. Unlike learning societies that focus on individual advancement, educative societies could potentially acknowledge the transformative potential of social environments themselves,



recognising what Bernstein (1975,2003) called the “invisible pedagogy<sup>12</sup>” that operates through everyday interactions and cultural practices. Thus, ‘educative societies’ could be used to challenge the separation between education and broader social processes, paying attention to the ‘invisible formation’ operating through everyday social interactions, cultural artefacts, and community structures.

Critically, this approach would also raise questions about agency and determinism and whether it could potentially risk diminishing individual autonomy. Furthermore, questions about preferred citizenry still risk perpetuating the idea of social control rather than emancipation, lending credence to Foucault’s (1977) warning about marginalisation through the educational process. Perhaps the binary distinction itself oversimplifies a complex educational ecosystem that contains elements of both approaches, existing on a continuum and in mutual movement. This complexity sets Intentional Communities like Findhorn Foundation as valuable research sites, as they function as concentrated ‘educative communities’ in practice.

### 2.2.5 Intentional Communities as Educative Communities

Intentional Communities could be said to represent a kind of ‘educative community’ where conscious attempts to design social environments that embody specific educational values and practices can be identified. Unlike mainstream society, where educational influence often operates implicitly or without coordination or what Bourdieu might term as “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2002, p. 167), many intentional communities make their educative vision and ambitions explicit through founding documents, articulated practices and shared governance processes, making them natural sites for examining how educative principles can be deliberately implemented. While the degree of explicitness may vary, these communities also may be said to embody the fundamental tensions in educational theory about whose knowledge shapes the community, how power operates and how individual and collective growth co-exist. Rather than resolving these tensions,

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<sup>12</sup> Although understood here more broadly as the embedded influence rather than a specific way of teaching or learning.

intentional communities provide sites where they are actively negotiated and managed. On the other hand, the very concept may raise questions about whose intentions and purpose are being privileged.

The Findhorn Foundation's positioning as a site for individual and collective development exemplifies these contradictions. While explicitly framed as educational, the community's spiritual and ecological focus could be considered a genuine alternative, or what Žižek might term an "ideological fantasy" (1989), a framework which provides meaning and purpose within bounded spaces, making current arrangements more bearable, while the broader socio-economic structures remain unchanged, potentially containing rather than catalysing systemic change. The community's work within a rich lineage of Intentional Communities suggests a critical examination of whether they serve as laboratories of social innovation or as "utopian enclaves" (Jameson, 2005) that offer an alternative lifestyle while overlooking broader structural issues. Or is it possible that the community is maybe neither and yet attempting to both challenge and accommodate dominant structures?

The following section elaborates on the historical significance, key characteristics and educational dimensions of Intentional Communities in general and Findhorn Foundation in particular.

## 2.3 Intentional Communities: Definitions and Characteristics

Suppose one understands education as the input for a utopian desired future, and that society is the system surrounding the process that enables the vision. In that case, we see three aspects emerge, which are an intentional purpose, a created environment, and social structures to support the pursuit of that intended purpose. This section elaborates on what intentional communities are and why they can be understood as educative societies in action, furthering the conversation between the utopian impulse, social reproduction, and education for a desired citizenry. The brief historical background, academic conception of Intentional Communities and its understanding within various sociological frameworks are laid out to establish that

Intentional Communities already exist as social movements and spaces of informal learning.

### 2.3.1 Defining Intentional Communities

Communities, as a concept, are highly contested, and depending on one's field of work or various factors such as geography, shared interests, purpose, or needs, they can be understood differently (Crow, 2012). A traditional approach distinguished between communities based on place, interest, and identity (Willmott, 1986), in which factors such as geography, specific interests, or identification with certain ideas led to community formation. The term 'intentional community' is often used as an overarching term that defines a specific typology of community conception and can be understood as a combination of community and intentionality.

Intentional Communities (IC) is an umbrella moniker that encompasses diverse initiatives referring to specific purpose-oriented residential communities with some aspects of shared economic or socio-cultural connections. Lyman Taylor Sargent, a prominent scholar of Intentional Communities and Utopian Studies, defines intentional communities as a "group of five or more adults and their children, if any, who come from more than one nuclear family and who have chosen to live together to enhance their shared values or for some other mutually agreed-upon purpose"(1994, p.14-15). He emphasises intentionality, shared goals and non-familial ties, focusing on the structure or function of communities. Kozeny (1995), a long-term communitarian, and Lucy Sargisson (1999, 2000), a scholar on utopia, add to the definition with emphasis on people (beyond traditional relationships or family) choosing to live and sometimes work together for a common purpose or reflecting core cooperative values within potentially diverse living arrangements, considering the purpose or organisation of lifestyles. Timothy Miller (1998) laid out the critical criteria for intentional communities: a sense of purpose and separation from mainstream society, collective over individual goals, geographic proximity and interaction, economic interdependence, and a critical mass of people self-identifying as a community.

The above definitions collectively emphasise the important aspects of intentional communities and the key characteristics needed to understand the term. They also position the Intentional Community as a consciously designed and created social field (Section 2.4) and a social movement (Section 2.5). The goals of both social mobilisation and field creation, however, have their roots in the educational actions of the Intentional Communities. First, building on the themes outlined above, I aim to explore the characteristics that contribute to the educational potential of intentional communities.

### **Relationality & Connection – Deliberate & Purposeful Participation**

**A group of unrelated people/families living together in geographical proximity** emphasises the deliberate nature of intentional communities and distinguishes them from large joint families. Although this characterisation could seemingly include other forms of social units, such as villages, tribal settlements, or other traditional communities of place, typically, intentional communities are not natural progressions of social living but rather deliberate attempts by individuals who choose to live together and continue to make a conscious choice to stay in the community. Where relations infer connections by blood or marriage, connectedness here seems to adhere more to the notion of choice, differing levels of belonging based on trust, reciprocity or affiliation. Thus, the membership can be understood as intergenerational peers who have actively chosen to be part of the intentional community. Tamera<sup>13</sup>, an IC in Portugal,, has around 160 members of diverse nationalities who claim to “research and model a new planetary culture, with strong ethical foundations” (Tamera, 2020), whereas there are over 250 Kibbutzim<sup>14</sup>. are considered institutionalised agricultural communities that operate as co-operatives and share communal responsibilities.

However, the idea of a community brings up rosy concepts like connectedness, captured in notions such as ‘common bonds’, ‘common ties’, or the idea that ‘we

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<sup>13</sup>See <https://www.tamera.org/about/> for more information.

<sup>14</sup> See The Kibbutz Movement: A History, Origins and Growth, 1909-1939 v. 1- Henry Near (Bowes, 1977)

belong to one another' (Hoggart, 1994, p.184). Research on social movements suggests a more complex picture. People who join social movements are often motivated by the movement's purpose and pursue "self-verification" (Swann, 1983, 2012), which guides their actions and choices, or provides a way to organise their lives and interactions. This suggests that members may be initially connected not to one another but to the purpose the Intentional Community aims to achieve. Again, for education to exist, there must be an acknowledgement of the intentionality in the relationship between educator and learner. Choosing to live in Findhorn could be seen as creating the fundamental condition for its educationality.

### **Boundaries & Proximity – An Educational Environment**

Building on this deliberate choice to live together, the concept of connection is reinforced by the spatial proximity of members, which can influence a sense of belonging and shared purpose within Intentional Communities. The geographical proximity determined by geographical coordinates or land ownership also helps distinguish Intentional Communities from other communal structures, such as communities of practice or interest-based associations, which may consist of people from diverse locations who come together temporarily (e.g., for conferences or retreats) or in virtual communities over technology-aided networks. The Twin Oaks<sup>15</sup> Community is on 350 acres of land in rural Virginia with around 100 members who live in seven large group houses, with a children's building, a community centre and an ambition to be a "model social system for human-scale solutions to problems of land use, food production, energy conservation, and appropriate use of technology" (Twin Oaks Community, n.d.). Similarly, Auroville is in Pondicherry, within a 7.5 km radius, with 3,300 residents (Auroville, n.d.).

The Findhorn Foundation has almost 300 members living within the eco-village's boundaries. The community also includes members who have moved to the surrounding areas (full members are expected to live within a 50-mile radius) but consider themselves members by self-identification. This geographical containment

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<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.twinoaks.org/>

serves an important function beyond mere logistics. Boundaries are also important for social movements, which require a clear distinction between “us” and “them” and the difference that labelling implies. Often the identification of members as a group could lead to a socially constructed collective identity which Melucci explains as “an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level) and concerned with the orientation of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which the action takes place” (1989, p.34) Thus educationally, the boundaries and proximity create both a contained environment that can be shaped to achieve the objectives of the intentional community and provide opportunities for its members to build a collective identity that can be used as motivational impetus for action.

### **Common Intent & Commitment – Praxis and Prefigurative Potential**

While living in geographical proximity can offer connections among members, **working towards some common intent and /or commitment** is usually seen as the glue that holds members together. Miller's (2009) emphasis on common intent or commitment appears to refer to a shared vision that extends beyond simply living together. While Miller sees this common intent as the *raison d'être* of the existence of the community, Lockyer expands on this idea, defining intentionality as “people choosing to orient their lives and livelihoods around particular goals or values and that these goals or values differ from those prevalent in the dominant society” (2007, p.10). Lockyer suggests that intentionality is not based solely on common living arrangements but rather a conscious effort to create a divergent lifestyle, implying that Intentional communities are a form of social and cultural experimentation with alternative models of living based on shared aspirations and beliefs. Dancing Rabbit<sup>16</sup> is a community spread over 280 acres in Missouri, where residents are expected to agree to “ecological covenants and sustainability guidelines” and “outreach and education are integral” to their vision (Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, 2025). Similarly, Damanhur<sup>17</sup> in Italy promotes itself as a spiritual

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<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.dancingrabbit.org> for further information (Lockyer, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> See <https://damanhur.org/> for further information

community “based on solidarity, sharing, art and culture, mutual love, and respect for Life and every being” (Damanhur Spiritual Community, 2020).

While the intentionality and commitment at Findhorn Foundation are formally evidenced by members signing an agreement to uphold the guiding values and core principles as outlined in the common ground document<sup>18</sup>, such formalities tell us little about the depth of individual commitment or the diversity of interpretations members might hold regarding these principles. Where subscribed agreements may suggest commitment at a surface level, there are challenges associated with varied interpretations of the common ground (New Findhorn Association, n.d.) and principles, as well as the diverse membership and residential structures at Findhorn, which allow for flexibility and accommodate differences. However, even within these varied commitments, intentional community living can be considered as prefigurative where members “attempt to create change ‘here and now’ ...of alternative or utopic social relations in the present, either in parallel with, or in the course of, adversarial social movement protest” (Tornberg, 2021, p. 85)

Building on this prefigurative understanding, social movement research also highlights that shared interests are not enough to mobilise or build commitment. Intentional Communities create “strategic frames” that establish the community's identity and purpose, which must align with the individual frames of members whose “self-verification” aligns with the community's intent, method, and process of activism (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). The framing by founders and existing members creates the theoretical base, while members communicate these through stories, rituals and daily practices to establish operational norms and shared ways of living together. The invitation to new members and the broader society through demonstrated lived experience also represents the educational function. Collectively, these processes can be interpreted as the core educational functions of Intentional Communities.

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<sup>18</sup> See <https://www.newfindhorndirections.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Application-Pack-2021-8.pdf> for application form and common ground details.

## Shared Agreements & Governance -Institutionalising Power and Field Dynamics

Intentional Communities often establish **a mutually designed and established agreement regarding living styles, sharing of resources and responsibilities, and governance of the community**. These agreements function as baseline expectations towards the shared values and intent of the Intentional community. Typically, shared agreements may include norms regarding ownership, expenses, income, and common community expectations. The New Findhorn Association (NFA), for example, has outlined the membership criteria, including governance and voting rights, financial contributions towards the community, and the rights and benefits that membership provides (New Findhorn Association, 2023). Bruderhof<sup>19</sup> which describes itself as a church-faith based community, has prescribed ethics for work and community living (Bruderhof, n.d.) and members are expected to take vows to enter the community. Freetown of Christiania on the other hand is an anarchist experimental city in Copenhagen that is now regularising itself through land ownership and governance (Christiania, n.d.).

Over time, the formalisation of these norms and governance can act as a creation of the field, which Bourdieu expresses as a system of social positions or a social arena of struggle with its own rules, capital, actors and strategies. Often, the sustainability of the field may necessitate the development of habitus, or embodied dispositions and traits, that members can cultivate or work towards maintaining (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). This field, however, is not static and is always at risk, depending on various intentional communities. Although documents and written agreements can provide some safeguards and help, lived realities and differences between policy and practice in intentional communities cannot be underestimated. Typically, sources of conflict encompass labour sharing, economic hardships, or feelings of loss of control, often leading to attrition or the collapse of the best of intentions

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<sup>19</sup> See <https://bruderhof.squarespace.com/foundations/life-in-community#common-work> for shared guidelines



within communities (Clark et al., 2019). Expectations regarding the sharing of incomes, where some members earn more than others, may create a power imbalance. Ownership and housing availability in a community are usually limited, making community living accessible only to those with means or increasing the barriers to entry. Work or shared tasks and responsibilities can also be a source of conflict, particularly when ableism or an unequal distribution of tasks is present. Furthermore, the ways and means of conflict resolution, decision-making, day-to-day operations, and emergency handling are binding on all members who choose to be part of the Intentional Community and can determine the culture and commitment (Clark et al., 2019). Thus, like any other social field, intentional communities are also subject to implicit and hidden factors of influence, like power inequality, inadequate social, cultural or economic capital, creating hidden or implicit educational repercussions

### **Membership Norms & Inclusion- Setting Expectations and Formalising Interest**

Building further on the idea of shared agreements, the **norms of community membership play a crucial role in determining who is an insider and who is an outsider**. Membership norms serve as a way for potential newcomers to identify and assess whether the community and its intent/ commitment meet their aspirations, whilst enabling existing members to evaluate whether new members will contribute positively to the community and uphold its shared values. Some communities encourage volunteering or residency for three to twelve months before formal membership, while others allow membership based on financial contribution (e.g., Eco housing, shared housing), or permit immediate membership for individuals or families. The Findhorn Association outlines the norms and criteria for membership in the Findhorn community. Everyone is encouraged to begin as an Introductory member, complete the Findhorn Experience week, and then transition to a full member through a consensus process involving both the community and the member (*Membership – NFA*, n.d.). This staged membership could be understood as a process of socialisation or actor induction into the community, its purpose and values, as well as a demonstration of its lived reality. Twin Oaks has a three-week

visitor program, followed by a six-month provisional membership, after which members collectively vote to grant full membership (Twin Oaks Community, n.d.). Auroville membership is offered to a member who has completed at least 11 months as a newcomer, after which a committee reviews the application against set criteria before approving.<sup>20</sup>

Although some formal processes may suggest a feeling of control, the realities of different communities can vary significantly. Some intentional communities are open to all others, but they require a substantial commitment of time, money, and labour before being considered for an insider status. Moreover, formal acceptance does not always translate into immediate belonging, and membership does not preclude dissatisfaction or withdrawal from the community. When criteria for inclusion and exclusion are established, membership norms not only define the boundaries of the community but also shape the nature of connections among members and how differences are perceived within the community and in relation to the world.

Intentional communities can be understood as critical infrastructure for social movements, where personal ambitions, political action, individual and collective identity, learning, and social change intersect. At the same time, they are also educationally significant, serving as laboratories, demonstration sites, and training grounds for social experimentation. Thus, intentional communities can be positioned as sites where social movement participation and education converge to create a specific social field and its rules. Although the above criteria are among the requirements for intentional communities, they are not exhaustive, and ICs can vary in size, form, and guiding ethos. Nevertheless, most share a common objective of embodying the utopian impulse that has animated experimental communities from Owens New Lanark<sup>21</sup> to contemporary eco-villages, which is a belief that alternative social arrangements are possible and worth pursuing.

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<sup>20</sup> See <https://auroville.org/page/joining-auroville-the-process> for further information

<sup>21</sup> New Lanark was Robert Owen's Scottish mill village (1800-1825) where he tested progressive labour reforms and educational provision, demonstrating improved working conditions were

### 2.3.2 Intentional Communities: “Working Utopias”

The Findhorn Foundation, as a contemporary IC, is part of a long and diverse history of communitarian experiments. While some believe that the trend for sustainable living and a desire to live in harmony with the planet motivates many today (Howard, 2021), the impulse for communitarian living has manifested throughout history, driven by a range of factors such as economic interest, religious or faith-based beliefs and the search for like-minded individuals.

At the heart of most intentional communities lies a shared interest or a vision of an imaginary ideal that draws inspiration from many sources, such as literary depictions of better societies (e.g., Skinner's *Walden Two*), historical examples of communal living (e.g., the early Christian Communes, co-operative movements), or a fantasised future imagined as resolving current crises like ecological collapse or capitalism (Claes, 2020). This imaginary ideal, often termed as utopia, is inspired by Thomas More's seminal work *Utopia* (1516)<sup>22</sup>, which some have referred to as “an imaginative projection, positive(eutopia) or negative (Dystopia) of a society that is substantially different from the one that the author lives in.” (Claes & Sargent, 1999, p.1) The rise of utopian literature in the 18th and 19th centuries can also be attributed to various social, intellectual and economic factors. Where the Enlightenment era emphasised reason, progress, and human perfectibility, the disruptive effects of the Industrial Revolution created a fertile ground for imagining alternative social orders. The growth of socialist and anarchist ideas, which criticised the inequalities and exploitation of capitalist society, further fuelled the desire for communitarian experiments (Metcalf, 2012; Sargent, 2013).

Utopian visions provided both an imagined future and a critique of the existing social order. However, in most versions (Eu)topian thoughts usually demonstrate

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compatible with industrial production, though under paternalistic rather than democratic control (Harrison, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) founded the modern utopian genre by depicting an imaginary island with communal property and rational governance. The term “utopia” combines Greek eu-topos (“good place”) and ou-topos (“no place”), suggesting that utopian ideals are simultaneously desirable and unrealisable—an ambiguity that has characterised utopian projects ever since (Logan, 1983).

ways and means of achieving social harmony, equality, cooperation, and the possibility of human development through education, moral development, and social engineering. The utopian socialist movement of the early 19th century had a significant impact, with thinkers such as Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and Etienne Cabet <sup>23</sup>envisioning and experimenting with a society based on cooperative labour, communal ownership, and the equal distribution of wealth. In addition to socialism, spiritually oriented communities also played a role in the development of ICs.

### 2.3.3 Findhorn Foundation- An Exemplar

The Findhorn Foundation is both a continuation and a departure from this historical evolution. Like its predecessors, The Findhorn Foundation can be seen as a contemporary manifestation of utopian ideals, seeking to build a community motivated by its vision of a better world. This is achieved by focusing on spirituality-based practices and the environment within the community, which serves as a demonstration of its beliefs (Findhorn, n.d). It also echoes the contemporary challenges of the 21st century regarding ecological crises and demonstrates a response by practising their ideals within the community.

Despite the similarities, there are also notable differences in how Findhorn presents its approach. Unlike many previous ICs driven by a collective political belief like the Ferrer Colony of Stelton<sup>24</sup>, or social ideology like the Oneida Community<sup>25</sup> or Fourierite Phalanges, Findhorn places an emphasis on individual growth and inner

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<sup>23</sup> Fourier's concept of the "phalanx," a self-contained community organised around the principle of "attractive labour" (Gibert, 2017), influenced the development of numerous Fourierist communities in France and the United States. These communities often combined religious or esoteric teachings with social and cultural experimentation, and communities such as Point Loma, Halcyon, and Krotona have been recognised for their contributions to social and cultural innovation (Claes & Sargent, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> The Ferrer Colony at Stelton, New Jersey (1915-1953) was an anarchist community organized around a libertarian free school. It dissolved due to ideological factionalism, financial struggles, and Cold War repression—demonstrating anarchist communes' difficulty sustaining across generations (Avrich, 1980).

<sup>25</sup> The Oneida Community (New York, 1848-1881) practiced religious perfectionism, communal property, and "complex marriage" (shared sexual partners). Despite economic success manufacturing silverware, the community dissolved its radical social arrangements under legal pressure and generational conflict, reorganizing as a conventional corporation—demonstrating the difficulty of sustaining ideological radicalism across generations (Klaw, 1993).

guidance. Furthermore, although the founders established the community, they maintained central charismatic leadership for only a short time, and the overall functioning was gradually handed over to members, resulting in collective leadership over time. This approach suggests a shift towards decentralisation in community participation and governance. This evolution also demonstrates how intentional communities adapt their pedagogical strategies while maintaining their function as alternative social institutions.

Understanding the Findhorn Foundation within this historical context sheds light on how it functions not merely as an alternative lifestyle choice, but rather as part of a tradition of pedagogical experimentation aimed at developing capacities for cooperative and sustainable social arrangements. Additionally, it aligns with the ideas of contemporary Intentional Communities, which are distinguished from their predecessors by several key criteria. In the next section, I discuss how the Findhorn Foundation can be further analysed as a contemporary IC as a dynamic utopia, based on the framework proposed by Robert Schehr.

### *Contemporary Intentional Communities-Utopian Projects to Dynamic Utopias*

The Findhorn Foundation was established between the 1960s and 1970s, historically attributed to a wave of “community revival” (Miller, 1992; Lee, 2016), influenced by factors such as challenging capitalism and building grassroots countercultural movements. Schehr defined this shift as “dynamic utopias” (1997), referring to communities that actively challenge dominant ideologies through their daily practices, rather than seeking isolation.

### *Contemporary Intentional Communities as Dynamic Entities and Fields*

Sociologist Robert Schehr proposed specific characteristics that distinguish contemporary Intentional Communities from their predecessors through the wave of change that started taking place in the 1960s. These changes emphasise smaller sizes than before, egalitarian-based governance rather than charismatic authoritarian leaders, a focus on economic sustainability, and new financial models of participation, as opposed to giving up possessions and resources. Lastly, they

adopt an open approach with an increasing focus on networking and outreach, rather than a preference for isolation and strong boundaries (Schehr, 1997). Findhorn Foundation aligns with these criteria, having evolved from being founded to being managed by an umbrella organisation, i.e., the New Findhorn Association (NFA) (*Home –NFA*, n.d.), encouraging financial contributions from members and strongly emphasising education and demonstration as a part of their purpose.

Schehr (1997) proposes that contemporary Intentional Communities function as laboratories for understanding alternative ways of living, are not merely resisting dominant ideologies but actively challenging them through their daily practices and localised perspectives on self-governance, production, consumption, and lifestyles. Zach Rubin's (2020) ethnographic research explores how intentional communities function as "collective action reservoirs," where a shared lifestyle is also a daily political choice. However, this characterisation risks overstating their transformative appeal and understating the complexities of reproducing the challenges they supposedly resist. Intentional Communities are, at heart, microcosms of society and broader issues of power, marginalisation, and poverty also reproduce within the communities. The Findhorn Foundation, like many intentional communities, must also navigate the tensions between its ideals and the practical realities of survival within the global capitalist system.

While extreme examples like Jonestown<sup>26</sup> and Heaven's Gate<sup>27</sup> highlight the potential of abuse and exploitation within isolated communities, more common factors like interpersonal conflicts, lack of long-term commitment or financial instability also contribute to high rates of statistical failures (Rubin et al, 2019).

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<sup>26</sup> Jonestown (Guyana, 1974-1978) began as a socialist commune promoting racial equality but devolved into an authoritarian cult under Jim Jones. On November 18, 1978, 918 members died in mass murder-suicide, revealing how charismatic leadership without accountability can transform utopian communities into sites of extreme coercion and violence (Hall, 1987).

<sup>27</sup> Heaven's Gate (1974-1997) was a UFO religious community whose 39 members committed coordinated suicide in 1997, believing they would ascend to an alien spacecraft. Unlike coercive cults, members appeared to participate voluntarily, illustrating how totalistic ideologies can lead to self-destruction even without overt violence or captivity (Balch & Taylor, 2002)

Despite high failure rates, Schehr (1997) believes that contemporary Intentional Communities serve as valuable laboratories for understanding alternative ways of living and organising society. By studying both the successes and failures of these experiments, we gain insight into the possibilities and limitations of utopian visions, as well as the desire to create more just, sustainable, and fulfilling ways of life (Zárata, 2025; Bohill, 2010). Understanding ICs as dynamic utopias thus emphasises both a futuristic orientation and collective aspirations that characterise the nature of the community. However, in its quest and residential structure, it also becomes a social field of action with its distinct logic, rules and capital. This positions them simultaneously as social fields with internal dynamics and as social movements oriented towards broader social transformation.

## 2.4 First Theoretical Lens: Intentional Communities as Social and Educational Fields: A Bourdiesian Analysis

Bourdieu's field theory could be used as a framework for interpreting intentional communities as distinctive social spaces with their own internal logic and dynamics. ICs thus actively construct this field with distinct boundaries that differentiate them from mainstream society while generating internal structures based on community-specific values. The members acting as players within the field are expected to demonstrate ideological alignment with the objectives and behavioural conformity in creating a coherent field. Thus, the field structure simultaneously enables collective identity formation while reproducing internal stratifications, as members navigate between individual agency and communal expectations within bounded social spaces.

### 2.4.1 The Community as a Social and Educational Field

Field theory, as developed by Bourdieu, conceptualises social spaces as "relational space" (Hilgers & Mangez, 2015, p. 5) and as structured arenas in which members compete for specific forms of legitimacy and capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). It operates through specific rules, actors, and interactions that create norms, forms,

and types of capital to be utilised within the field (Hilgers & Mangez, 2015). A field is thus characterised by stakes, meaning the resources worth competing for, which could be economic, cultural, social or symbolic capital, positions which individuals could occupy based on the above capital, dispositions or internalised habits that shape how members perceive and act within the field and also struggle over what constitutes legitimate practice, knowledge or authority within the field (Bourdieu, 1993). Fligstein and McAdam (2012) further clarify this by defining it as “social order in which actors (who can be individual or collective) are attuned to and interact with one another on the basis of shared (which is not to say consensual) understandings about the purposes of the field, relationships to others in the field (including who has power and why), and the rules governing legitimate action in the field” (p.9) with membership, boundaries and shared understanding creating a stable field of action. Educational fields, by extension, would become arenas that involve struggles and contestations over what counts as legitimate knowledge, who has the authority to transmit it, how learning should occur and what outcomes constitute success (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Agin, 2018).

The Findhorn Foundation, as a social field, operates within boundaries defined by shared aims, governing structures, and membership norms, while being connected through social and cultural ties that create embodied learning environments.

Kalinowski's (2017) study of intentional communities demonstrates that they are bound by rules, hierarchies, and valued knowledge systems within their alternative spaces. The Findhorn Foundation over the last six decades has developed specific symbolic spiritual and ecological knowledge and practices based on the founders' principles, vision and community evolution, reflecting what Bourdieu terms as “historical constitution of the field” (Bourdieu, 1993, p.74), evolving from a small spiritual community to a more complex and differentiated field with multiple positions and power relations (Forster & Wilhelmus, 2005). Conceição, Mota et al. (2024) employs the concept of field in their work on two Portuguese intentional communities to analyse how governance and income-sharing structures affect members' social capital within these communities. Additionally, the IC, as a field,



exists in relation to other fields, including economic, political, and social fields, at local, national, and global levels, which are navigated. At the same time, the Findhorn Foundation seeks resources, legitimacy, and influence while navigating structural pressures and constraints in its efforts to create a viable alternative social arrangement. The Findhorn Foundation could also be considered an educational field because it has explicit stakes aligned with its vision and ambition, with differentiated positions such as founders, members, visitors, and valued capital forms within the community, as well as ongoing struggles to maintain its position based on founding ideas and pragmatic sustainability. However, few studies have directly examined intentional communities as educational fields, and even within these studies, the focus is often on incidental learning (Brown, 2002; Gilsenan, 2013; Sullivan, 2016; Stevens-Wood, 2024).

#### 2.4.2 Capital, Illusio and Habitus in Community Contexts

Understanding the Findhorn Foundation as an educational field further requires elaborating on the several key Bourdiesian concepts and their operations within this context.

##### *2.4.2.A Capital: Reputation, Tenure or Community Living Skills*

Central to field theory is Bourdieu's concept of capital, understood as resources that hold value within specific fields and can be accumulated, exchanged, or converted (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu identifies multiple forms of capital, such as economic capital (referring to financial resources), cultural capital (referring to, among others, knowledge, skills, credentials, and cultural competencies), social capital (meaning networks, relationships, and connections), and symbolic capital (meaning prestige, recognition, and honour). Crucially, capital is field-specific, meaning what is valuable in one field may be worthless in another. Within educational fields, capital shapes not only what knowledge is valued, but who has authority to transmit it, whose learning is recognised as legitimate and which outcomes are deemed successful. Members within fields possess capital or work to accumulate it by being in the field and playing by its rules. Understanding Findhorn as an educational field thus

requires examining which forms of capital operate within it; multiple capital forms may be at work, and how capital influences educational experiences and outcomes.

#### *2.4.2B Illusio: Shared Belief in Community Value*

Bourdieu's conception of '*Illusio*', which refers to the belief held by the players within the field regarding the game and that it is worth investing in and that the stakes are meaningful and worthy of one's time, energy and commitment (Bourdieu, 1998). Rowlands and Rawolle (2013) further describe *illusio* as "a name to the belief that people maintain in the games that are played in everyday life that allow a person to take the objective of these games seriously". *Illusio* serves an important role in preserving participants' sense of possibility and agency. It explains why members continue investing in the fields even when rewards are uncertain or deferred. For instance, activists organise despite the lack of immediate results. *Illusio* also helps determine how and whether fields can sustain themselves as members reinforce the field logics, and those who do not buy into the *illusio* opt out or do not feel the field is worth playing (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). *Illusio* also helps recognise legitimate players from outsiders, thereby helping set the boundaries of the field.

*Illusio* operates in relation to *doxa*, which he defined as "what is essential goes without saying because it comes without saying" (Bourdieu, 1977). Throop and Murphy also explain it as "the process through which socially and culturally constituted ways of perceiving, evaluating and behaving become accepted as unquestioned, self-evident and taken for granted" (2002, p.189). Thus, *doxa* sets the rules of the game that must be accepted for the *illusio* to develop, as one cannot invest in a field without accepting the foundational premise as given. For example, a doxic belief in the importance of formal education as a means of growth leads to the *illusio* that one is invested in the idea that credentials have value and that one is being developed.

*Illusio* is used by Crossley (1999) while characterising ICs as "working utopias" In the context of ICs, this can be understood as the shared belief among members that

their alternative way of living is valuable and worth pursuing, despite the challenges and uncertainties it entails. This belief is not only crucial for sustaining communities but also serves as a powerful motivation to share the message with the broader world. Thus, the *Illusio* here is more than just a cognitive belief; it provides a motivational foundation for learning and an emotional and embodied investment through living in the community as an economic participant.

Unlike most social contexts, where *illusio* is implicit, ICs usually make this investment explicit through their norms, practices, or governance processes to encourage active commitment to shared values and purposes. In Findhorn, they cultivate it through origin stories, community narratives, and by positioning the significance and uniqueness of the Findhorn Foundation within larger historical and spiritual contexts (Sutcliffe, 2000), which could manifest in members' beliefs that the community's approach and vision for social transformation are both valid and meaningful. However, these narratives do not merely inspire investment; they naturalise fundamental assumptions (*doxa*) about reality within the community. This belief could influence sustained participation and help even in the face of challenges, providing what Crossley (1999, p.815) terms "a sense of the possibility of an alternative". Critically, one may ask if *illusio* enables genuine alternative viability or primarily provides psychological comfort that sustains investment regardless of actual transformative capacity. This question also highlights the educational dimension of how communities seek to cultivate members' relationships to purpose and value, and whether such cultivation is empowerment or socialisation for masking field reproduction and compliance. Newcomers are simultaneously learning what to care about (*illusio*) and what cannot be questioned (*doxa*), and maybe also decide who continues their journey in the community and who opts out.

#### *2.4.2C Community Habitus: Embodied Learning Processes*

Crossley (1999) further elaborates that working utopias or ICs are sites of producing and reframing knowledge through the creation of "movement *habitus*", which refers to the embodied dispositions, skills and ways of being that individuals acquire

through their social experiences and interactions (Bourdieu, 1990). In addition to merely intellectually agreeing with community principles, participation in ICs can also involve developing a kind of “community *habitus*” that shapes how members think and act in the world. At the Findhorn Foundation, multiple mechanisms could be said to contribute to the “community *habitus*” as described by the members. The role of daily practices, such as *attunement*<sup>28</sup> sessions before meetings, spatial and living arrangements within the community, material culture, and artefacts, connects the members' bodies and minds. Additionally, distinctive vocabulary and communication norms seem to shape perception and expression (Litfin, 2014). Through shared vocabulary, actions, and understanding, members can develop what Crossley (1999, p. 817) describes as “a feel for the game” specific to the community’s social field. However, this process could also function as a mechanism of social control, potentially marginalising those who fail to adopt the *habitus* or who question its underlying assumptions.

Beaupre-Gateau and Chokri (2022) also offer the idea of “protofields” (potential new fields) where the emergence of a new *habitus* results in a “fieldisation” (p.32) of the community of practice. It could be said that this “community *habitus*” tends to operate in ways that become second nature to established members, functioning as an “embodied history” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 56) and contributing to the creation of a sense of coherence and belonging within the community. On the other hand, it could also obscure power relations and limit critical reflection on community norms. Additionally, the “community *habitus*” could interact with members' existing dispositions and socially constructed understanding of the world. Where some members may experience significant “cleft *habitus*” described as “gap between the conditions of *habitus* formation and the conditions of its realisation (Perger, 2023,

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<sup>28</sup> A time to bring together a group, usually in silence and holding hands, before beginning any task or experience. This can happen several times a day, before eating, before working, before a workshop session or even before a longer bus journey. Departments and work areas also hold weekly attunements, which can take several hours and serve as a time for personal sharing and bringing the group together in a more in-depth way (Bogliolo & Newfeld, 2002, p.13).

p.1), others may find greater alignment and provide an understanding of the different trajectories of member integrations and exits.

Significantly, both changing existing *habitus* and cultivating new *habitus* are products of educational practices and processes which are not accidental but planned and deliberate.

#### 2.4.2 D Field Dynamics as Educational Opportunity

The *illusio* and the *habitus* formation discussed above are taking place within a specific boundary. Understanding intentional communities as a field helps to see how these educational processes are embedded in their social structures, rather than being separated as discrete activities. Here, learning occurs through participating in the field, investing in the community *illusio*, and embodying the community *habitus*. Could the development of the '*habitus*' within the ICs also be seen as a form of 'pedagogical action', whereby members collectively enact their shared values and aspirations?

As such, working utopias in the form of ICs, such as the Findhorn Foundation, can be positioned as social fields maintained through knowledge, social organisation, and practices developed and disseminated to sustain them. The creation and maintenance of the '*illusio*' and '*habitus*' are active processes and not incidental. By providing a space where participants can experience and embody alternative practices of living and being, Intentional Communities like the Findhorn Foundation enable their members to "learn how to practise differently; how to perceive, think and act differently" (Crossley, 1999, p. 817), although questions remain about whether such learning genuinely challenges dominant structures or merely provides an alternative lifestyle, leaving broader inequalities intact.

Understanding how the Findhorn Foundation operates as a field requires examining the process of field establishment and how the founders' visions were transformed into durable social structures, practices, and transmissible knowledge. This process is fundamental to understanding education within the community because it is not just about communicating ideas and stories but materialising them into institutional

arrangements of what can be known, valued and practised. Field establishment would reveal how educational content, purposes, and processes emerge from the historical constitution of the field itself and from the process through which communities become sites of learning, transformation, and reproduction, including how they potentially reproduce power and contestation.

## 2.5 From Social Fields to Social Movements: Intentional Communities as Prefigurative Spaces of Learning and Social Change

The creation of the field dynamics of intentional communities ultimately serves broader social transformation purposes. As dynamic utopias, they function simultaneously as working experiments and vehicles for knowledge generation and outreach. This dual function of internal field development and external participation in social movement positions intentional communities as unique educational spaces that bridge individual transformation and collective social change.

Members within intentional communities, through their participation, also align with the idea of ‘prefigurative politics’(Boggs,1977), referring to “how activists embody and enact, within their activism, the sociality and practices they foster for broader society” (Fians, 2022). The daily practices within these communities serve as working models of alternative social organisations, from shared childcare arrangements to local food production systems, demonstrating that different ways of organising society and living within it are not only possible but also viable. Although for some, Intentional Communities may function as an escape mechanism rather than a genuine prefigurative space. Research by Bohill suggests “intentional community living is an ethics as praxis—a truly practical philosophy” (2010; p.viii), whereas Hull (2004) extracts the potential of ICs as places of community healing and Sanford’s (2017) book explores various lessons of democracy, sustainability and collective living through his exploration of communities focusing on the potential of social change as an inherent quality.

### 2.5.1 Prefigurative Politics: Learning through Alternative Arrangements

Intentional Communities and its members could thus be said to engage in a form of ‘prefigurative politics’ in action that are “not just about ‘enacting a new imaginary by sheer force of will’ (Raekstad & Gradin, 2020,p. 62); but also “a relational process that seeks to sustain those social connections and institutions that can bring the new world that activists desire into being”(Westwell, 2020). Sargisson’s (2012) paper emphasises the Self-Other relation as the basis of social and political relations and how it could contribute to the worldview. The idea of prefigurative politics here could then also suggest experimentation with a different conception of the Self-Other view or alignment. Rather than simply critiquing existing social structures or mainstream individualism, in which selves relate to others competitively or contractually, ICs actively demonstrate the possibilities in which selves emerge through and with others, thereby providing an experience of an alternative way of social, economic, and cultural arrangements (Melucci, 1996). This could operate at a practical level; for example, income sharing makes others' well-being a part of the self's material prosperity, and ecological considerations require the self to think beyond humans and include nature, the planet, and future generations. As van de Sande describes, “practice of prefiguration is one in which a collective emulates in the present the attitudes, social relations, culture and organisation it envisions for the future, through ‘experimental and experiential’ means” (2015, p 189)

This prefigurative approach creates educational pathways that extend beyond the community. Litfin (2014) describes three main pathways for this knowledge exchange: direct influence through educational programs and visitors; indirect influence through the documentation and sharing of alternative practices; and network effects, in which community members carry learned practices into their interactions with mainstream society, creating avenues for broader impact. Thus, the experiential dimension at the Findhorn Foundation helps transform abstract

ideals into practical skills in consensus decision-making, sustainable living, and collective resource management.

### 2.5.2 Social Movements and Educational Implications

Intentional communities are one kind of social movement. There are, however, some differences in their primary mode of politics. While movements seek to transform broader society through mobilisation, pressure or confrontation, ICs may seek to create autonomous spaces where alternatives are lived daily rather than demanded externally. Thus, what distinguishes them is their sustained residential, total-life character, meaning members do not just episodically participate while primarily living in mainstream society, but reorganise their daily existence around an alternative premise. Although this is not absolute, some ICs may withdraw entirely from mainstream society, whereas others, such as Christiania, emerged from protest sites. In his study (2021), Rubin characterised the Dancing Rabbit ecovillage<sup>16</sup> as a “collective action reservoir” in which members consider their shared lifestyle a form of political engagement. Although Raekstad and Gradin propose that the primary feature of pre-figurative living is praxis and “if people are to implement a free, equal, and democratic society, they need to develop the right powers, drives, and consciousness in order to do so, which can only be done through practice” (2020, p.59) Clarence-Smith’s (2019) work on prefigurative utopianism at Auroville suggests that merely intentional community living is not living prefiguratively; rather, there are practices or initiatives within which are utopian.

The emphasis on praxis thus creates distinct educational dynamics, as learning does not occur solely through workshops, sessions, or campaign participation, though these may exist, but through an embodied immersion in the community. The ambition of lived social change as an approach makes intentional communities, such as Findhorn, valuable sites for understanding social movements and their influence. In the quest for prefigurative politics, it creates and generates both individual and collective knowledge, which then influences both movement members and observers. While prefigurative politics involves dialogue, struggle, and criticality



(Webb, 2019), making intentional communities inherently educational, the educational theorisation of ICs lies in understanding and studying their intentionality and practices holistically, rather than focusing solely on their informal influence on individuals and the broader society.

Further, the learning processes within ICs are complex and multifaceted, involving both individual and collective transformation. As participants engage in the collective pursuits of '*illusio*' (belief in the value of the community goals) within intentional communities, they may undergo significant learning experiences that can contribute to their '*habitus*' (embodied dispositions and practices), which is probably determined, influenced and controlled by the 'field' (shared space) of the Intentional Community. Critically, this process also raises important questions about power dynamics within communities: who shapes these learning experiences, whose knowledge is privileged, and how might existing social hierarchies be reproduced within these alternative spaces?

This learning and knowledge generation is comprehensively studied through Social Movement Learning (SML) as part of the study of Social Movements (Choudry, 2015; Foley, 1999). In the following section, I build on the connections established by aligning the Findhorn Foundation with the scholarship on SML and explaining why it is important to go beyond the understanding of Social Movement Learning.

### 2.5.3 Social Movement Learning (SML) and Education

Social movement learning (SML) explores the learning processes within social movements. Hall and Clover describe SML as a) learning by persons who are part of any social movement and b) learning by persons outside of a social movement because of the actions taken or simply by the existence of social movements (2005, pp. 584-589). This positioning emphasises the learner-level, individualistic focus, with limited emphasis on the collective and reciprocal nature of learning and educational practice. To address the gap in collective dimensions, Deborah Kilgore's (1999) 'collective learning' theory analyses how learning operates within social movements and how social movements create and benefit from shared knowledge

and a collective identity among movement participants. Kilgore (1999) emphasises the importance of collective groups both as learners and producers of knowledge. The primary distinction for Kilgore (1999) is the foregrounding of social justice within movements, which distinguishes it from an individualistic perspective on learning and also motivates the social movement. Thus, the groups play an important role in shaping the goals and strategies, and, through collective action, provide continuity and a sense of purpose to social movements. However, collective learning within social movements is not value-free. It operates within the historical and social contexts in which it exists (Kilgore, 1999), which may allude to both the social field and properties of the IC, as well as the broader social context. The Findhorn Foundation attempts to exemplify this collective learning approach through its vision of a “radically transformed world” (Findhorn.org, n.d), achieved through individual and collective action. Where individual learning contributes to agency and identity within the community, collective learning focuses on group identity, shared meaning and understanding their role as collective actors within the broader society. Nevertheless, although Kilgore’s concept of collective learning seems to hint at the need for educative processes, it falls short of delving further into what that means.

The gap in the reciprocal nature of education and learning has also been discussed in a systematic review by Atta and Holst (2023), which highlights the rise of empirical research grounded in lessons learned within the movements. However, they also note limitations within SMLs, including a lack of grounded theory and a tendency to revert to individualistic perspectives of learning that overlook the collective dimensions. Additionally, the studies often focus on incidental, informal, and accidental learning among participants and society in the study of the movement. Moreover, aligning with Kilgore (1999), they discuss how the creation, influence, and impact of collective movements among educators, as well as the intentional origins of social movements, planned communication to attract and retain members, and continued efforts to sustain the social movement, are rarely examined. Niesz et al. (2018) also advocated for a unified scholarship between the

two fields in their review of the connections between education and social movements, describing movements as educators and knowledge creators, both of which are essential in shaping formal education policy.

The Findhorn Foundation, with its well-documented written history through memoirs, files, and publications, and its presented intentional approach to social change, thus provides a valuable case study for examining the IC beyond a mere social movement. The community functions simultaneously as a learning laboratory by experimenting with alternative approaches, as a knowledge incubator, as a movement, and as a pedagogical demonstration. It challenges conventional distinctions between individual and collective learning, formal and informal education and learning and social action.

## 2.6 Intentional Communities as Educational Microcosms

This chapter began with discussions of key tensions in the purpose and execution of education for society, and how Intentional Communities, as social microcosms with specific features such as social change ambitions and intentional living, can serve as a case study for observing and analysing these tensions in practice. Intentional Communities hold potential for utopian aspirations and social change. However, the process that enables both of the above to occur is education. Having positioned intentional communities as fields with distinctive *habitus* and *illusio*, as social movements engaged in prefigurative politics, and as educational environments, the following section elaborates the six interconnected dimensions that reveal the community's educational potential and its inherent tensions.

Using the Findhorn Foundation as a case study could provide insight into how intentional communities function as educative environments. Although the community has evolved from a spiritual commune in the 1960s to an internationally recognised ecovillage and learning centre, education, both internal and external, has remained central to its identity and purpose. However, it is important to approach the community's self-presentation critically, distinguishing between aspirational ideals and actual practices and recognising that educational experiences within the

community may be highly variable and shaped by power dynamics and other factors that may not be immediately apparent. Some grey literature, such as Castro (1996), discusses this disparity, while Kidd's (n.d) blog posts critique the foundation, or, more recently, the impact of COVID-19 and its repercussions on community restructuring. (Smith, n.d) wherein redundancies caused internal strife and the burning of the Sanctuary (BBC, 2021).

Nevertheless, once the WHY of the community is established (through the founders' intentionality, the FOR WHAT has been put forth (through the professed social change), and the HOW, WHERE, and WHEN), the educational interplay within the community influences them. The educational dimensions of Intentional communities are thus complex, multifaceted, and deeply intertwined within organisational structures, governance systems, practices, space, and environment, as well as founders/originators' ideals and aspirations, creating distinctive educational environments that differ significantly from both traditional educational institutions and other community or social movement organisations. At the same time, they could perhaps offer a glimpse of what an educative society might look like while revealing critical tensions that illuminate broader educational challenges.

### 2.6.1 Internal Educational Practices: Integrated Learning Systems

The Findhorn Foundation has distinctive educational practices that seem to integrate spiritual, ecological, and communitarian dimensions, and they operate at multiple levels. Formal induction programs, such as the Experience Week, serve as an introduction to community life, providing an overview of the community's history, core principles, and its enactment (Forster & Wilhelmus, 2005). On the other hand, everyday interactions, work experience rituals, and decision-making processes seem to be governed by core principles and a shared vocabulary of practices, which will be elaborated in Chapters 5 and 6. Forster and Wilhelmus stated that Findhorn Foundation had a few key individuals who created a transition from a single entity to “a diverse collection of individuals and organisations with wider interests and decision making” (2005, p.374) and maybe that could be seen as

having developed some “institutionalised reflexivity” understood as capabilities of institutions which keeps them open to change, by a regular review of its structures and practices, encouraging initiatives and creating space for adaptation and maybe representing a capacity for institutional learning.

### 2.6.2 Educational Outreach and Knowledge Dissemination

Beyond its internal learning system, it also disseminates knowledge to broader audiences. While internal education focuses on sustaining community values and their observance, the Findhorn Foundation also operates through multiple channels to achieve global reach. Notably, the foundation is known for its thematic workshops and programs on specific aspects of sustainable living, ecological practices, or community building, in an attempt to both transmit information and create immersive experiences that engage participants not only in the subject matter but also through a sampling of the Findhorn community life (Findhorn Foundation, n.d). Furthermore, the foundation has also disseminated knowledge through publications, books, digital media, and participation in wider networks, such as the Global Ecovillage Network and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). As Litfin (2014, p. 173) notes, the community seeks to position itself and its knowledge as “practical solutions to global challenges,” a laboratory for sustainable living practices, rather than primarily as a spiritual centre. Although this self-representation is also selective and raises questions about what knowledge is disseminated versus what remains unspoken, as well as how intentional communities represent themselves to the wider world, often glossing over difficult internal realities to maintain their standing.

### 2.6.3 Navigating the Tensions between Individual and Collective Needs

These internal and external educational functions operate within and are shaped by fundamental tensions that characterise ICs as educational spaces. The first of these concerns the relationship between individual autonomy and collective coherence, as members of an Intentional Community choose to be part of a collective as part of

their individual development plan. This dynamic could exemplify both the educational processes and the hidden challenges posed by disparities or power dynamics within the community. The analysis of how Findhorn Foundation manages the individual-collective dichotomy may reveal mechanisms that could inform broader educational approaches of balancing personal autonomy with collective coherence.

### *Mechanism for Continuity and Change*

A second critical tension concerns education's dual function of preservation and transformation, or, as I term it, the mechanisms of continuity and change. Education within intentional communities can also be seen as serving a dual function: maintaining and sustaining the field and contributing to its evolution through the commitment and adaptation of its members. This duality parallels the fundamental tension in education between preservation and transformation. Kanter (1972) identified a tendency for communities to move from charismatic, flexible beginnings towards more institutionalised, structured forms as they mature. The Findhorn Foundation appears to demonstrate this trajectory, having evolved from a founder-led organisation to a more complex entity (Forster & Wilhelmus, 2005). However, this evolution may also contain contested perspectives and power struggles that are obscured by the community's official narrative of its path. This evolutionary pattern suggests that ICs may offer insights into educational adaptation and how institutions can maintain core purposes while responding to changing circumstances and membership.

### *Field Dynamics and Knowledge Validation*

Understanding how these tensions operate requires examining the field dynamics and knowledge validation process through which Findhorn constitutes itself as an educational space. Suppose we consider Bourdieu's concepts of field, *habitus*, and *illusio* within Intentional Communities and understand them as distinct social and educational fields with forms of capital, embodied *habitus*, and shared motivations, then the analysis of how intentional communities develop and sustain *illusio* and

*habitus* may illuminate broader patterns of connections between fields and education in alternative educational spaces. The explicit nature of these processes within IC's potentially could offer clearer visibility into power relations and knowledge legitimization dynamics that operate more subtly in conventional educational settings.

### *Collective Learning and Social Movement Education*

These field dynamics do not operate only at the individual level; they also involve collective learning processes characteristic of social movements. Incorporating Kilgore's (1999) understanding of collective learning alongside more individual-focused theories could help capture how knowledge is generated, transmitted, and transformed within social movements, such as Intentional Communities, as both individual and collective processes. This framing suggests that intentional communities, as social movements, function as both educators and learners, deliberately cultivating knowledge, and as sites of prefigurative social movements, become sites where alternative educational processes emerge through both formal and informal means in daily practices.

### *Embodying Educational Utopia*

Synthesising the above dimensions of internal practices, outreach, navigating tensions, field dynamics and collective learning, Findhorn's attempt to embody educational utopianism in practice. As discussed earlier, education can be understood as a necessary utopia—a vision of possibility directed towards a desirable future that, while not yet realised, provides direction and purpose. Intentional communities, such as the Findhorn Foundation, could also be seen as attempting to embody the utopian impulse (though the gap between the utopian vision and lived reality provides a productive tension for critical analysis). They could also be seen as spaces where the path towards social transformation emerges through ongoing experimentation (Process utopia, Harvey, 2000). However, they could also be spaces where cultish and charismatic leaders take control and create problematic dystopias. They could be seen as spaces for 'education of desire'

(Levitas, 1991), cultivating not only skills and knowledge but also aspirational orientations towards alternative social arrangements. They also function as a 'working utopia' (Crossley, 1999), demonstrating an alternative reality rather than an abstract idea, and perhaps thus keep alive the utopian dimension that Webb (2009) argues is essential to education's transformative potential.

#### 2.6.4 Critical Tensions: Power, Inclusion and Educational Processes

However, critically examining Findhorn's educational dimensions cannot ignore the power dynamics, exclusions and contradictions that complicate its utopian aspirations. While intentional communities, such as the Findhorn Foundation, aspire to create alternative educational and social environments, they are unable to escape the challenges of power dynamics, exclusion, and marginalisation that mirror those in broader society. Whether it is in the form of implicit hierarchies of knowers or learners based on the spiritual capital that members could bring into the community, or the disproportionate influence over what counts as legitimate knowledge and how it needs to be transmitted (Sargisson, 2007), it creates educational inequalities that contradict the stated values of egalitarianism and also raises questions about conformity versus authentic diversity. The pressure to comply with specific spiritual practices and ecological values, while presenting itself as universal, may privilege particular socio-cultural perspectives, leading to what Bourdieu describes as "symbolic violence," in which seemingly consensual educational processes mask power differentials (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1990). These tensions offer opportunities to critically examine the formation and sustenance of the field from the perspective of reproducing similar environments that most members actually want to escape.

Based on the theoretical perspectives of field theory and its analysis of institutionalisation, social movements, and their attention to intentionality and purpose, and on education as the mediating element, these provide the analytical focus for this study. The following research questions guide the investigation into the educational significance of the Findhorn Foundation.



## 2.7 Research Questions

The Research Questions guiding the case study are as follows

- 1. RQ 1 - How did the founders' vision and educational aspirations translate into the community's practices and its field establishment?**
  1. How did the founders' beliefs and narratives influence the educational intentionality of the community?
  2. What insights emerge about educational purpose, content and curriculum in their approach and presentation?
- 2. RQ 2 How do members describe their experience of educational participation at Findhorn Foundation?**
  1. What attracts members to Findhorn, and why do they stay?
  2. How does participation shape their learning and development?
- 3. RQ 3 What theoretical insights (if any) emerge about education from studying the practices of the Findhorn Foundation?**

## 2.8 Towards an Integrated Framework

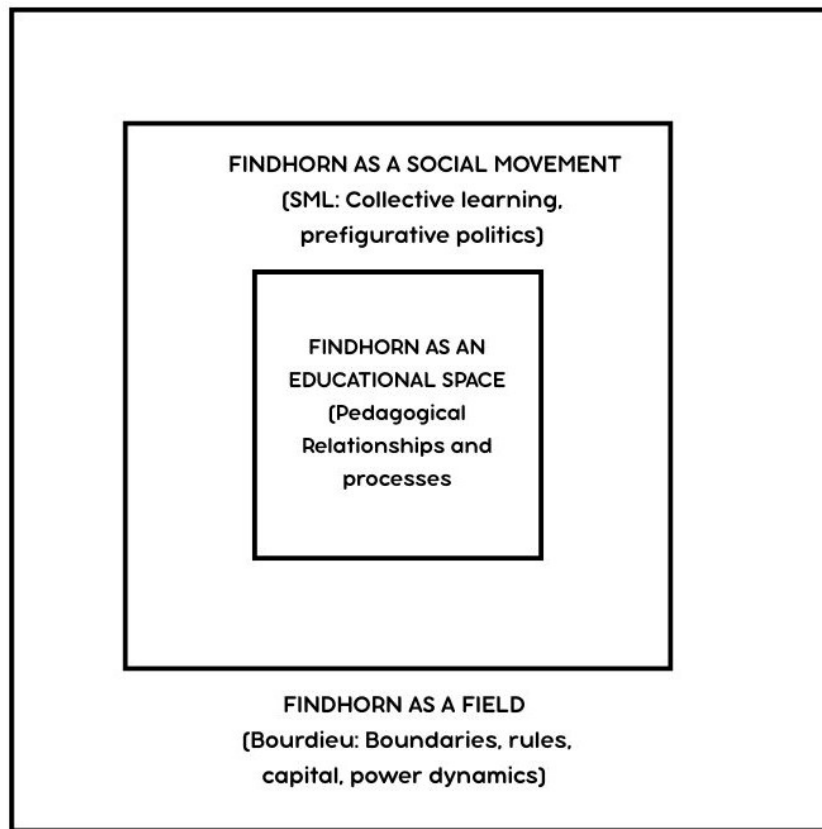


*Figure 2: Theoretical Positioning of Findhorn. (Author Generated)*

The above image (Fig. 2) recaps the embedded theoretical perspectives for understanding intentional communities as educational spaces. The dimensions mentioned above are not discrete categories but facets of a complex educational field. However, applying any single framework in isolation would be inadequate in capturing the complex educational dynamics present in communities like the Findhorn Foundation. The integrated approach must account for how field dynamics shape the learning processes, while recognising the community's social movement functions. It must examine how utopian aspirations drive educational innovation

whilst also critically examining how power and exclusion operate within these spaces. Thus, a theoretical integration provides the foundation for an analysis that can reveal both the educational potential and inherent limitations of intentional communities as *educative communities*.

## 2.9 Conclusion

This chapter situates the Findhorn Foundation within the broader theoretical landscapes of education, community studies, and social movements to establish a comprehensive framework for understanding intentional communities as educative societies. The analysis began by examining education's tensions (individualism and collectivism, continuity and change) that position education as a necessary utopia with a focus that exists beyond formal institutions in what Clarke (1948) terms as "educative societies." Building on this foundation, the chapter uses Bourdieu's field theory to reveal how communities like Findhorn develop specific forms of cultural capital, *habitus* and *illusio* that shape educational experience within bounded social fields. Simultaneously, the examination of intentional communities as sites of prefigurative politics (Fians, 2022) has illuminated how these communities function as social movements that actively demonstrate alternative social arrangements, rather than merely critiquing existing structures.

The integration of social movement learning theory, particularly Kilgore's (1999) concept of collective learning, provides analytical depth to understand how knowledge is generated, transmitted and transformed within intentional communities. This multi-theoretical approach reveals intentional communities as a complex educational phenomenon that cannot be adequately understood through any single theoretical lens.

However, while the concept of educative community provides an ambition, it does not yet build a theoretical bridge to Intentional Communities. The Findhorn Foundation, as a contemporary intentional community, is then positioned as a field and a working utopia (Crossley, 1999), where I have explored how Bourdieu's concepts of field can be applied to the Findhorn Foundation and how *habitus* and

*illusio* operate within this field. I have also examined Intentional Communities as social movements and sites of prefigurative politics (Fians, 2022), where alternative social arrangements are actively practised and demonstrated. This analysis also suggests exploring the critical tensions within the educational functions of intentional communities. There is always a gap between professed ideals and lived realities, such as power, exclusion, and economic barriers and even alternative spaces may not escape broader inequalities. These contradictions provide productive tensions for analysis rather than reasons to dismiss the educational significance of such communities.

The theoretical positioning explored in this chapter requires integration to systematically analyse how these dimensions integrate and interact within the specific context of intentional communities, which will be outlined in the following chapter.

## 3. Integrative Social Movement Education and Learning Framework (I-SMLE)

### 3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, I positioned the Findhorn Foundation simultaneously as an educational society, a distinctive social field, and a working social movement with utopian intentions. While the Findhorn Foundation community has been studied in many areas like sustainability (Tinsley & George, 2006; Copeland et al, 2023), community development (Dawson, 2009,2010), and others (Browne & Dinnie, 2016; Vine, 2018), a comprehensive study that captures the educational approach of the community and situates it within the larger context of educational practice and research is missing. Such a study is valuable for several reasons. It addresses a gap in educational research on alternative educational spaces, which remain underexamined despite their potential to show educational possibilities. Also, ICs like Findhorn constitute social laboratories in which educational purposes, processes, and outcomes emerge organically from community life rather than being determined by curriculum or policy. Examining ICs that position themselves as models for addressing global challenges such as the ecological crisis and social fragmentation, understanding their educational dimensions may provide insights applicable beyond intentional communities to educational theory and practice more broadly.

However, analysing such complex educational ecology requires more than recognising its existence; it needs a pluralistic framework capable of examining and integrating diverse theoretical dimensions without losing the distinct contributions of each theoretical position. The pluralistic approach (della Porta, 2024) is employed as a strategic method to integrate different aspects of the study. Thus, the Integrated Social Movement Learning and Education (I-SMLE) Framework developed in this chapter builds upon the theoretical foundations established in Chapter 2 to

propose a comprehensive analytical tool for understanding the educational dynamics within intentional communities.

This chapter develops this integrated framework through four interconnected stages. Building on Section 2.4 through the Bourdiesian understanding of a field, *habitus*, and *illusio* (1996/1992) to highlight the nature of the Findhorn Foundation as a specific field within which the actors are embedded, and the field has its own stakes and strategies within which it operates. Then I elaborate on Section 2.5, focusing on theoretical perspectives on learning, particularly collective learning and Social Movement Learning. I will then draw on the process to determine Social Movement Learning in the Findhorn Foundation through Engeström's expansive learning framework questions (2001, 2009, 2015), which can help analyse the learning dynamics of individuals and social movements. Next, I explore components of educational theory to describe the various elements that comprise educational theory and how it can be applied to develop a Findhorn Foundation-specific theory of education. I also introduce the pedagogical triangle (Kenklies & Friesen, 2021) as a foundational tool for understanding educational interactions and discuss how it can be adapted for social movement contexts. Finally, I propose what I am terming as an integrated Social Movement Learning and Education (I-SMLE) framework that utilises the Pedagogical Triangle as its foundation and builds upon layers of questions derived from Engeström's and Uljen's (2004) work, as well as field theory.

### 3.2 Theoretical Compatibility and Integration

This study employs multiple theoretical frameworks, not through arbitrary integration, but through a strategic theoretical pluralism architecture (della Porta, 2024) to capture the multidimensional nature of intentional communities as a social phenomenon. With the understanding that intentional communities like the Findhorn Foundation simultaneously operate as bounded social fields, collective learning environments and social movements oriented towards change, with dimensions that require distinct analytical approaches (Sargisson, 2007; Miller, 2009).

The theoretical framework (Table 1) employed here may represent what Denzin (1978) terms “theoretical triangulation”, where multiple frameworks address different analytical dimensions of complex social phenomena. Each perspective serves a specific analytical function: field theory explains the structural foundation of how Findhorn exists as a bounded social space with its own rules, forms of capital, and power (Bourdieu, 1993), utilising framing analysis as a methodological tool. Social movement learning theory captures the dynamic processes by which collective learning and prefigurative politics sustain member engagement and drive community evolution (Hall & Clover, 2005; Kilgore, 1999), utilising Engeström's questions as an analytical tool.

*Table 1: Theoretical Architecture*

| <b>Analytical Dimension</b>        | <b>Theoretical Lens</b>  | <b>Key Concepts</b>                                                                                                                                              | <b>Research Questions Addressed</b>                         |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>FOUNDATION: The "Container"</b> | Bourdieu's Field Theory  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field</li> <li>• Habitus</li> <li>• Illusio</li> </ul>                                                                  | RQ1: How did the founders' vision become institutionalised? |
| <b>PROCESS: The "Activity"</b>     | Social Movement Learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collective learning</li> <li>• Prefigurative politics</li> <li>• Cognitive praxis</li> <li>• Movement frames</li> </ul> | RQ2: How is commitment mobilised and sustained?             |

|                             |                    |                        |                                                            |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>STRUCTURE: The "How"</b> | Educational Theory | • Pedagogical triangle | RQ3: How does Findhorn function as an educative community? |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|

Finally, educational theory analyses the mechanisms of how knowledge and values are intentionally transmitted within this specific context (Biesta, 2009), using the pedagogical triangle as the analytical tool. This approach aligns with scholarship advocating theoretical pluralism in social movements (Jasper, 2010; Layder, 1993) and in education (Tight, 2004). This approach is not without challenge, and its complexity raises concerns about analytical coherence so that it does not become theoretical confusion (Mason, 2006).

However, several key features suggest their potential compatibility, particularly in understanding the dynamics of the Findhorn Foundation's educational approach. The above frameworks do share some assumptions about the social nature of knowledge and learning. Social Movement Learning emphasises how knowledge emerges through collective action and shared experiences (Hall & Clover, 2005), and participating in movements can support both individual transformation and collective action (Holst, 2002) (which is evidenced in how Findhorn community members describe learning through participation in community life, shared spiritual practices, and ecological initiatives). This understanding aligns with the educational theory's recognition of learning as a social process, particularly Biesta's (2012) conceptualisation of education as geared towards qualification, socialisation and subjectification (Biesta, 2012) of individuals within the society they inhabit- aspects visible in how FF prepares members for community life, socialises them into the community values and at the same time encourages individual development. Bourdieu's (1996/1992) framework further enriches this analysis by its understanding of knowledge as socially constructed within specific fields. This



highlights the relevance of influences and dynamics affecting learners, educators, and content, enabling individuals within the field to adapt and integrate within the community. This shared emphasis on social construction and knowledge transfer provides a foundational compatibility. Also, the three perspectives acknowledge the relationship between individual and collective processes of learning and knowledge generation, suggesting their potential compatibility within ICs.

### 3.3 The Intentional Community as a created and sustained Social Field

The first stage of the I-SMLE framework is based on the conceptualisation of the Intentional Community as a social field, as elaborated in Section 2.4. Drawing primarily on Bourdieu's field theory, particularly his concepts of field, *habitus*, and *illusio*, I integrate perspectives from Goffman's (1974) framing theory and Fligstein and McAdam's (2011) work on strategic field dynamics to analyse how intentional communities form, solidify, and negotiate their continued existence. Fields are dynamic and exist within the context of other fields, making them helpful for mapping social interactions (Leander, 2009). The educational goals and social movement aims of ICs, such as the Findhorn Foundation, play a crucial role in maintaining the field's distinct characteristics and mobilising its membership. The educational efforts not only transmit knowledge but also socialise new members into the field's specific values and ways of being. The movement's broader aims of self-development and ecological consideration also shape what forms of knowledge and practice are valued within the field. While Bourdieu's concepts provide a structural understanding of the field, Goffman's (1974) framing analysis theory offers an analytical method for understanding how the field is constructed or maintained. Framing Theory is particularly suited to Findhorn, as it illuminates how founders strategically constructed both organisational legitimacy and their own spiritual authority through language and discourse, which can be analysed in the documents and publications. In the next section, I elaborate on how framing and field theory are understood in the context of this study.

### 3.3.1 Framing for Formation of the Field

To determine how the field is established and maintained, one can examine it through various lenses. Erving Goffman's (1974) work on frame analysis introduced the concept of framing to explain how meaning can be presented, articulated, or changed based on what is 'in frame' and what is excluded (Snow et al., 2019). Although the concept of frame analysis is multidisciplinary, it is adapted within social movements to focus on the intentionality of their messaging. Just like an artist uses a canvas to convey a certain meaning, social movements frame their work through the lens of the problem presented, proposed solutions, or motivational messaging to attract members and define the boundaries of what the movement stands for. "Frames are structures of meaning that include a set of core concepts and ideas, especially basic conflicts, metaphors, myths, and narratives" (Hertog & McLeod, 2001, p.160) and are commonly held by a set of people. Framing theory within social movement scholarship further understands frames as tools for mobilising members, attracting resources, and legitimising social movements (Snow et al., 2014), which aligns with the way the Findhorn Foundation uses appropriate frames to present its core messaging and achieve legitimacy. Based on Snow and colleagues' work (Snow et al., 1986; Snow & Benford, 1988, 1992), framing here focuses on the language and its usage as an aspect of studying how the founders presented the rationale and legitimacy for the Findhorn Foundation and their own authority and how that influences the way the field functions.

Framing analysis offers a valuable lens for examining how the Findhorn Foundation presents its mission, vision, and educational approach to both its members and the wider world. The selection of framing theory was deliberate and considered suitable. While other frameworks, such as new religious movement theory (Barker, 2014, 1999; Dawson, 2017), analyse spiritual communities, I wanted to focus on what is communicated through the written and spoken word and how it could align with educational theory rather than within the broader realm of religious studies. On the other hand, theories such as communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) or Latour's actor-network theory (2005) would have been beneficial if I had conducted

a more field-based study, allowing me to gain access to or develop a lived understanding, which was not the case. Thus, framing theory helps because it directly addresses the research questions of how the founders communicated their ideas and how they were translated into communities' practices, as well as the messaging within the conversations of the interviewed members.

### 3.3.2 Stages of Field Formation

Drawing on understandings of framing within field formation, I combine Bourdieu's concepts of *illusio* and *habitus* with Fligstein and McAdams's (2011) conceptualisation of strategic field dynamics, which identifies three key mechanisms that shape the field's development. The Findhorn Founders could be said to engage with what Fligstein and McAdam term “**collective construction/ attribution of threat/opportunity**” (2011, p. 9), specifically framing the Findhorn Foundation as an opportunity for transformative living, separate from mainstream society, as further elaborated in Chapter 5 B. In the next stage of “**solidifying**”, I use the idea of *illusio* and *habitus* or “organisational appropriation” (2011, p.9), which refers to mobilising and sustaining action in the face of the opportunity/threat, wherein the founder's vision starts to become institutionalised through the development of practices, structures, and educational initiatives to reproduce the initial frames. The **negotiating** phase reflects “innovative action” (2011, p. 9) as community members continually adapt the founding principles to changing circumstances, highlighting the field's dynamic nature through comparisons of the founder's frames and member interviews.

#### *Construction of the Field*

The initial field created by the Founders in the 1960s-1980s was gradually influenced by others who were part of the early community formation, as well as by early members who joined and remained. Thus, frames here could be understood from the articulation of the field by the founders, who put forth a compelling vision, defining problems and/or solutions that helped mobilise support and attract diverse members to come together and further stabilise the field. The founders' language

and narratives became the basis for shared meaning, legitimacy, and collective identity within the field. The community's early publications, interviews, and newsletters were used to replicate and amplify these central messages/themes and narratives for both members and the wider world. Even today, the website and other publications echo the community's message, aligning with the established frames. The founders' narratives, as documented in memoirs and early community texts, serve as origin stories that define the field's purpose and values. These founding narratives establish what Bourdieu terms the "*doxa*," which are taken-for-granted assumptions about reality that structure the field (Bourdieu, 1977).

While the community actively frames itself as a spiritual-educational community through its publications and messaging, critics might counter-frame it as an insular or even cult-like group, yet it still represents the community as a separate field. Although this process appears straightforward, several questions arise. I will further elaborate on these in Chapters 5A and 5B.

### *Solidifying the Field - Frames and Habitus Development and Community Identity*

If a social field "is a stable order, one that allows for the reproduction of the actors and their social positions over time" (Kluttz & Fligstein, 2016, p.186), then we can question how it is sustained. In the case of the Findhorn Foundation, the field could be understood as an emergence through the experiences and practices of its founders, whose vision established the community's distinct characteristics. The last six decades, however, have seen many other members and influences contribute to the community's furthering. While the founders' framing carries over among past, current, and future members, it is also shaped by recognition from other social fields (such as the United Nations and other Intentional communities in this instance). The frames are also converted into practices and shape the members' habitus. *Habitus*, further described by Leander as "a system of durable and transferable dispositions integrating all past experience" (2009, p. 6), is like a "structuring structure" that shapes behaviour and thinking. (ibid) refers to the role

of *habitus* as a largely unconscious display through words, practices and behaviours. Unlike mainstream socialisation, which is considered to develop somewhat unconsciously, the *habitus* within intentional communities could be said to be more explicitly worked on to align with the community's values. Bourdieu's *habitus* may seem contradictory as it is considered pre-reflective and unconsciously acquired, while intentional communities aim to transform members' dispositions and practices. However, this tension makes the concept analytically productive, as while the founders may intend to reshape members' ways of being, the process by which repeated practices become embodied dispositions remains primarily unconscious to participants. The community's explicit teachings on spiritual practice, ecological and communal living aim to create conditions for the formation of *habitus*. However, the resulting *habitus* may itself emerge through the same gradual embodied process that Bourdieu describes. The successful transmission of the founders' teachings and community practices may contribute to the field's sustainability and continuity. The members' existing *habitus* could thus be assumed to interact and then slowly change to suit life in the community, creating dynamic tensions between individual dispositions and collective practices. However, the modified *habitus* can be understood as both the aim of education and the result of intentional efforts by individuals and the community.

Further, as the field evolves and solidifies its existence, the field starts to develop a community *habitus* that is both shaped by their existing *habitus* and response to the frames and purpose of the community as well as building collective sense of what is normal, natural and appropriate within the specific social field and maybe influenced by the community's founding ideals, practices and norms and the understanding of what is considered desirable and possible within the community. The more ingrained the *habitus* is, the more coherent the field will feel for both members and observers. The development of the community's *habitus* can also pose a paradoxical challenge for intentional communities like Findhorn, which seem to value both individual development and spiritual autonomy. As embodied dispositions could become normalised, could non-conforming behaviours be

marginalised through subtle social cues? I further discuss these perspectives in Chapter 6 using the member interviews.

### *Field Negotiation and Evolution: Illusio Sustaining Commitment and Participation*

The maintenance of the field, i.e., the Intentional Community, is possible when members are engaged and participate in it, thereby maintaining its identity. This engagement can stem from maintaining the '*illusio*' of participation and from building a habitus that integrates members into the survival and growth of the field through the successful transmission of knowledge and is thus a function of educational intentionality. The initial frames used to attract early members continue to be shaped by the field's emergence and are employed to attract and align other actors within the field. Although founders' identity and self-concept influence the original frames and how they set the community, frames are also understood as constantly evolving tools through social interaction and negotiation.

Thus, frames can also be seen as aligning meaning for actors with the *illusio* or the investment of belief, energy, and emotion in the game of the community that makes it meaningful and worth pursuing, and what motivates members to commit to the community's ideals and its values and to participate in the community. A strong *illusio* could continue to attract and retain members, and if the *illusio* fades, the chances of dissolving the social field are high. Kanter (1968) uses the term commitment in her research on communities, which she defines as "the process through which individual interests become attached to the carrying out of socially organised patterns of behaviour which are seen as fulfilling those interests, as expressing the nature and needs of the person" (1968, p.500). In intentional communities, success/longevity is determined by the members' commitment to maintaining the field. Although Kanter focused on how communities institutionalise long-term commitment, I want to use frames here to focus on the alignment between the messaging of intentional communities and their purpose, as well as the aspirations of their members.

Although the concept of *illusio* as an investment may seem to reduce the complexity of members' reasons for being in the community, it can help clarify their commitment as a strategic position-taking rather than merely as an acknowledgement of their genuine experiences. Moreover, members' investment may shift over time: individuals who initially joined based on a commitment to the community vision may see their investment evolve to include, or even be dominated by, the social bonds, sense of belonging, or lifestyle benefits they experience within the community. These questions are further examined in Chapter 6.

### 3.3.3 Limitations

Finally, the field theory is vast and encompasses many aspects of study for this case, I will focus only on the ideas of field, *illusio* and *habitus* because I believe they represent the fundamental mechanisms of field production which is the why i.e. what makes the field worthwhile and meaningful and the *habitus* shows the how i.e. the way people navigate and reproduce the field through their internalised ways of being. I examine these dynamics through a framing analysis, identifying how the field is actively presented in written documents, in the Findhorn Foundation's public presentations, and in members' own accounts. This theoretical model of field formation through framing does leave several critical tensions unresolved. First, it presents a tension between authenticity and strategic action. Frames are not merely passive interpretations but active constructions that define boundaries, establish legitimacy and mobilise resources (Snow et al.,1986). At Findhorn, framing involves strategic choices about how to present the community to outsiders, how to articulate and highlight specific aspects of its founding vision in accessible language and how to position the community within broader spiritual and ecological movements. Yet, this strategic dimension co-exists with founders' and members' beliefs and thus frames are simultaneously tools for legitimisation and expressions of lived values. The question of whether frames represent conscious strategy or authentic conviction may be a false dichotomy; thus, I analyse how frames function to establish and maintain the field while remaining attentive to their role in articulating members' commitments. The focus on successful framing and field

establishment can also obscure resistance and contestation of voices that challenged frames or offered alternative visions, lost as the community's official narrative solidifies over time. Additionally, frames evolve to meet the expectations and illusions of newer members, potentially sanitising or adapting founding messages in ways that erase complexity. At the Findhorn Foundation, evidence suggests ongoing negotiation with the founding frames and evolving interpretations, particularly regarding the nature of spiritual authority. Lastly, frames are always working within external structural forces, such as economic, regulatory, and broader cultural shifts, which can shape and evolve framing processes. For Findhorn, this includes navigating charity regulations, responding to trends in the New Age movement, and adapting to changing public attitudes towards alternative spirituality. These external forces both constrain and enable certain framings, reminding us that fields are embedded within larger social contexts.

If Intentional Communities as fields represent both the purpose, vision and the created intentionality of the community, understanding them as social movements elaborates on the WHY or the impact and outcomes of this social field. The following section discusses SML and the relevant tools integrated within the I-SMLE.

### 3.4 Social Movement Learning

Building on the social movement learning foundation established in Chapter 2, this section outlines an analytical framework for examining learning processes within the Findhorn Foundation. Social Movement Learning (SML) is usually studied on the margins of adult education or informal learning. It draws on the ideas of critical pedagogy and learning for change through empirical or conceptual studies of movements (Kuk & Tarlau, 2020). Learning within social movements is a relatively niche area that examines how social movements are instrumental to participants' and observers' learning and is understood to have both individual and collective dimensions.

While scholars hesitate to define learning (Domjan, 2015; Haselgrove, 2016), the most commonly expressed versions refer to learning as a process of change in



behaviour, acquisition of memory as a result of experience, or acquisition of new information by the nervous system, that may be relatively permanent or even an ontogenetic adaptation in response to the environment (Lachman, 1996; Okano et al., 2000; Houwer, Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013; Burgos, 2018). These conceptions of learning primarily focus on individuals and the processes that govern the acquisition of new knowledge or skills, or the modification of existing ones. Furthermore, most contemporary research on learning elaborates on the functional, associative, cognitive, neuropsychological, or evolutionary aspects of learning processes (Olson & Ramirez, 2020). Further complexity is added due to the interplay of conscious and subconscious factors in learners, learning environments and design, facilitation skills and strategies, within the realms of power, learner agency, and social structures, which contribute in many unobservable ways to the learning process. This complexity may explain why most theorists present their views on the nature of learning rather than defining what learning is (Catania, 2012; Haselgrove, 2016).

Examining learning within groups, organisations, or communities introduces additional challenges and considerations. It raises questions about the link between individuals and groups, and how learning occurs within groups towards collective goals or shared meaning, such as in workplaces or communities (Garavan & Carberry, 2012). Scholars, especially in organisational behaviour and human resources development, use the term “collective learning” to refer to groups and learning distinct from individual learning. Blust, Devisch et al. define collective learning as “a concept that gives insight into how a diverse group of individuals work on processes of shared problematisation and a shared sense of meaning” (2019, p.20), and Jessop et al. (2013) emphasise the potential of collective learning as a tool for collective action and change.

Collective learning is also understood to emerge through dialogue and engagement between connected individuals, enabling the exchange of knowledge, insights and understanding (Fu et al., 2007). Hager & Beckett (2024) further propose that collective learning is distinct from individual learning and “not reducible to learning by individuals” (2024, p. 407) and can be understood through a focus on the

collective. They assert that group learning is distributed within groups, emerges from group processes and relationships, and extends beyond the individual's learning (Hager & Beckett, 2024). Despite the focus on collective learning, it is crucial to acknowledge the role of individual characteristics and their differences in shaping the collective learning process. Like individual learning, collective learning also operates within the influence of power structures and dynamics, where dominant voices may potentially overshadow the group's outcomes and processes.

### 3.4.1 Learning within Social Movements

As established in Chapter 2, social movement learning (Hall & Clover, 2005) can occur through embodied or enacted practice, such as participation in protests or organising events, or through the cultivation of habitus, which involves internalising the movement's values or norms. Choudry's (2022) analysis of contemporary social movements highlights how learning and knowledge production are central to movement activities, and movements generate both theoretical and practical knowledge through their struggles and activities.

Atta & Holst (2023) proposed a framework that situates social movement learning along a dual continuum of organised and disorganised learning (Fig. 3) and within individual and collective learning. Their four-quadrant model offers a helpful starting point for understanding learning at Findhorn Foundation.

The first quadrant focuses on incidental and self-directed learning that occurs as individuals engage with movement ideas before formal structures emerge. The second quadrant involves conscious participation where members recognise they are generating knowledge through their engagement, though learning itself may not be their primary goal. The fourth quadrant describes learning that emerges unintentionally through social connections and shared practices, which is largely tacit and difficult to measure.

The third quadrant initially appears paradoxical. Atta and Holst describe it as involving intentional observation and learning from others, yet suggest that members may not be fully aware that they are learning. This seeming contradiction

between intentional and unconscious learning can be resolved by distinguishing between pedagogical intentionality, which, in this case, is the community's deliberate creation of learning environments, and learner awareness, which is the individual's recognition that learning is occurring. In communities like Findhorn, founders may intentionally structure practices such as attunement, communal work, and others as learning opportunities. At the same time, participants engage in these practices for other reasons, like spiritual development and community contribution, without consciously framing their participation as education. Thus, learning occurs through participation but may become explicit upon reflection.

Their quadrant model comes very close to understanding the intentionality and learning potential within the ICs and highlights the key role of considering the dialectical relationship between learning and education by “failing to see movements and those within them as educators is to miss one of their major

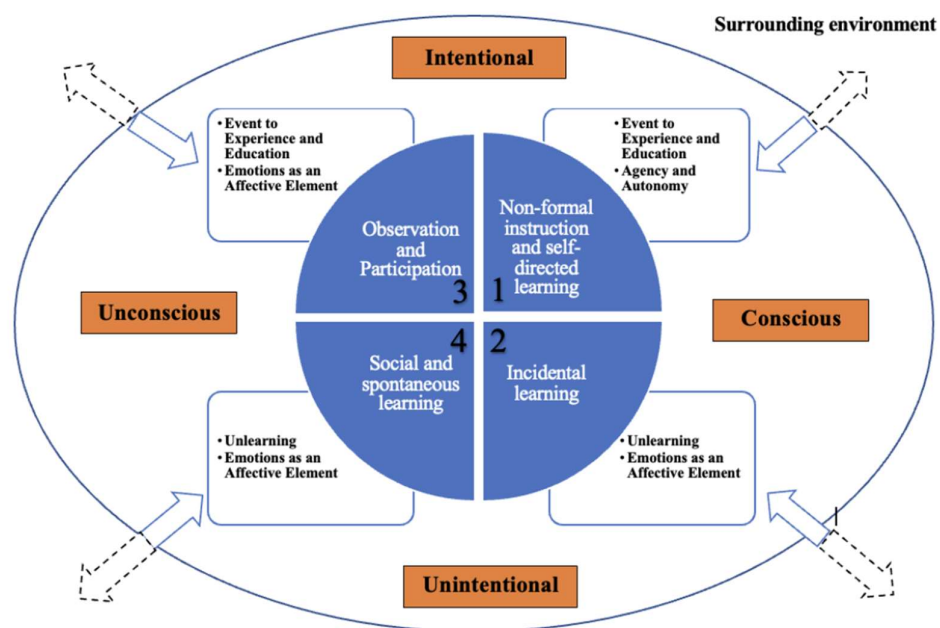


Figure 3: Quadrant Model (Holst & Atta, 2023)

purposes: to educate" (Holst & Atta, 2023, p.187). This reframing is particularly valuable for understanding intentional communities, which often resist formal

educational labels while operating as pedagogical spaces. However, applying this model to Findhorn requires attending to the evolution of intentionality.

The diagram (Fig. 3) can also be linked to the understanding of learning within the Findhorn Foundation, particularly during the period when the founders and early members were attempting to establish the community without a clear vision of its future direction. Their learnings were gradually formalised through books, lectures, and later community directives. The contemporary Findhorn Foundation represents a more complex learning environment in which multiple forms of learning co-exist. As a community and social movement, it comprises individuals living in geographic proximity, bonded by the guiding philosophy of the founders and the shared field of the community, with its norms, practices, and purpose connecting the members. Thus, learning within the community involves understanding not just individual narratives of the learning process but also identifying the founders' contributions to collective knowledge, the space, the practices embodied by the collective and their interplay. This comprehensive approach could help capture learning within social movements, where individual learning is intertwined with the generation of historical and collective knowledge, shared experiences, participation in community life, and the intersection of formal and informal processes. However, Atta and Holst's conception, while useful for categorising learning types, does not fully capture how learning functions to establish and maintain the social field itself. In ICs like Findhorn, learning is not merely about acquiring knowledge or skills but also about reproducing the field across generations. Newcomers are not just learning community practices but also learning what matters in this field or the *illusio*, how to be a member through embodying the *habitus* and how authority and legitimacy within the field can be established. The founders' teachings are not simply knowledge to be transferred but frames that define the field's boundaries and stakes, and members' learning is not just personal transformation but position-taking within a structure's social space. Thus, Atta and Holst explain how learning occurs (intentionally/unintentionally, formally/informally), and field theory reveals

what learning does. It establishes legitimacy, reproduces power, maintains field boundaries and ensures field continuity.

### 3.4.2 Identifying Learning within Social Movements

Where theories of learning can help describe the phenomenon, a framework expands on the process to create connected concepts and research steps (Varpio, Paradis et al., 2020). Yrjö Engeström's expansive learning<sup>29</sup> framework comprises a set of analytical questions widely employed in research to examine learning processes. Engeström (2001) argues that "any theory of learning must answer at least four central questions" (p.134), which are elaborated below. While Engeström's framework was initially developed to analyse systems<sup>30</sup>, it has been used as a standalone analytical tool across diverse contexts, including social movement learning, organisations (Hill et al., 2007), and community-based contexts (Daniels, 2004). Rather than adopting Engeström's full theoretical apparatus, I am using his questions as a practical tool for structuring my empirical analysis of learning at Findhorn. Several characteristics make it well-suited to this case study. Its comprehensive coverage of the questions allows for the simultaneous examination of multiple dimensions of learning. Additionally, its flexibility accommodates both individual and collective learning processes, which are crucial for understanding community-based learning. Finally, it also aligns with the understanding of the system as a field with its own rules and division of labour. The questions are detailed below.

#### *Who are the learners?*

Learners could refer to individuals who acquire new knowledge, skills, behaviours, or values through experience, study, or teaching, leading to relatively lasting

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<sup>29</sup> Expansive learning (Engeström, 1987, 2001) describes transformative processes where collectives create new forms of activity in response to contradictions, learning "something that is not yet there" rather than acquiring pre-existing knowledge. It involves questioning practices, analysing contradictions, modelling solutions, and implementing new activity patterns.

<sup>30</sup> Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), developed from Vygotsky's (1978) work and extended by Engeström (1987, 2001), analyses human learning and development within collective activity systems. While CHAT provides a comprehensive theoretical framework, this study employs only Engeström's (2001) four analytical questions as a practical heuristic for examining learning processes.

changes in their state or capacity for behaviour. While the emphasis is on humans, learners could also refer to any living organism (animals/plants/microorganisms), machines, or entities such as teams, organisations, communities, or society. In social movements, learners are identified as individuals who participate in or observe them (Hall & Clover, 2005). Furthermore, as Kilgore (1999) emphasises and established above, the group is also a learner in constructing knowledge and resources through its actions and learning from its outcomes. Understanding the learners within the Findhorn Foundation as a social movement thus helps to identify the subjects of learning. Chapter 5B describes the founders' expectations about who would join the community, whereas Chapter 6 describes some members and their reasons for joining.

### *Why do they learn?*

Most learning theories focus on motivations and capacities that can influence people's desire to learn. If Social Movements are viewed as an instance of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), then the motivation would stem from “participation in culturally valued collaborative practices in which something useful is produced” (Engeström, p. 65). However, participation in social movements can also be considered a politically prefigurative act by members who not only want to participate but also desire and need to be part of the change. The members of the Findhorn Foundation may have their own rationale for being part of the community; understanding those reasons could help explain why they learn within it. This is further expanded in Chapter 6.

### *What do they learn?*

An emphasis on social movement learning focuses on the knowledge, skills, and strategies that enable the movement's continuity. Holst uses the term pedagogy of mobilisation, which he describes as “people learn numerous skills and ways of thinking analytically and strategically as they struggle to understand their movement in motion. Moreover, as coalitions are formed, people's understanding of the interconnectedness of relations within a social totality becomes increasingly

sophisticated” (Holst, 2002, pp. 87-88). When members are active participants in the Findhorn Community, they learn by being part of the community and through the community's efforts to integrate them and sustain the community ethos. The framework will establish its learning content based on both documentary analysis and member narratives, further elaborated in Chapter 5 on the intended content and in Chapter 6 on how members describe it.

### *How do they learn?*

Learning in social movements is often attributed to non-formal and incidental learning, achieved through participation in the movement or through understanding its rationale (Hall & Clover, 2005). However, a very organised effort is also part of the movement, in which intentional efforts are made to align participants with the movement's objectives through knowledge transfer and the encouragement of cognitive praxis. Cognitive praxis refers to the central role of learning processes in social movements, through which social movements generate knowledge, meaning, and identity through individual and collective action and thought (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991). In the case of the Findhorn Foundation, the framework aims to understand how participants describe the learning methods used by community members for self-development and by newcomers, and this is further discussed in Chapter 6.

### *Where do they learn?*

In addition to the above questions, it may also be helpful to ask an additional question about the environment and the various learning spaces within the community. This could also prompt consideration of how the community utilises its facilities and campus to foster, promote, and enhance learning for its members.

### *Limitations of the above framework*

The above framework is helpful in systematically analysing the unique learning processes within this intentional community. The framework's focus on who learns, why they learn, what they learn, and how they learn within Findhorn will be used to

identify and bring out the learner's perspective of the community. Moreover, by examining the Findhorn Foundation through this lens, we can better understand how intentional communities can serve as spaces for innovation and how they utilise learning to both sustain their membership and fulfil their aims.

However, while this framework provides a structured approach to understanding learning within social movements, it also reveals limitations in existing SML research. The emphasis on the learner and the learning process may not adequately capture the educator's intentional role in shaping the learning environment and its content. As Biesta (2012) cautions, the language of learning itself is problematic as it tends to individualise and depoliticise the learning process, obscuring the social and political contexts in which learning occurs. Atta and Holst (2023) also note the tendency of language to lean towards learning rather than the educational capacity of social movements. The emphasis on learning overlooks the role of educators, the purposeful intentionality behind the actions, and the dialectical relationship between learning and education (Biesta, 2024). For instance, if learning is a part of the process, it is essential to consider what drives it. For learning to take place, perhaps someone with a clear intention and aim is required to create the environment that influences this learning process.

This is where connecting the theories of social movement learning and broader theories of education may help crystallise the concept of strategic and conscious cultivation of knowledge within social movements. To address this gap, Atta and Holst propose the idea of SMLE (Social Movement Learning and Education), which may acknowledge both the learning and educational importance of social movements and recognise the systematic and interconnected relation of the movement, the individuals and the knowledge that is collectively generated. Taking that suggestion on board, along with the recognition that the Social Movement is also a strategic field, helps create a much fuller analysis than the individual lenses. The following section elaborates on the education analysis as part of the integration and the aspects interrogated within it.



### 3.5 A Theory of Education

Following Hirst (1983), I want to distinguish between a ‘theory of education’, which is a comprehensive, normative and explanatory framework addressing the purpose, needs, and proposed solutions, and ‘theories in education’, which explain specific educational phenomena or processes, such as learning or teaching. This case study aims to develop a theory of education for the Findhorn Foundation that articulates not only how learning or teaching occurs, but the foundational assumptions about reality, knowledge and purpose that shape educational practice within the community. Educational theory here serves as both an interpretive lens and a framework for understanding how learning and teaching occur within specific contexts. It addresses the gaps between learning and education, as well as the connections among field formation, field habitus, social movements, and social action, all of which are interconnected and enacted through the process of education. While SML does bring out the organic emergent learning processes, educational theory can help establish how communities deliberately cultivate and transmit knowledge.

As an interpretive lens, education typically focuses on the “application, interpretation, and purpose of learning and education” (Lockey, Conaghan et al., 2021, p. 1). It shapes what is observed, providing insights into the meanings that social actors construct (Biesta et al., 2014; Popkewitz, 2014). Within ICs, educational theory can also serve as a “redescription” (Biesta et al., 2014, p. 5), meaning that while education processes and practices are already described in some way by those involved, theory helps to redescribe them from another perspective, providing a hypothesis or a starting point. As Popkewitz elaborates, theory aims to “make visible the rules and standards that produce what is seen, thought and acted on” (2014, p.27).

Building a theory of education, whether for conventional institutions or intentional communities, requires addressing several fundamental elements. Moore (2012)

emphasises that a general theory of education involves assumptions “about the end to be achieved, about those who are to be educated, and about the methods to be used in educating them as well as assumptions about the learners and their abilities” (p.17). Developing such theories is not without precedent. Waldorf/Steiner education, for instance, was built on Rudolf Steiner's articulated philosophical foundations, distinctive ontology (anthroposophy), epistemology (creative role of consciousness), specialised language (eurythmy, developmental stages) and clearly defined educational goals (holistic development of body, soul and spirit) (See Schieren,2023). Goulet and Goulet (2014) provide an alternative framework based on Nehinuw (Cree)<sup>31</sup> concepts for an indigenous pedagogy, and David Scott uses Roy Bhaskar’s philosophy<sup>32</sup> to draw a theory of education (2015).

### 3.5.1 Core Components of an Educational Theory

Drawing on Scott and Bhaskar’s (2015) criteria, any robust theory of education must provide (1) a language and conceptual framework for understanding the educational processes; (2) clear ontological and epistemological foundations that define the nature of reality and knowledge; (3) coherence and prescriptive power that guides the practice while remaining contextually responsive, and (4) articulated educational goals and values that define purpose and direction. Together, these elements constitute the building blocks of educational theory. This section describes each component and explores how they manifest within ICs, using the Findhorn Foundation as a case study.

#### *Language & Framework*

Educational Theory provides a commonly understood language and a framework for understanding or analysing the educational process, its components and the

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<sup>31</sup> Nehinuw (Nehiyaw) refers to the Cree people, one of the largest Indigenous groups in North America, with distinct educational philosophies including kiskinaumatowin (“teaching each other”), which emphasises reciprocal learning partnerships (Goulet & Goulet, 2014).

<sup>32</sup> Critical realism is a philosophical approach developed by Roy Bhaskar (1975/2008) that maintains reality exists independently of our knowledge while acknowledging our understanding is mediated by structures, mechanisms, and social contexts—offering education a framework that integrates ontology (stratified reality) with epistemology (theory-laden knowledge) (Scott & Bhaskar, 2015).

relationships between them. This foundation could help provide conceptual clarity and provide terminology for discussion, comparison and analysis. However, the multidisciplinary nature of educational theories poses significant challenges, as each discipline has its own epistemological and ontological assumptions, leading to divergent interpretations and applications of key terms and concepts in education (Furlong & Whitty, 2017).

Intentional Communities often develop distinct vocabularies that reflect their worldview and practice, which enable internal coherence but may also create barriers to external engagement and potentially reinforce power dynamics between 'insider' and 'outsider' knowledge systems. As an intentional community and ecovillage with over 60 years of history and influence, the Findhorn Foundation is likely to employ a diverse range of approaches and practices tailored to its context. Field-specific terms and methods could be represented through core educational practices within the community, but are not positioned as educational. Thus, building a specific theory of education for Findhorn involves identifying the language, terms, and practices specific to their lived reality. These are identified in this study through both founder texts and member interviews, and through the lens of their narrative construction rather than an interpretation of a scholarly analysis. The focus was on identifying the language used in both frames and in daily conversations. While the Findhorn Foundation's language and practices are specific to their context, they invite a broader understanding of learning within ICs, even as their terms may differ from those used in other alternative or educational contexts.

### *Ontology & Epistemology*

Establishing the nature of reality and the theory of knowing that underpin the educational process, and clarifying their relationship, is essential for developing a coherent and robust educational framework. However, the diversity of ontological and epistemological positions within education poses significant challenges. As Scott & Bhaskar (2015) state, different ontological stances can lead to radically different conceptions of the purpose and nature of education. A realist ontology approach

may prioritise scientific methods and the acquisition of factual knowledge and skills. In contrast, a constructivist ontology may emphasise the co-creation of meaning and the development of critical thought. Similarly, different epistemological positions, such as positivism, may prefer sensory and observable evidence, leading to a focus on instruction and transmission. In contrast, an interpretivist epistemology may prefer a socially constructed method emphasising dialogue and collaboration. As Biesta (2010) argues, the underlying assumptions about reality and knowledge influence how one approaches the educational process, including its methods and content.

The task of theorising the Findhorn Foundations' ontological and epistemological framework presents unique challenges. Although the nature of ontology and epistemology is complex, individual ontological/epistemological positions are neither linear nor easy to interpret. At best, they are educated guesses. In this case, my interpretation of the collective ontology is based on the founders' texts, which inform the community's educational practice and help identify key assumptions. I do not focus on the empirical validity of the claims. The frames are put forth to critically discuss and reflect on their impact on the community's unique approach to education, while also highlighting broader questions about the nature of knowledge and reality in educational theory.

### *Coherence and Prescriptive Power*

Another crucial aspect of the theory of education is the coherence and prescriptive power, meaning that the theory must be internally consistent and provide practical guidance for educational practice. A coherent theory maintains logical consistency across its elements and supports the stated educational goals. Prescriptive power offers educators clear principles for making decisions about curriculum and pedagogy. However, as Mason (2008) points out, education is a multipronged process involving both the teacher and the learner, as well as content, environment, tools, and power, making it challenging to capture coherence and prescriptive power amid complexity, especially across varied contexts. In most educational

settings, frameworks emerge from specific historical, social, and cultural contexts and are influenced by disciplinary perspectives such as psychology, sociology, philosophy, and anthropology (Popkewitz, 2014). Integrating these diverse perspectives involves understanding the underlying assumptions and context from which they emerge rather than adopting them arbitrarily, and a willingness to engage in interdisciplinary dialogue. The challenge for prescriptive power is to provide clear, actionable guidelines for practice while allowing flexibility and adaptability. As Biesta (2007) argues, emphasising “what works” in one space may not always translate into all contexts. Thus, an educational theory needs to guide practice meaningfully without rigid universalism.

For this case study, this tension translates into theorising education that is internally coherent with the Findhorn Foundations' framed worldview and offers practical guidance, while acknowledging that this theory may not be directly applicable or even desirable to other intentional communities. Rather than seeking a universal prescriptive power, the aim is to articulate a theory with sufficient internal coherence and context-specific guidance to illuminate how education functions within Findhorn's particular field. However, it also invites visions of possibilities and adaptations across various contexts.

### *Educational Goals & Values*

A theory of education also tends to articulate a set of educational values that guide the purpose and goals of the education it focuses on. These values serve as a foundation for the educational endeavour and inform decisions about the curriculum, pedagogy and the broader aims of education. Defining a universal set of goals and values is impossible, as they are deeply rooted in cultural, historical, and philosophical contexts. A primary reason for conflict is the diversity of societal perspectives and priorities. Different cultures and communities may hold varying beliefs about the purpose of education, who should guide it, and how it should be implemented. Some societies may prioritise individual achievement and competition, while others may emphasise collective well-being and cooperation

(Hofstede, 2001). Some view education as a tool for economic preparation, while others emphasise personal growth, social transformation, and the preservation of cultural heritage (Barrett et al., 2006). Even within the same society, competing values may influence educational goals, such as academic excellence versus equity and inclusion. In practice, holding these paradoxes and making trade-offs are common. Furthermore, educational values are flexible and constantly evolving to meet society's broader challenges, such as the emphasis on digital literacy and sustainability, driven by current global challenges (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

In this case, identifying both the community's purpose and the expectations that members, individually and collectively, must meet is derived from the published writings and member interviews. The values, approach and practices of the Findhorn Foundation community emerge from their specific worldview and beliefs about learners, learning and the world. However, articulating and elaborating these aims is not easy in the language of conventional frameworks and theories because the community's aims are not merely different but operate from fundamentally different assumptions about human potential, developmental needs and learning methods. Their aims and goals have been intertwined with the community's experiences and cultural legacy. Further, they are not static but constantly evolving to meet contemporary needs and members' reinterpretations. These challenges in articulating educational goals and values also raise broader questions about the nature and purpose of theory itself and its role as a tool for dialogue among different visions, while maintaining a critical awareness of power dynamics and cultural contexts.

### 3.5.2 Framework for Educational Enquiry

The breakdown of the core requirements of a theory of education provides a starting point for understanding and building a specific theory for the Findhorn Foundation. However, to construct a comprehensive theoretical framework that captures both the universal and the unique aspects of the community's educational approach, we need a systematic way to interrogate the educational process itself. In

his work on education, Michael Uljens (2004, p. 16) proposes that the theory of education can be built by identifying or answering the following questions, which provide a scaffold for understanding, identifying, and analysing the educational process. The questions are

1. Who is teaching?
2. Who is being taught?
3. What is being taught?
4. How is it being taught?
5. When and where does the teaching take place?
6. Why is it being taught?
7. What are the goals of teaching?

Further, the questions are complemented by Uljens' five essential aspects of the didactic process - (1) intentionality, (2) student-teacher interaction, (3) cultural context, (4) content, and (5) methods (ibid., p.17). Bringing these diverse perspectives together helped me to start thinking about how to develop a Findhorn Foundation-specific theory that can focus on the various aspects of educational theory, while also combining elements of understanding the community as a social movement and a field. I wanted to establish a framework that can incorporate the diverse ideas of the Findhorn Foundation, encompassing its role as a place of education, a community, and a social movement.

While Uljen's (2004) questions provide a comprehensive framework for examining the educational process, the pedagogical triangle offers a visual and systematic model for mapping the dynamic relationships and influences at the heart of these questions. The pedagogical triangle serves as a valuable tool for both theoretical integration and expansion, making it helpful for analysis and for presenting findings. In the following section, I will elaborate on the pedagogical triangle and its application in the case study.

### 3.5.3 The Pedagogical Triangle - A Foundational Concept.

German theorist Johann Frederich Herbart initially proposed a didactic model in '*Allgemeine Pädagogik*' while attempting to derive a neutral context-independent theory of education (Kenklies,2012). His initial thesis divided educational theory into two parts: 'what to do,' stemming from ideological considerations, and 'how to do,' focusing on psychological methods (Herbart 1806, p.16 as cited in Trohler, 2014, p.52). Herbart later added the concept of 'bildsamkeit', the possibility of forming or moulding an individual to reach his insights. His work emphasised the triadic relationship of the teacher and the learner, stating that "there is always a third something with which teacher and pupil are at the same time occupied" (Herbart as cited in Hjulstrom & Rytzler,2022, p.422). This triadic relationship between the educator, learner, and the content is represented through the pedagogical/didactic triangle defined by Friesen & Osguthorpe as "an elementary, heuristic structure that can be used to highlight and analyse the specific interrelationships and interactions between teacher, student and content" (2018, p. 2). Each vertex represents an element, and the edges represent the dynamic relationships between them. The educator's content reflects on the teacher's expertise and preparation. The learner-content relationship emphasises the learner's engagement with the content, and the educator-learner focuses on the pedagogical relationship.

This model provides a structured framework for examining the interplay of factors within educational settings. In the case of the Findhorn Foundation, the educational triangle provides a valuable lens through which the community's educational dynamics can be understood. Furthermore, the triangle offers flexibility for integrating aspects of social movement learning and the unique environment of Findhorn to conceive and present a specific visual framework for the Findhorn Foundation.

The above sections have established the case of Findhorn Foundation through the integration of key theoretical perspectives: The understanding of the community as a field, with its specific *illusio* and *habitus* (Section 3.3) The community as a social



movement (Section 3.4), and using Engeström's questions of learning in social movements (who learns, why they learn, what they learn and how) situating these within the context of social movements (Hall & Clover, 2005) It then sets out the key components of educational theory (Section 3.5) as outlined by Scott & Bhaskar (2015) including ontological and epistemological considerations, educational goals and values and coherence and prescriptive power as well through the use of Uljens (2004) conceptualisation of the didactic process through the questions. The educational triangle serves as a structural element, providing a lens through which the aspects and dynamics between the educator, the learner, and the content are examined within the Findhorn Foundation context. The integration of these tools and theoretical contributions converges to examine the Findhorn Foundation and its educational significance.

While educational theory provides tools for understanding pedagogical relationships and processes, it often struggles to fully account for the broader social contexts in which education occurs. This is particularly true in intentional communities, such as the Findhorn Foundation, where educational processes are deeply embedded in complex social structures and power relations. The theoretical tools operate within the boundaries of the Intentional Community and its context, wherein Bourdieu's concept of the field offers a useful lens to examine how the educational dynamics captured by the pedagogical triangle and Uljens' framework manifest within the specific social, cultural, and spiritual context of intentional communities like the Findhorn Foundation to inform the educational theory of the Community. Furthermore, this could also enable us to observe how the theoretical frameworks discussed above function within the lived reality of an intentional community, where education is not merely an activity but a fundamental aspect of community life itself.

### 3.6 The I-SMLE (Integrated Social Movement Learning and Education Framework) Framework

The I-SMLE framework represents a multifaceted approach and an analytical tool for understanding the educational dynamics within social movements, particularly in the context of intentional communities like the Findhorn Foundation. This comprehensive framework synthesises key elements from field theory, social movement learning theory, and educational theory. At its core, the I-SMLE recognises the dialectical nature of learning within social movements as both an organic emergent process and an intentional structured endeavour. Furthermore, it theorises the community as a field that encompasses a particular *habitus* and field, as well as actions within, to contribute to the creation and sustainability of the field.

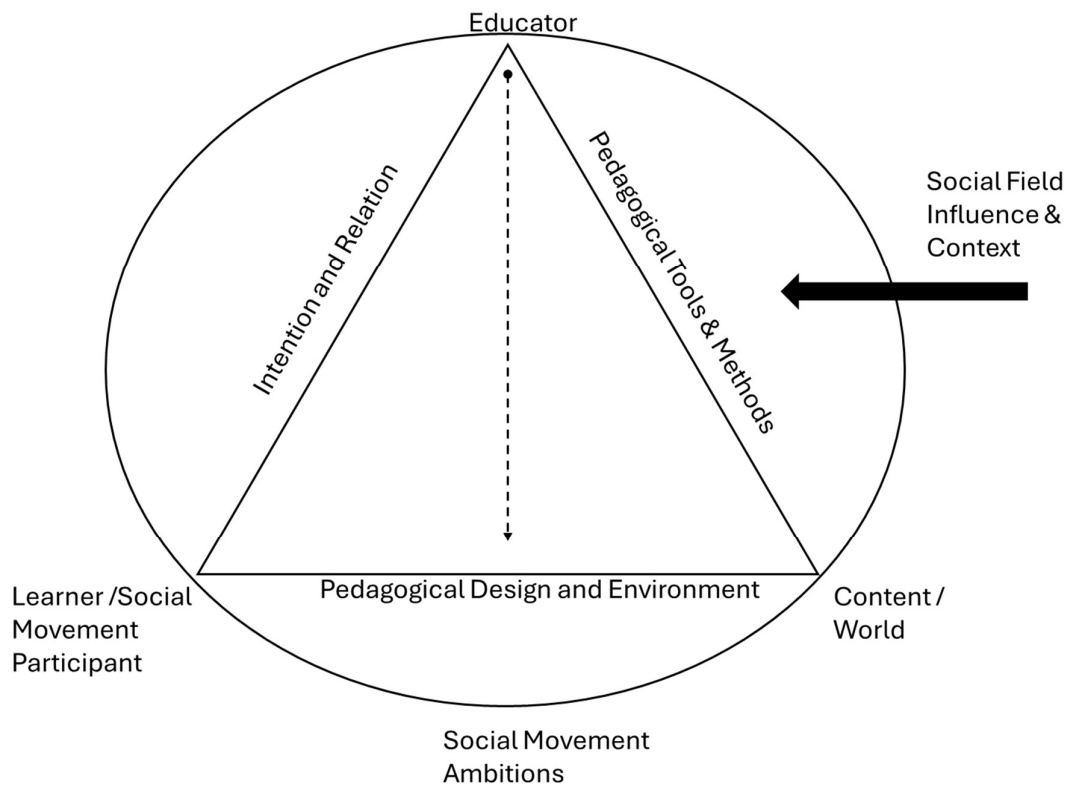


Figure 4 Merging the Field, SML & Pedagogical Triangle (Author Generated)

The '**I**' in I-SMLE stands for **Integrated**, reflecting the framework's holistic approach to positioning the IC as a field, social movement, and educational space. It acknowledges that learning in ICs is both a result of its educational intentionality, its identity as a social field and through the efforts of individual and collective learning.

The **SM** component draws from **social movements** learning theory, emphasising the unique characteristics of learning within activist and community-based contexts. It incorporates concepts such as prefigurative politics (where movements embody the change they seek) and cognitive praxis (the knowledge-generating processes within movements, as well as the role of collective identity and purpose in shaping learning experiences).

The **L& E** components represent **Learning and Education**, respectively, highlighting the framework's recognition of both intended and unintended outcomes and efforts within social movements. This dual focus allows for a nuanced analysis of how knowledge is both organically generated through participation in the movements and deliberately cultivated through structured educational initiatives.

Thus, the I-SMLE frameworks enable us to examine how the community's ideas and founders' intentions permeate both informal learning experiences and formal community structures, shape its educational practices and daily community life, and how these practices in turn contribute to the evolution and sustainability of the community's collective knowledge and identity.

### 3.6.1 Analytical Structure

This multi-theoretical approach operates through three analytical stages

#### *Stage 1 – Field Analysis (Chapters 5A & 5B)*

Using Bourdieu's concepts and framing analysis, this study examines how the founders established the community, its boundaries, legitimacy, and educational vision through their narratives and early documents.

**Framing of the Field** – This element highlights the social field formation by incorporating the elements that contributed to the formation, specifically the founder's perspective and ideas that have positioned and framed the community. I identify the specific language, metaphors, and narratives used to establish community boundaries and identity, as well as the way founders legitimise their leadership, the community's existence, and its role. This is established through Chapters 5A & 5B.

**Founders' Influence and Macro-changes** – I also examine how the founders' experiences, as documented in their memoirs, shape the community's understanding of education and their outlook. What key principles and values did they establish, and how do they continue to influence the community?

**Knowledge Transmission** – What are the formal and informal mechanisms for transmission of the knowledge within the community, and what role does the community play in generating and preserving that knowledge?

**Community Environment** – How did the founders' vision shape the physical and social organisation of the community? How does the environment specifically facilitate both individual and collective learning?

**Members' Motivations and Illusio Formation**- How do members integrate the community practices into their identity, and what do they understand as their role in being in the community?

#### *Stage 2- Identification of Key Educational /SML Elements: Chapters 5 & 6*

I then examine the key educational elements, both historically through documents and through participant interviews, in order to answer the following question.

- **Educators:** I discuss how the data presents answers to who the educators are and how the founders envisaged the role of the educators and the expectations from the educators.
- **Learners/Learners:** Further, what does the data say about who the learners are, and what was the founders' vision in terms of the type of learners they

wanted to attract? Further using Engeström's (Section 3.4) questions, I focus on how learners are defined, where they are located, and what motivates them to join and continue in the community.

- **Content:** Based on the initial writings, what was the community's proposed content that the founders wished to draw attention to or use to influence the members, and what is the content as described by the members within the community today?

### *Stage 3 - Analysis of Relationships: Chapter 6*

After answering the above questions, I will also consider the insights based on the relationships between the learner, educator, and content. The elements that will be analysed are as follows.

- **Learner-Educator:** What does the data say about the dynamics between learners and educators, and how is the knowledge co-created and transferred in the community? How do we also understand the power and capital within these relationships?
- **Learner-Content:** What does the data provide information on how learners engage with and internalise the Foundation's teachings and practices? How does the field influence the consumption and delivery of the educational content?
- **Educator-Content:** Finally, explore how the educators develop, adapt, and present content for themselves and for the other members, as well as the general society. What strategies are employed to create value for members and sustain their participation and commitment to the community?

Finally, I bring it all together to create an integrated theory of education for the Findhorn Foundation that addresses the various aspects of education and learning organisation identified in Sections 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5, which focuses on the specific elements from the Findhorn Foundation and its approach to education.

### 3.6.2 Critical Reflection and Limitations

My theoretical pluralism approach, while offering comprehensive analytical coverage, raises legitimate concerns, particularly Milkowski's (2025) argument that such an approach risks "monstrous theories" that lack the systematicity and depth. However, this study is not attempting to synthesise the frameworks, but rather to systematically apply complementary analytical tools, with each aspect addressing distinct dimensions of the Findhorn Foundations' complexity as an Intentional Community. Thus, the analytical strength lies not in forcing theoretical synthesis but in strategic, systematic application, where each lens offers insights and provides analytical depth that single-theory approaches would necessarily compromise when dealing with a multidimensional phenomenon like an intentional community.

While Kelle's work on grounded theory and the "general method of comparative analysis" (2007, p. 135) provides legitimacy for using theoretical preconceptions as heuristic frameworks, this approach has methodological constraints. The focus on action-oriented frameworks with limited empirical content may overlook certain aspects, such as macro-structural or systems-theoretical interpretations. Additionally, reliance on interviews and historical documents alone creates the potential for researcher bias, where apparent theoretical coherence may reflect my interpretive preferences rather than emergent analytical insights. These limitations thus constrain the theoretical claims of the study and its contributions within the bounded domain of educational dynamics. It leaves an opportunity for broader social insights for future enquiry.

## 3.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the I-SMLE aims to offer a comprehensive theoretical synthesis and a tool to analyse the multidimensional educational significance of the Findhorn Foundation whilst incorporating its understanding of itself as a social field and the aspirations of a social movement. While existing frameworks offer valuable insights into either educational processes or social movement learning in isolation, I-SMLE seeks to provide an integrated analytical tool for understanding how intentional

communities simultaneously function as both educational institutions and social movements. By combining multiple theoretical perspectives, this framework aims to capture the complex interplay between formal and informal learning, individual and collective transformation, and the maintenance of community knowledge and practices. The I-SMLE framework serves as both a theoretical lens and an analytical tool for this case study, facilitating the research. The following chapter outlines the methodological approach needed to operationalise the above theoretical tools effectively and the choices made within the case study.

## 4. Research Methodology

In Chapters 2 and 3, I have positioned Intentional Communities as social fields, social movements, and educational spaces, and have elaborated on a comprehensive Integrated Social Movement Learning and Education (I-SMLE) framework to analyse my chosen case. The overall objective of this research project is to determine the educational significance of an intentional community as a potential 'educative community.' It is developed using the Findhorn Foundation as a case study, examining how intentionality and purpose are enacted through educational processes that impact both members' lived relationships and the community's purpose.

The study addresses three key questions: how the founders' ideas are enacted in community life, how members describe their learning journeys, and what theoretical insights can be drawn about education within the Findhorn Foundation. These research questions necessitated a qualitative approach that could capture both the community's historical development and its contemporary experiences. In this chapter, I establish the philosophical underpinnings of the research, elaborate on the case study approach, and detail how the I-SMLE framework was operationalised and informed data collection and analysis methods. A discussion of ethical considerations, researcher reflexivity, and study limitations follows. Throughout the chapter, I explain how methodological choices align with both the research questions and the theoretical framework while ensuring research quality and ethical integrity.

### 4.1 Research Paradigm – Interpretivism.

This study adopts an interpretivist paradigm, which holds that reality is socially constructed through participants' subjective meanings and experiences rather than searching for an objective reality (Stake,1995). Unlike positivism, which seeks objective, universal laws and causal explanations, interpretivism aims for understanding grounded in the perspectives of social actors (Stake,1995). This



approach is not without critique, and scholars have questioned interpretivism's capacity for theoretical generalisation (Flyvbjerg, 2006) and its potential for relativism (Williams, 2000). However, the interpretivist approach and emphasis on subjective meaning-making align with this study's aim of investigating the translation of the founders' ideas, members' subjective experiences, and the meaning-making processes related to the educational aspects of community life.

The interpretivist paradigm acknowledges the central role of the researcher in the interpretive process (Patton, 2002). My role involves interpreting founders' written accounts and publications through the lens of the I-SMLE framework, which has guided my search, informed the structure of my case study, and provided analytical categories for data interpretation and theme generation. The following section outlines the key elements of my research paradigm, including ontology, epistemology, and methodology, which together form the research structure (Patton, 2002).

#### 4.1.1 Ontological Position- Bounded Relativism

Ontology concerns assumptions about the nature of reality and what constitutes truth and knowledge (Crotty, 2003). In this research, I adopt a bounded relativist ontology that recognises multiple constructed realities exist but are often shared within bounded groups, cultures, and moral positions (Moon & Blackman, 2014). This aligns closely with the nature of Findhorn as an intentional community, where members likely construct shared realities through their communal practices, beliefs, collective historical narratives, shared understandings, and common experiences. This stance also allows for examination of multiple perspectives while recognising that individual interpretations exist within community boundaries. While members construct shared meanings through collective experiences, reality is also socially negotiated, with a temporal aspect that may differ between founding and present members.

For instance, regarding the research question, "How are the ideas of the founders and community translated into the daily lives of the community?", bounded

relativism enables the exploration of both shared ideas and practices (bounded realities) and individual interpretations and adaptations of these bounded realities. This ontological position acknowledges that Findhorn's situated realities are specific to its particular social and historical context without claiming universal applicability for other communal groups with different boundaries or belief systems.

#### 4.1.2 Epistemological Position -Constructivist /Subjectivist

Complementing this ontology, a constructionist/subjectivist epistemology underpins this research, recognising that knowledge is created through social interactions and individual interpretations. This stance is particularly appropriate for investigating the educational dimensions of Findhorn because it:

1. Acknowledges the role of social interactions in knowledge creation, which is crucial in a communal living environment.
2. Respects the subjective nature of individual learning experiences and interpretations of community practices.
3. Allows for exploring how knowledge about educational practices is co-constructed between community members and the researcher.

For instance, the constructionist/subjectivist approach supports research questions such as "How do the members describe their learning journey over their stay at FF?" by focusing on individual narratives and subjective experiences of learning within the community context. Thus, knowledge here is not static but emerges through "exploring and understanding (not discovering) the social world of the people being studied, focusing on their meaning and interpretations" (Al Saadi, 2014).

Constructivist epistemology also aligns with the I-SMLE framework by supporting the examination of both historically constructed meanings (founders' narratives) and contemporary meanings (members' narratives), while acknowledging the field's social context in knowledge creation and the importance of creating field-specific shared practices and meanings. This approach also informs the methodological choice of using multiple data collection methods to capture temporality and varied

perspectives, focusing on descriptions and contextual understanding, and emphasising participants' voices and experiences.

The choice of interpretivism, with its bounded relativism and constructivist epistemology, over alternatives (such as a positivist or critical realist approach) is justified because it aligns with the research aims of understanding subjective experiences and socially constructed meanings of education within Findhorn. Intentional communities, such as Findhorn, are inherently social constructions, making a constructionist approach more appropriate than realist alternatives. This framework also provides flexibility for integrating multiple perspectives and data sources, which is essential for capturing the complexity of educational experiences within a community setting, while acknowledging the unique context of Findhorn, and allowing for insights that more universalist approaches might miss.

Having established the philosophical underpinnings, the following section justifies the choice of case study methodology and its appropriateness for exploring the educational significance of Findhorn

## 4.2 Case Study as Methodology

Building on the above mentioned philosophical foundations, a case study methodology was employed to examine the Findhorn Foundation as a contemporary bounded system (Cresswell, 2014) and a unique community (Stake, 1995). Recognising that the knowledge and reality in this particular context lies in the narratives of the founders, stories of the members' experiences and the practices and their interpretations, a case study methodology allows for an in-depth examination using interviews, observations, and community documents (Denscombe, 2014).

Findhorn Foundation Ecovillage is a community with over 60 years of history, and its evolution from a spiritual community to an internationally recognised ecovillage presents a rich case for investigating how educational processes operate within an intentional community. The complexity of this setting, with its diverse membership,

distinctive practices, and extensive documentation, is particularly suited to case study research, which allows for the capture of multifaceted social phenomena (Stark & Torrance, 2005). Findhorn Foundation ecovillage can also be described as an intrinsic case, meaning the focus is on understanding the particularities of Findhorn itself rather than comparing or generalising to other cases (Stake, 1995). The goal is to develop a rich contextual understanding of this specific community's educational dynamics while recognising that insights generated may have relevance to other intentional communities and educational settings.

Since the members' behaviour and context are entwined with the communal culture and the phenomenon of interest, the case study provides insights into the natural settings, and the open-ended nature of the research questions makes it suitable for exploratory inquiry without fixed, predetermined hypotheses (Yin, 2003). As Eysenck mentions, "Sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases--not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something!" (Eysenck cited in Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.224). In this case, the goal is to understand how community members perceive educational experiences.

The Findhorn Foundation, as a contemporary bounded system (Cresswell, 2014), is particularly well-suited for operationalising the I-SMLE framework through its three phases of analysis. This case-study approach enables examination of both historical and contemporary practices through multiple complementary methods, helping establish an understanding of the framework's elements and the relationships among the educator, learner/member, and content within the boundaries of the intentional community and its systems. Case studies are also suitable tools for answering how and why questions about a phenomenon (Stake, 1995), aligning with the research focus on how the founders and members have constructed the meaning of the educational significance of Findhorn. This approach enables thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) that capture not just the bare facts but feelings, commentary, and interpretative analysis for the reader, lending itself to the epistemology of the reader's experience and helping their interpretation.

### 4.2.1 Quality Measures

This study incorporates several strategies identified as hallmarks of rigorous case study research to ensure the quality of the research (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995; Yin, 2009; Thomas, 2011a; Tight, 2017).

- Rich, multifaceted description drawing on primary and secondary sources, including founders' autobiographies, collective writings of members, newsletters, publications and member interviews. The I-SMLE framework here helps set the context and the lens, providing a directed description.
- Chronological narrative describing the founders' formative influences and the community members' meanings over time, and the subjective narratives of the founders are brought into dialogue with alternative viewpoints to position the case within the field of research on education in communities (Yin, 2009).
- The use of multiple data sources spanning personal stories, community archives, publications by academic and other sources, interviews, news articles, and video and audio records helps justify the case analysis (Thomas, 2011a). This approach also helped triangulate information from different sources, providing a more comprehensive picture of the I-SMLE framework.
- The case prioritises members' voices within the bounded system through direct quotations, descriptions and careful integration of multiple views and experiences. The writing style also aims to be accessible yet meet the academic rigour of research (Yin, 2009), incorporating a systematic presentation of evidence while maintaining the narrative.

### 4.2.2 Addressing Limitations of the Case Study Approach

While acknowledging the strengths of case study methodology, it is important to address its potential limitations.

### *Temporal Snapshots*

While the case study methodology offers rich insights, this study employs a temporal snapshot, focusing on two distinct time periods: the founding intentions (1960-1970) and the contemporary experiences and perspectives of current members. This is a fundamental limitation of the community's evolutionary nature. The case does not encompass the gradual transformation, adaptive processes or the developmental trajectories of the intervening decades.

Further, some scholars contend that behaviour is very complex, making cause and effect difficult to determine (Bhaskar, 1975; Lane, 1996; Kurki, 2007). Although this research does not aim to provide definitive conclusions or generalisable claims, it reconstructs how members make subjective meaning of their lived experiences (Klein, 2012) at the Findhorn Foundation and how their meanings can contribute to understanding a lived educational experience. However, by focusing on temporal snapshots, the study may present an incomplete picture of how educational significance has been constructed and reconstructed over time, and this limitation must be considered when interpreting the findings.

### *Scope Management*

The extensive repository of sources spanning decades, a large volume of in-house and externally published material, and many members presented a challenge in containing the case study. This was addressed by using the I-SMLE framework to guide data selection and analysis, focusing specifically on materials relevant to understanding educational processes, founders' intentions and members' learning experiences. Choices were made based on first readings, selecting books that directly address community life at Findhorn Foundation, as well as publications grouped around the first-person accounts of community members. Certain books, including those on manifestation, learning to love, new age philosophy, and gardening, were set aside.

### *Researcher Bias*

As with all qualitative research, the researcher's positionality influences the research process. The I-SMLE framework helped me maintain a systematic framework and approach, while reflexive practices (discussed in Section 4.5) were employed to acknowledge and examine my personal assumptions and biases.

### *Generalisability*

While the narrow focus on the Findhorn Foundation may limit direct generalisation, the I-SMLE framework provides theoretical bridges that connect this specific case to broader educational concepts. The goal is not broad generalisation, but rather contextual insights that can inform an understanding of educational theory and alternative learning environments.

Awareness and acknowledgement of these limitations and strategies used helped me maintain awareness of the approach's boundaries and ensure a rigorous yet nuanced examination. In the following section, I discuss the data collection methods and how evidence was gathered to explore the research questions in this case.

## **4.3 Data Collection Sources & Methods**

With the case study approach established and its challenges addressed through the I-SMLE framework, this section details the multiple data-collection methods employed to capture the complexity of the Findhorn community. The case study methodology encourages the use of data from multiple sources to provide a holistic, in-depth perspective of the case (Yin, 2014). The data sources used in this case align with the three phases of the framework. The I-SMLE framework informed each data collection method by establishing specific analytical categories that guided instrument development. For example, when developing the interview protocol (Table 2), questions were deliberately structured around the framework's three key components: field establishment, educational relationships, and learning processes. Alternatively, the community texts were specifically analysed to identify sentences, quotes, and explanations that answered questions such as who the educator is,

what the community's role is, and the like. This deliberate alignment of data collection instruments with the I-SMLE framework ensured that each component of the I-SMLE model could be investigated while also enabling cross-data insights.

#### 4.3.1 Historical Field Establishment through Document Analysis

Document Analysis provided the foundation for understanding the historical establishment of the Findhorn Foundation as an educational field, its intended educational values, and its relationships. This phase focused on identifying the founders' articulated educational vision and how they framed the “*illusio*” or motivating belief system that would attract and sustain members. Documents, described mainly as written, oral or virtual text, published or unpublished, in public, private or virtual domains, providing information, evidence or a record (Tight, 2019), here refer to the various publications by the founders, including their memoirs, brochures and pamphlets of the community, visitors and members' accounts both in published versions and other sources like videos and interviews.

The documentary evidence enhances understanding of how the founders describe their purposes regarding Findhorn in its initial stages. Their opinions, filtered from sources such as their autobiographies, articles, diaries, and early newsletter editions, offer glimpses into the assumptions shaping the fledgling community, adding descriptive richness to the case analysis. Specifically, these documents reveal early conceptualisations of Findhorn’s educational significance. Comparing these to present member perspectives, as elicited through interviews and observations, elucidates how communal knowledge has evolved. The documents provide a crucial historical context for examining contemporary meanings.

These published documents have the advantage of being a stable source of information and providing supplementary and contextual data-gathering (Lincoln, 1980). Further, they are accessible and provide information about their creation time. Atkinson and Coffey (1997, p. 47) caution against the stability and consider that all documents are subjective, created by the interests of individuals for a specific purpose and audience. However, critically examining these texts aligns with



the ontological view that realities are socially constructed through language and narratives. Further, the various documentary evidence forms a body of 'extant data'(Charmaz,2006), meaning data that has not been created by the researcher but has been used to add to the case description and has been further interpreted in the light of the research aims. Some of the documents accessed are in the public domain, and others were accessed through the Findhorn Foundation archives, in line with the BERA guidelines (2018, pp. 7, 10-12) to meet the requirements of consent and fair means.

### *Autobiographical writings of the Founders*

The autobiographical publications of the Caddy's and Dorothy Maclean provided direct articulations of their visions and insights into how the founders discursively constructed meaning regarding the community's origins and purpose.

#### **The following publications and versions of the Autobiographies were used.**

- Flight into Freedom and Beyond: The Autobiography of the Co-Founder of the Findhorn Community is Eileen's updated autobiography, published in 2002.
- In Perfect Timing: Memoirs of a Man for the New Millennium is Peter Caddy's recount of his life story, published in 1999.
- Memoirs of an Ordinary Mystic, by Dorothy Maclean, was published in 2010 and tells the story of her time at Findhorn and beyond.

These autobiographical accounts were approached as first-person narratives that, while inherently subjective and selective portrayals of the author's desired image (Power et al., 2012), offer valuable insights into the founders' perspectives and intentions. As Carter notes, "the stories we are told and we tell are not what really happened...the storyteller... may suppress some elements, draw new ones in and emphasise others" (2008, p.1064).

Autobiographies tend to provide a first-person perspective and describe "a rich ore of lived experiences" (Van Manen,1997, p.72); however, autobiographies also have

the disadvantages of self-censorship, optimistic bias, and lack of external verification, along with the editorial and publishing journey bringing in process and motives that influence the messaging of autobiographies (Power et al., 2012). Thus, autobiographies provide meaningful yet subjective snapshots of the founders' perspectives and require a critical lens, informed by the constructivist assumption that reality is created through discourse (Stake, 1995). Additionally, unlike conversations, many autobiographical accounts tend to gloss over the negatives, primarily focusing on the positive aspects, and offer limited scope for questioning or clarifying concepts (Power et al., 2012). Thus, methodological rigour was established by comparing and verifying stories across the three founders, where necessary, and by an academic exploration of the themes in the selected texts. Accurate referencing practices have been followed as all the texts are published and available.

A key point to note is the use of the term 'memoir'. Julie Rak (2004) points out that memoirs are a misunderstood term and are often considered a "poor relative" of an autobiography. They are seen mainly as 'texts that are 'merely' about public personal or historic events,' with a focus on either recording or sketching a memory and foregrounding events that shaped their perspective, rather than the critical lens and depth of introspection that characterise an autobiography. Memoirs often cater to market expectations but are primarily about the narrative memory that the individual wants to convey. This becomes apparent in the drafting of the memoirs of the Caddy's and Dorothy MacLean, which pay specific attention to the significance of their experiences as founders of Findhorn and select encounters that illustrate the evolution of their identity. Memoirs are also viewed as an aspect of life writing and seem to support Eakin's (2015) point that autobiographies are constructions of self, combining factual reality with the imagining and shaping of past events to present a version of the self at the time of writing. The titles of both Peter Caddy and Dorothy MacLean feature the words "Memoir of a New Man" and "An Ordinary Mystic," respectively, which construct a very particular image and the lens through which the writers have tried to establish a connection to spirituality and New Age

audiences. However, Paul Eakin (2015) contends that all kinds of life writing are part of self-representation, which combines who we think we are with how memories inform our construction of the self. In the case of using the founders' memoirs, the aspects of their construction of intentionality and reason provide the study with a preliminary sense of the origin and growth story of the Findhorn Foundation as a community and as a concept. Lastly, as Rak (2004) observes, memoirs blend the public and the private, as seen in how all the Caddy's' and Maclean's personal encounters have been used to shape their public personas. Paul Eakin likens them to cosmograms, which he defines as an impulse "of a personal myth-making in which we size up our place in the world" (Eakin, 2014, p.38). In my reading, it felt like the autobiographies tried to share a picture of the world the Caddy's and Maclean aligned with and used to describe their narrative as the spiritual leaders of the Findhorn Foundation.

### *Community Publications*

In addition to personal memoirs, early community publications provided insights into how educational aims and approaches were formally articulated. The community website lists several books about the community and various publications by Eileen Caddy that contain her guidance on the community. The two publications listed below were used to gather insights into Caddy's intentions, direction, and vision for Findhorn.

- Spirit of Findhorn -Consists of specific guidance from Eileen's diaries, focusing on the community and its vision.
- Foundations of a Spiritual Community by Eileen Caddy is a compilation of guidance received by Eileen Caddy.

These publications helped identify how the community's educational vision was communicated to members and visitors, revealing both explicit educational intentions and implicit pedagogical approaches embedded in community practices.

### *Archival Records at the National Library of Scotland*

The Findhorn Foundation has deposited Archival records with the National Library of Scotland, which comprise early community publications, Eileen Caddy's diaries, correspondence from the community's early days, tapes and recordings of seminars, as well as draft versions of earlier publications and lecture transcripts from seminars held in June 1992. These are accessible only after the trustees grant permission.

Archives are defined as 'documents made or received and accumulated by a person or organisation in the course of the conduct of affairs and preserved because of their continuing value.' (Ellis 1993, p. 2) Archival data provided insights into the community's presentation in its formative years, particularly regarding its educational role through newsletters and marketing messages, which I discuss in Chapter 5 B. They offered an opportunity to triangulate some of the information gathered with the earliest community newsletters. An illustration of this triangulation occurred when I examined the community's original purpose as an educational institution. The archival newsletters provided early communication from the community, making the community's intentions as a place of education explicit and offering a glimpse into its priorities in the 1970s. This does not in any way make archival records more factual or objective. However, they give a glimpse of the intentions, perspectives, assumptions, concerns, and activities of those who produce[d] them' (Bogdan & Taylor, 1998).

The archival research was restricted to two batches of inventory: lectures, publicity material, and some of Eileen Caddy's diaries and early newsletters. The newsletters documented the community's evolving self-conception and outreach efforts. While acknowledging that this archival material was created for specific purposes and audiences (often promotional or communicative), they offered important insights into how the community's educational vision was presented during its development.

Another resource was Eileen Caddy's diaries, held at the National Library. I went through a few of the diaries, which were plain carbon-copy notebooks filled with

Eileen's daily '*inner listening*' messages. The text has faded, and most messages have been transcribed and compiled as publications. Thus, I decided not to use the diaries and instead focus on the published versions. There were also tapes of the community's conferences and lectures by many visitors to Findhorn. Although I listened to a few of the tapes to hear the voices of Peter and Eileen Caddy and to gain a first-hand sense of their personalities, the tapes were more relevant to new-age spiritual concepts, which fell outside my scope of study.

#### 4.3.2 Contemporary Practice Analysis

The second phase of data collection focused on understanding current community practices and members' experience, examining how the field established by the founders has evolved and is maintained by contemporary members. This phase focused on mapping the diverse elements of the educator, learner, and content relationships as experienced by members, and mapping these elements onto the I-SMLE framework to determine how members frame and maintain the field.

##### *Interviews with members of the Findhorn Foundation*

Interviews with six long-term members of the Findhorn Foundation ecovillage formed a central component of this research phase. The interviews employed a semi-structured format, allowing for consistent exploration of the key themes while maintaining flexibility to follow participants' unique subjective perspectives and their socially constructed knowledge of the community and its influence on their lives (Galletta & Cross, 2013). Recognising that long-form interviews allow participants to share their worldview in their own words (Woodside, 2010), each interview lasted 90-120 minutes and was conducted via Zoom video call.

The interview protocol was structured around three main areas (See Table 2)

1. The members' journey to Findhorn (Background, motivations, influences, desires)
2. Their experiences in the community life (lived understanding, challenges, learning and growth)

3. Their understanding and practice of core community principles (particularly *inner listening*)

| Section                                                                                         | Activities                                                                                                                                                       | Sample Questions                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Introduction & Briefing                                                                         | Reminded the participants about confidentiality and consent. Also, verbal consent must be obtained to record the interview.                                      | Do I have your permission to record and for your participation in the research?                                                                                     |
| Demographic and Background Questions                                                            | The first section aimed to understand the members' lives before Findhorn, as well as the motivations and reasons for their visits and stays.                     | What is your background story, and what led you to join the Findhorn Foundation Ecovillage?<br><br>Motivation to join the Community?<br><br>Reasons for staying on? |
| Opinions about their experience of the Findhorn Community and its contribution to their journey | This section focuses on their life at Findhorn Foundation, their life story within the community, and how the community has contributed to their personal goals. | How has the Findhorn Foundation served as an educational space for you?<br><br>What specific skills, knowledge, or insights have                                    |

|                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                         | <p>you gained from community involvement?</p> <p>How has the community contributed to your life in general?</p> |
| Elaborating on what they understood by <i>Inner listening</i> and its contribution to their lives | This section focused explicitly on <i>Inner listening</i> as a practice, asking how they used it in their daily lives and how they described its role in the community. | In your words and understanding, what is <i>Inner listening</i> , and how do you practise it?                   |

Table 2 Interview Guidelines

### Participant Recruitment for Interviews

The Findhorn Foundation has protocols and processes in place to provide access and safeguard the community. I was referred to Ms Mari Hollander, a long-term member who was my administrative contact for the project. I attended an experience week from January 9th to January 15th, 2023, to familiarise myself with the community, its ethos, and its way of working. I was then invited to share a call for participants, which was coordinated by Mari and sent via email to all members. The recruitment aimed to gather a diverse sample of community members with at least 6 months of tenure who volunteered to be interviewed.

### Participant Profiles

The six people interviewed were diverse in their backgrounds, tenure in the community and their roles at Findhorn for the case study. This sample size reflects a deliberate methodological choice rather than merely pragmatic considerations.

While there is no universally agreed-upon number for qualitative studies, this number aligns with the case of qualitative studies, usually focusing on smaller groups and exploring their views and experiences (Creswell, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2015) with an emphasis on making sense of subjective meanings rather than quantifiable data (Smith et al., 2009). This number also aligns with Sandelowski's (1995) recommendations for a sample size that is large enough to allow for a rich and textured understanding, yet small enough to provide deep, case-oriented analysis, which is often a matter of judgment. The concept of "information power" (Malterud et al., 2016) also suggests that sample size should be determined by the quality of the interview data and the research aims and methods, rather than by numbers. While acknowledging limitations, particularly representation of newer members, this theoretically informed sampling approach prioritised depth of experience with the community's educational processes over demographic representation.

The participants came from different countries, but mainly Anglo-European, so an influence and understanding of the world stems from post-World War II socio-political concerns. The table below (Table 3) shows a brief view of the participants. However, Chapter 6 presents a detailed vignette of the participants to provide a more comprehensive portrait.

| <b>Participant</b> | <b>Short Bio</b>                | <b>Years in Community</b> | <b>Age</b> |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|------------|
| FFA                | Female, originally from the USA | 45+                       | 70s        |
| FFB                | Female, originally from Germany | 30+                       | 70's       |
| FFC                | Male, originally from the USA   | Variable (in/out)         | 50s        |
| FFD                | Female, originally from England | 37                        | 60's       |



|     |                                 |     |      |
|-----|---------------------------------|-----|------|
| FFE | Male, originally from Glasgow   | 2   | 20s  |
| FFF | Female, originally from Germany | 30+ | 60's |

*Table 3: Participant Summary*

### **Holding Interviews over Zoom**

The decision to conduct interviews via Zoom was pragmatic and offered several advantages, including increased scheduling flexibility and the ability for participants to speak from comfortable, familiar environments (Winiarska, 2017). I established rapport through preliminary conversations, remained attentive to nonverbal cues, and regularly checked participants' comfort levels (Gray et al., 2020). Zoom provided enhanced security, password protection, and the ability to save the interview on the university's cloud storage system, creating a more secure backup option. Zoom could also record the interview and provide a basic transcript, reducing the manual labour of transcription. However, the transcripts were not entirely accurate and required editing and revision. Furthermore, transcribing and safely storing records was relatively cost-effective and straightforward.

### **4.3.3 Direct observations of the community**

Direct observation through participation in an Experience Week (Jan 9-15, 2023) provided firsthand insights into the community's educational practices. Observations are described as "conscious noticing and detailed recording" (Cowie, 2009, p. 178) and add another meaning-making aspect to case studies. Although considered time-consuming and practically challenging, they offered unique advantages, including the opportunity to explore the community and its workings in

their natural form, to provide insights not captured by data or members, and to triangulate interview data (Cowie, 2009).

Figure 5: Experience Week Schedule (Author's Experience Week)

**Findhorn Foundation Experience Week**  
Focalisers: **Hanna + Ash**      Date: **9<sup>th</sup> January 21**

Door code: **8-6-2**

|                        | Monday                               | Tuesday                                     | Wednesday                                 | Thursday                                                      | Friday                                            | Saturday                                |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 06.30 & 08.30<br>08.00 |                                      | Morning Meditation and/or Taize singing     | Morning Meditation and/or Taize singing   | Morning Meditation and/or Taize singing                       | Morning Meditation and/or Taize singing           | Morning Meditation and/or Taize singing |
| 7.30 - 08.00           |                                      | Breakfast                                   | Breakfast                                 | Breakfast                                                     | Breakfast                                         | Breakfast                               |
| 9.00 - 12.30           | Arrivals<br>10.30 Registration       | Creating Community Group Discovery          | Doorways to Inner Listening & Co-creation | Tour of The Park                                              | Personal & Planetary Transformation<br>Next Steps | Departures                              |
| 12.30 - 13.30          | Lunch                                | Lunch                                       | Lunch                                     | Lunch                                                         | Lunch                                             | Lunch                                   |
| 14.00 - 18.00          | Welcome Introductions<br>Group Angel | Intro to 3 Core Practices & Personal Angels | Outing: consciously "be-ing" in nature    | Cluny Garden                                                  | Completion Sharing                                |                                         |
| 18.00 - 18.40          | Dinner                               | Dinner                                      | Dinner                                    | Dinner                                                        | Celebration Dinner                                | Dinner                                  |
| 19.45 - 21.00          | Settling in                          | Free / optional Magus Magnusson video       | Group Time                                | Free / optional Erraidilona & other ways of staying connected | Free                                              |                                         |

A long-term tradition, Experience Week is designed as a residential introduction to the community, offering visitors "an experience of our life in microcosm" (Ridell, 1991, p. 117). This structured program (See Fig. 5) is facilitated by community members and held at the Cluny, a former Victorian hotel purchased by the foundation in 1975 (Findhorn Foundation, n.d). My observations followed James Spradley's (1980) framework for participation, maintaining a 'dual purpose' as both a participant and researcher with a 'heightened awareness' of how the Experience Week was being conducted and how the methods and environment were creating a particular message for the participants. The observations focussed on the three key elements of the I-SMLE framework.

## 1. Space & Field

Space directly connects to the I-SMLE by observing how the community functions as a learning environment and utilises its space to provide both formal and informal education. The space also embodies community values and contributes to the development of the community's field.

## 2. Actors & Interplay

Observing actors provided a glimpse into the roles of educators and learners within the community, as well as how knowledge transmission, power, communication, and collaboration occur there.

## 3. Activities & Artefacts

This aspect focused on how learning was carried out and on how artefacts and activities supported knowledge transmission.

The above observations were recorded in both specific photographs and field notes taken during the experience week. They complemented the interview data by providing direct exposure to the community's educational environments and practices, allowing an examination of how stated principles translate into lived experiences. However, COVID-19 restrictions severely limited my observations, yielding only superficial insights rather than deeper perspectives.

### *Integration of Data Sources*

The multiple data sources provided complementary insights across different temporal dimensions and different aspects of the I-SMLE framework. This approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of how the community's educational dimensions have evolved while maintaining connections to its founding principles.

## 4.4 Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data is a complex process that involves making sense of diverse textual and observational data to answer research questions (Cresswell & Poth, 2018) and to form a case. The I-SMLE framework has guided this analytical process through its three phases: historical document analysis, contemporary

practice analysis and theoretical integration. This section outlines how thematic analysis was employed within this framework to systematically examine founders' intentions, members' experiences and educational practices.

#### 4.4.1 Framework Guided Thematic Analysis Process

In this study, I have used framework-guided thematic analysis as my method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I have employed both inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) coding approaches, aligning with Fereday and Muir-Cochrane's (2006) hybrid approach to thematic analysis. This approach was chosen for its flexibility and alignment with constructivist epistemology, while allowing for systematic analysis across diverse datasets. The I-SMLE framework provided initial analytical categories that focused on educational intentions, relationships, field establishment, dynamics, and learning processes. However, the analysis was also open to emerging themes within the Findhorn Foundation, remaining sensitive to the community's distinctive characteristics and receptive to new patterns and authentic expressions within the data. Each component of the I-SMLE framework (educational relationships, field dynamics, and learning processes) informed specific aspects of the analytical process.

The thematic analysis was based on the six-phase approach outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006) with adaptations to suit the specific needs of my case study.

1. Familiarisation with the data and framework integration- Rather than engaging with the data without preconceptions, I engaged with texts and transcripts with specific attention to educational elements as defined by the I-SMLE framework, including identifying descriptions of field establishment, intentionality of the founders and experiences of members and recognising articulations of learning processes and descriptions of educational content.
2. Generating Initial Codes - The initial coding process was guided by, but not limited to, framework categories. For example, codes for educators included "divine as educator", formal facilitator role" and emergent codes like nature

as educator. This approach ensured that coding remained grounded in the framework while allowing for new insights to emerge from the data itself.

3. Searching for Themes within the coded documents- Codes were organised into potential themes within each framework component. For example, within the educational content component codes related to practices, skills and community living were grouped into potential themes while preserving the distinctive language used by participants.
4. Review of themes - Themes were then reviewed for both internal coherence and distinctiveness as well as alignment with the I-SMLE framework and authentic expression, preserving participants' framing and language. This process ensured that themes were both analytically robust and faithful to participants' articulation.
5. Defining and Naming themes – Theme definitions balance theoretical precision with authentic expression by using participants/founders' language as far as possible and ensuring the themes reflected their relationship to the framework components, to determine how the codes were a part of the entire story, as emphasised by Braun & Clarke (2006)
6. Writing the case – The final analysis presented the themes with extensive use of direct quotations to ensure participants' authentic voices remain central. The analysis explicitly links themes to the I-SMLE framework, showing how founders framed different aspects of education and how educational framings have evolved while maintaining connections.

To illustrate this analytical process, consider how the concept of “*Inner listening*” was analysed. Initial coding identified direct references to the practice across all data sources. When comparing founders' accounts with contemporary members' descriptions, a significant conceptual evolution emerged. Where Eileen Caddy framed it as “messages from God” to current members, diverse interpretations as “intuitive knowing” or embodied wisdom”. This required analytical decisions about maintaining conceptual coherence while recognising temporal shifts. I mapped

these variations onto the I-SMLE framework to identify how this practice functions differently as educational content( skill to be acquired), pedagogical method (way of learning) and field sustaining practice (maintaining the community's distinctive *habitus*) This analytical integration reveals both continuity in core practices and significant reframing of its status and educational function which would have been missed through isolated analysis of individual data sources.

### *Cross-Source Analysis*

The integration of multiple data sources followed Bazeley's (2013) approach to cross-analysis. This involved the following steps.

1. Separate Analysis - Each data source was independently read and analysed based on the purpose of the document. See Appendix 1 for Chapter 5 and Appendix 2 for Chapter 6)
2. Comparison across data - The themes were also compared and integrated across different data sources, e.g. themes from the Interview data were also compared with the observational notes and documents to identify how educational practices were differently described.
3. Integration of findings - After the comparison, the themes were also looked at collectively to write the parts of the case and to interpret the findings. For example, *Inner listening* is mentioned as a learning tool in the founders' memoirs, interviews, and various community materials that describe either their intentions or practices. By integrating these diverse practices, a more nuanced understanding of *inner listening* can be developed.

This cross-source analysis was particularly valuable for examining how the community's educational approach has evolved, identifying both continuities with founding principles and adaptations to changing circumstances. Table 4 outlines the integration of data sources. Further, a brief Bridging Table explaining the process is in Appendix 3.

| <b>Research Questions</b>                 | <b>Data Source</b>              | <b>I-SMLE</b>                                | <b>Data Analysis</b>            |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Founders' Beliefs and Intentions          | Memoirs                         | Educational Intentions & Field Establishment | Summary and Content Analysis    |
|                                           | Publications                    | Articulated Educational Approach             | Summary and Thematic Analysis   |
|                                           | Archives                        |                                              | Thematic Selection              |
| Role of Practices Described by Members    | Interview                       | Experienced Educational Processes            | Thematic Analysis               |
|                                           | Anthology Publications          | Framed Intentions and Experiences            | Thematic Analysis               |
| Members' description of being in Findhorn | Interview                       |                                              | Thematic Analysis               |
| Insights and Analysis                     | Observations of Experience Week | Enacted Educational practices                | Participant Observation         |
|                                           | All of the above                |                                              | Cross-referencing and Inference |

*Table 4 Integration of Data*

### *Codes and Themes*

The thematic analysis yielded 764 codes across 38 themes, drawn from both founders' publications and member interviews. They were organised around the major components of the I-SMLE frameworks, as summarised in Table 5. Rather than presenting exhaustive code listings, Table 6 illustrates the distribution of data across framework elements to demonstrate analytical coverage. The complete code table is appended as Appendices 1 for Publications-based data & 2 for Interview data.

The coding process revealed particularly rich data regarding community practices (129 codes) and the field context (142 Codes), reflecting participants' emphasis on how educational processes are embedded in community structures and daily lives. Conversely, the more explicitly educational categories, such as Educator Role, yielded fewer codes (23), suggesting that formal educational relationships may be less prominent within the community and informed by an understanding of how educational processes operate through community structures and participation.

| <b>Title</b>                         | <b>Codes</b> |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| The Spirit of Findhorn               | 134          |
| Foundations of a Spiritual Community | 93           |
| <b>Number of Themes</b>              | <b>17</b>    |
| Number of Interviews                 | 6            |
| Total Codes                          | 537          |
| <b>Number of Themes</b>              | <b>21</b>    |

*Table 5: Summary of Codes*



Table 6: Sample of Themes and Quotes Generated (Table in Appendices 1 & 2)

|    | Theme Title                            | Description    | Source       | Total Quotes | Cumulative Quotes |
|----|----------------------------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|
| 1  | Beliefs about Findhorn                 | About Findhorn | Publications | 24           |                   |
| 2  | Challenges of Findhorn                 |                | Interviews   | 54           |                   |
| 3  | Life at Findhorn                       |                | Interviews   | 36           |                   |
| 4  | Opinions about Founders and their role |                | Interviews   | 22           |                   |
| 38 | Who is the Student                     |                | Publications | 14           | 39                |
|    |                                        |                |              |              |                   |
|    | <b>TOTAL NUMBER OF CODES</b>           |                |              |              | <b>537</b>        |

#### 4.4.2 Analytical Challenges and Strategies

Several challenges emerged during the analytical process, requiring specific strategies. The volume and diversity of extensive textual and observational data proved challenging, presenting not only practical difficulties but also methodological questions about commensurability across data sources. Following Maxwell's (2012) approach to qualitative analysis, I addressed this by developing “connecting strategies” that examined relationships between data types rather than merely categorising them. For example, this revealed how the founders' articulations of the educator's identity were reinterpreted and framed by members as their

understanding evolved. This was achieved by analysing data sources sequentially prior to integration and utilising the I-SMLE framework to establish connections. Significant differences existed between the language and context of the founder's writings (1960s-1970s) and contemporary members' accounts, revealing what Ricoeur (1984) would term the refiguration of meaning over time. The analysis acknowledged these temporal shifts, examining how concepts and practices have been reinterpreted and reframed.

## 4.5 Ethics, Researcher Reflexivity and Limitations

This research aligns with the BERA ethical principles and Strathclyde University Code of Conduct that commits to “respect for the person; knowledge; democratic values; the quality of educational research; and academic freedom” (BERA, 2019).

### **Informed Consent & Lawful Data Gathering**

The research was conducted with the approval and knowledge of the Findhorn Foundation. All data was gathered with the participants' consent, and recordings and photographs were used with their due permission. The data was stored securely and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018. (Gov.UK, n.d.) and the BERA guidelines on data management.

### **Beneficence and Avoiding Harm**

The data collection process and the research focused on the fundamental principle of “doing no harm”. Thus, it was ensured that neither the foundation nor its members felt at risk or disempowered by participating in the research. The questions focused on participants' experiences rather than criticism of others or the community.

### **Confidentiality:**

All participants' names have been converted to pseudonyms and coded to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The personal information of the participants has been maintained in an encrypted file, and all identifiable shareable information

consists of participant pseudonyms. All research notes were uploaded to the cloud, and access was only provided to the University project supervisors.

### **Representation**

There is always a risk of oversimplifying or misrepresenting the community's beliefs or practices. I have used first-person quotes and direct explanations wherever possible. I have also tried to mitigate this by exploring various perspectives within the literature to support my understanding.

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

This was a critical aspect of my research. Having previously experienced another Intentional community quite closely, I had to ensure that my understanding remained specific to Findhorn and its cultural norms and practices. However, navigating concepts like spirituality, consciousness, and awareness is difficult when each individual also brings a variegated understanding. Therefore, the glossary at the beginning appends the words and meanings, referring more specifically to those explained by the community.

#### **4.5.1 Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality**

With a background in working in formal education and training, and an interest in alternative learning environments, my academic and professional trajectory has inevitably shaped my approach to studying the Findhorn Foundation. As Pillow (2003) argues, reflexivity in qualitative research must go beyond acknowledgement to a critical examination of how knowledge is produced through research relations and theoretical commitments. This section expands on my positionality to reflect on its influence on my research process.

My academic training in educational studies and conventional educational systems, combined with my understanding of community-embedded learning processes and workforce training, enabled me to broaden my conceptualisation of education. This allowed me to view the Findhorn Foundation through a more fluid lens, one that encompasses complexity, and to develop analytical categories beyond the confines

of a formal educational theory approach. However, I would like to acknowledge that most of my reading, research and knowledge gathering is predominantly based on and bound within the Anglophone literature. The readings are within the scholarship in English, which may, directly and inadvertently, shade and prejudice my interpretations.

My urban, middle-class upbringing and prior exposure to intentional communities in India have undoubtedly influenced my perspective, potentially facilitated particular insights while obscuring others. It is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of my understanding, particularly regarding the socio-historical context that shaped many of my participants' worldviews. Most of my interviewees were influenced by the macro-political and social climate of Western societies in the 1960s-80s, including phenomena such as the squatter movements and hippie culture, contexts with which I have limited firsthand experience or deep understanding. To address this gap, I conducted additional background research on relevant historical movements and included specific questions to help participants describe their context and its influence on them.

Researching specific practices, such as Inner listening, presents a particular challenge in bridging spiritual and academic discourse. While there may be some superficial similarities between certain Hindu concepts and some of Findhorn's spiritual practices, it would be presumptuous to assume any deep or meaningful connections. Thus, my approach involved adopting Knott's (2005) approach of methodological agnosticism –neither affirming nor denying the ontological status of spiritual experiences while focusing on their educational function and using the participants' articulated experiences in their preferred terms, while analysing the educational implications, allowing me to engage respectfully with members' articulated frameworks while maintaining the scholarly distance necessary for analysis.

Throughout the research process, I have engaged in ongoing reflexive practice, including regular discussions with my supervisors and peers, to maintain a critical

distance from my assumptions and to ground my analysis firmly in the empirical data (Berger, 2015).

This process of reflexivity has been both empowering and challenging, as it has required a continual questioning of deeply held beliefs and assumptions that often operate below the level of conscious awareness (Pillow, 2003). I have employed several strategies to mitigate potential biases stemming from my positionality. These included maintaining a reflexive journal to document and critically examine my evolving thoughts and reactions throughout the research process (Ortlipp, 2008), engaging in peer debriefing sessions with colleagues unfamiliar with Findhorn to challenge my interpretations, and actively seeking out perspectives within the community that diverge from my initial understandings. By explicitly acknowledging and critically reflecting on my positionality, I aim to enhance the transparency and trustworthiness of this research, enabling readers to better contextualise the findings and interpretations presented.

Beyond personal reflexivity, methodological reflexivity requires an examination of how the chosen approach itself shapes what can be known. As Law (2004) argues, methods are not neutral tools but actively participate in creating realities while shielding others. The case study approach, while enabling a contextual understanding of Findhorn's educational dimensions, may have privileged coherence and narrative continuity over fragmentation and contradiction. Similarly, the I-SMLE framework, in providing analytical categories derived from certain academic traditions, may have foregrounded formal and semi-formal educational processes while less readily capturing more implicit, embodied, or non-intentional learning processes. During data analysis, I attempted to address this methodological partiality by documenting and examining themes that resisted categorisation to study how they might indicate limitations in the theoretical framework itself. These methodological reflections were important in showing how the research design does not simply describe but actively constructs a particular version of Findhorn's educational processes and interpretations.

#### 4.5.2 Limitations of the Study

While this study employs a robust methodology, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations.

**Single Case Focus** - While allowing for depth, the single-case focus on Findhorn limits the generalisability of findings and may miss broader patterns across different intentional communities (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The contextual nature of the findings was made explicit, emphasising transferability rather than generalizability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

**Limited Field Time** - Time constraints of fieldwork have yet to capture the full range of community experiences. The Experience Week, while valuable, represents a curated introduction rather than an immersive experience. As Hammersley (2018) notes, brief ethnographic encounters risk capturing performative rather than typical behaviours. This risk was partially addressed through triangulation with the accounts of long-term members, but it remains a significant constraint.

**Participant Sample** - The composition of the interview sample presents methodological concerns beyond size alone. The six interview participants, although diverse in background and tenure, may not fully represent the range of experiences within the community. Additionally, recruitment through community channels may have led to participants having a more positive disposition towards the community. While this composition aligned with examining educational continuity, it may have obscured tensions or competing educational visions within the community.

**Community transition** – The research took place during a period of significant community transition, following restructuring in response to financial challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have influenced participants' reflections and community dynamics.

These limitations were addressed through triangulation across multiple data sources, explicit acknowledgement of the contextual nature of the findings, and

reflexive consideration of how these constraints might influence the research outcomes.

## 4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach underpinning the exploration of educational significance within the Findhorn Foundation Ecovillage. Grounded in a bounded relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology, the research employed a qualitative case study methodology to capture the complex, socially constructed realities of community members. This approach has been particularly well-suited to address the research questions, which seek to understand how the founders' ideas are translated into daily life, how community practices are described and experienced by members, and how the community contributes to personal development.

The I-SMLE framework guided a multi-method approach to data collection, combining document analysis, interviews, and participant observation, which enables a rich and nuanced understanding of Findhorn's educational dimensions. This triangulation provided a comprehensive understanding of Findhorn's educational dimensions across different temporal contexts. Thematic analysis, conducted with rigorous attention to both framework components and emergent themes, enabled the integration of diverse data sources to generate meaningful insights about the community's educational significance.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations and reflexivity have been prioritised to ensure the integrity of the research process. This methodology, while acknowledging the inherent limitations of case study research, provides a theoretically grounded approach to examining the educational significance of the Findhorn Foundation.

The following chapters will present the findings from this methodological approach, offering an exploration of Findhorn's educational significance as constructed and understood by the founders and as experienced by its members. The three

subsequent chapters address specific questions: Chapter 5 examines the founders' vision and how it shaped the community's educational approach, and Chapter 6 explores the experiences and learning journeys of contemporary members. Finally, Chapter 7 presents the theoretical insights gained from the case study.



## 5A. A Case Background

### 5.1 Introduction

Building on the Research Methodology Presented in Chapter 4 and the multifaceted positioning and analytical framework for the Findhorn Foundation in Chapters 2 and 3, this Chapter addresses the first Research Question, which analyses how the founders established the social field at Findhorn and the way their messaging was used to provide boundaries, assumptions, and motivation for members to join. The Findhorn Foundation's educational philosophy and practices cannot be fully understood without examining its historical roots, particularly through the lens of its founders who lay at the heart of the community's background and whose experiences, insights and aspirations led to the formation of the community and also continue to shape the community's core principles and values today.

The chapter proceeds in three parts. Section 5.2 gives a brief overview and timeline of the community, and Section 5.3 presents the founders' biographical narratives, highlighting formative experiences and spiritual development. Section 5.4 traces the community's field establishment from the Findhorn Caravan Park days to institutional consolidation, and Section 5.5 discusses how their narratives led to the establishment of field legitimacy, capital requirements, boundaries, and *illusio*, and to a preliminary understanding of its implications.

Drawing on the Findhorn Foundation as a social field and on Bourdieu's concept of field construction, I utilise these personal accounts as precursors to the establishment of the “social field” Through these written narratives, the founders can be understood as attempting to actively construct the boundaries, values, and ‘rules of the game’ (Bourdieu, 1993) that would define the Findhorn Foundation as a distinctive educational space and social movement. Their selective retelling of formative experiences, encounters and community development could be seen as functionalising to legitimise their practices (like *inner listening* and co-creation with

nature), establish valued forms of capital (spiritual insight, connection with non-human entities) and normalise particular dispositions as desirable (openness to guidance, manifestation) Thus this chapter argues that the Findhorn Foundations philosophy and practice are deeply rooted in the personal journeys and experiences of its founders and these personal journeys were transformed into institutional structures over time and codified into collective educational practices and values. Understanding how the founders conceptualised education, learners, and the transmission of knowledge provides essential context for analysing contemporary practices (Phase 2) and theoretical implications (Phase 3) in subsequent chapters.

## 5.2 Beginnings and a Timeline

The Findhorn Foundation's story begins in 1962, when the community's founders found themselves out of work. Through retelling their narratives and life experiences in memoirs, the community lore is as much the founder's story as it is the community's. Peter, Eileen Caddy, and Dorothy Maclean officially established the community almost ten years after landing in the Findhorn Caravan Park. What began as a temporary living situation became a catalyst for change for all of them. Over the next decade, it led to the establishment of the Findhorn Foundation ecovillage. However, the community was more of a final step in their journey, which was presumably influenced by many prior incidents, mentors, and life experiences along the way. Table 7 provides a summarised condensed timeline. It is divided into five phases: the preformation period, the early years when the community was being conceived, the growing years, the transition from founders, and post-formalisation.

## FINDHORN FOUNDATION TIMELINE -1917 - 2020s

(Based on Caddy, 1991; Caddy,1996; Maclean,2010; Findhorn Foundation, n.d)

| <b>Phase 1: Formation<br/>(1917–1962)</b>         | <b>Key Events and Details</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1917–1920</b>                                  | Founders born: Peter, Eileen, Dorothy                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>1930s–1940s – Early Influences</b>             | Childhood exposure to alternative spirituality: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peter: Grace Cooke, yoga, “ologies and isms”</li> <li>• Eileen: Christian Science, family losses</li> <li>• Dorothy: Vision of Jesus, spiritual questioning</li> </ul> |
| <b>1940s–1950s – Active Seekership Period</b>     | Exploration of multiple spiritual traditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rosicrucians • Moral Re-Armament (MRA)</li> <li>• Theosophy • Sufism • Other esoteric movements</li> </ul>                                                               |
| <b>1952 – Key Encounter</b>                       | Peter meets Eileen and Andrew Combe • Introduction to MRA “quiet times” practice.                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>1953–1956 – Sheena Govan Mentorship Period</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All three founders trained in inner listening • Eileen begins receiving spiritual guidance • Dorothy types Sheena’s messages</li> </ul>                                                                                |
| <b>1957–1962 – Cluny Hill Hotel Period</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peter serves as manager; Dorothy as secretary • Hotel achieves 4-star status • Daily guidance from Eileen directs operations and decisions</li> </ul>                                                                  |
| <b>1962 – Crisis and Turning Point</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fired from Trossachs Hotel • Guidance received: “Have faith; this is part of the plan”</li> </ul>                                                                                                                      |

**Phase 2: Caravan Park & Early Community (1962–1966)**

**Key Events and Details**

|                                        |                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Nov 1962</b>                        | Move to Findhorn Bay Caravan Park• Social ostracism• Material poverty                                             |
| <b>1963 – Garden Begins</b>            | • Peter starts a vegetable garden• Dorothy contacts “deva of garden pea”• Extraordinary growth despite sandy soil |
| <b>Dec 1963 – Guidance Received</b>    | • “This is permanent home” • “Efforts will bear fruit”                                                            |
| <b>1964–1965 – Growth and Visitors</b> | • Garden flourishes and attracts attention• First visitors arrive• Community slowly forms                         |
| <b>1966 – Public Recognition</b>       | • BBC Radio Scotland documentary “The Findhorn Garden”• Visitor numbers begin to increase                         |

**Phase 3: Growth & Legitimation (1966–1971)**

**Key Events and Details**

|                                           |                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1967 – Expansion</b>                   | • Guidance foretells many visitors• Community begins organised guest program                               |
| <b>1968 – Media Attention</b>             | • BBC TV “Man Alive” documentary• International attention• Steady stream of visitors and potential members |
| <b>1970 – David Spangler Arrives</b>      | • Brings intellectual depth to New Age themes• Findhorn College concept develops                           |
| <b>1970–1971 – Publications Circulate</b> | • Eileen’s guidance books• Dorothy’s nature communications• Community newsletters                          |

|                                                |                                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Oct 1971 – Pivotal Guidance from Eileen</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Stop relying on my guidance” • “Each develop own inner listening” • “Take responsibility for own growth”</li> </ul> |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**Phase 4: Institutionalisation (1972–1980)      Key Events and Details**

|                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1972 – Formal Establishment</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Findhorn Foundation formally established • Registered as a Scottish Charity • Educational and religious trust.</li> </ul>     |
| <b>1972–1973 – Governance Structures Created</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Core Group formed (Administration, Education) • Focaliser system established • Consensus decision-making adopted</li> </ul> |
| <b>1973 – Dorothy Maclean Departs</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moves to North America with David Spangler • Continues teaching independently</li> </ul>                                    |
| <b>1973–1975 – Guest Department Formalised</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience Week program developed • Orientation for new members established</li> </ul>                                      |
| <b>1975 – Cluny Hill Hotel Purchased</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becomes an educational center • Significant property and financial milestone</li> </ul>                                     |
| <b>1977 – Leadership Change</b>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• David Spangler departs</li> </ul>                                                                                           |
| <b>1979 – Peter Caddy Leaves Community</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• François Dusquene becomes focaliser • Peter moves to Hawaii • Community sustains beyond founders</li> </ul>                 |

**Phase 5: Evolution (1980–2020)      Key Events and Details**

|                                                |                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1980s–1990s – Expansion and Recognition</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global Ecovillage Network founding member • UN consultative status achieved • International workshops and partnerships</li> </ul> |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1993 – Governance Evolution</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shift from the central community to the NFA umbrella structure</li> </ul>                                                                |
| <b>1994 – Passing of Peter Caddy</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dies in a car accident at age 77</li> </ul>                                                                                              |
| <b>2000s – Continued Development</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecovillage initiatives expand</li> <li>• Educational programs grow</li> <li>• Community adapts to changing times</li> </ul>              |
| <b>2006 – Passing of Eileen Caddy</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dies at age 89</li> <li>• Lived at Findhorn until death</li> </ul>                                                                       |
| <b>2010 – Dorothy Returns</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dorothy Maclean returns to Findhorn</li> </ul>                                                                                           |
| <b>2020 – Passing of Dorothy Maclean</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dies at age 100</li> <li>• 100th birthday celebrated at Findhorn</li> </ul>                                                              |
| <b>Present – Ongoing Legacy</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately 300 core members</li> <li>• Thousands of annual visitors</li> <li>• Educational and spiritual mission continues</li> </ul> |

*Table 7 Findhorn Foundation Extended Timeline*

The timeline above seems to trace not just the institutional history but the gradual materialisation of ‘process utopia’ (Harvey,2000), suggesting an evolving ongoing practice of iterative experimentation, adaptation and revision.

### 5.3 Founders’ Formative Experiences and Narrative Construction

The autobiographies of Peter, Eileen, and Dorothy provided a valuable resource for understanding the philosophical roots of the community’s educational approach and how the founders framed their own authority and purpose. While these narratives provide a detailed and intimate account of the personal journeys and life events that led to the creation of the community, they also show how the selective retelling of incidents formed the foundation for the stories, beliefs, and practices that could have shaped the Findhorn Community’s distinct educational understanding and methods. The Findhorn founders' memoirs are titled with terms such as

‘extraordinary, mystic, or divine’, which seem to imbue the founders and the community with a higher purpose and legitimacy. At the same time, their anecdotes serve as the raw material for ‘frame articulation’ (Benford & Snow, 2000, p.623), which refers to weaving individual experiences and interpretations into a coherent and compelling story for the community. Their stories of spiritual seeking, personal transformation, and unconventional living have become the basis for the community's shared identity and purpose, contributing to the broader collective frame that guides the Findhorn Foundation's educational and social mission. Using framing analysis is not to instrumentalise their experiences or minimise the founders' beliefs. This binary may be false as frames can be both strategic and sincere. Also, recognising narrative construction does not invalidate spiritual experiences or community achievements, but shows how subjective experiences become socially meaningful.

In the following analysis, I explore the key themes and insights that emerged from my close reading, with a particular focus on how the life experiences and elements of seekership, spiritual bricolage, and personal change have informed the community's educational philosophy and methods.

### 5.3.1 Childhood and Early Spiritual Exposure

The founders' retrospective accounts emphasise childhood experiences that normalised non-conventional spiritual orientations, establishing what they later framed as innate spiritual sensitivity, distinguishing them from mainstream society.

#### **Early losses and alternative healing**

Peter's childhood established patterns that would later define Findhorn's approach. His father's openness to alternative healing and spiritual approaches included inviting Grace Cooke<sup>33</sup>, who introduced Peter to “concepts of life after death and to receiving practical advice from other-worldly realms” (Caddy, 1996, p. 22). By

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<sup>33</sup> Grace Cooke (1892-1979) was a British spiritual medium and author who founded the White Eagle Lodge in 1936. She claimed to channel teachings from a spirit guide called White Eagle, described as a Native American elder or ancient master. <https://white-eagle.org.uk/about-us/our-history/>

sixteen, Peter reports being attracted to Yoga and “started searching for the truth through many ‘ologies’ and ‘isms’” (ibid.p.25), attempting to present an active seeking orientation as opposed to a passive acceptance. Eileen's family losses introduced her to Christian Science's<sup>34</sup> emphasis on the “power of positive thought,” establishing an openness to faith-based healing. Dorothy's narrative talks of a childhood vision of Jesus that set her on a “pattern of seeking direct spiritual experience (Maclean, 2010, p.2). Growing up in Ontario, she describes herself as questioning “the purpose of life” from an early age(ibid). These selectively emphasised childhood memories serve specific narrative functions further explored in Section 5.5, which establishes the founders' distinctive spiritual sensitivity from youth, legitimising later unconventional practices and constructing what McAdams (2011) terms “narrative identity” that positions their lives as coherent spiritual journeys. This early normalisation of non-conventional knowledge sources establishes what Bourdieu might term as foundational *habitus* dispositions that would later become the valued orientations within the Findhorn Field. Although this retrospective framing could have been interpreted differently if the founders had chosen different careers, it highlights the purposeful retelling of their story.

The founders' childhood narratives reveal formative influences and incidents they portray as unconventional, and their specific recollections attempt to support their later belief systems that became part of the Findhorn Story. McAdams (2011) proposes that narrative identity, or the internal story of one's life, could be one way people make sense of their childhood and place in society, consolidating a version of themselves in a social and cultural context. For example, Peter describes his childhood as “searching through ologies and isms (Caddy,1996, p.25), while Eileen's experience with Christian Science and Dorothy's vivid fantasy life suggest a portrayed dissatisfaction with mainstream beliefs. Here, narratives are also framed,

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<sup>34</sup> Christian Science is a religious movement founded in 1879 by Mary Baker Eddy in Boston, Massachusetts. Based on her book *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (1875), it teaches that sickness and sin are illusions that can be overcome through prayer and spiritual understanding rather than medical treatment. Christian Scientists believe that God is entirely good and that matter, disease, and death are not ultimately real. (See Gottschalk,1978 )



which political communication scholar Richard Entman defines as “selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and connecting them in a coherent narrative to promote a particular interpretation” (Entman cited in Livingston & Nassetta, 2018, p. 102). The founders thus present events that can be seen as justifying their journeys and actions in the creation of the Findhorn Foundation. For example, Peter Caddy discusses his intuitive knowing of Eileen's importance. However, perhaps it was framed as intuitive knowing rather than attraction to speak to a particular interpretation of his capabilities as the founder of the Findhorn Foundation. It is essential to acknowledge that the founders' narratives are shaped by their self-perception as founders of the community. If Eileen's husband or Peter's ex-wife were writing their narratives, their interpretations might likely emphasise different aspects and potentially highlight their roles as unfaithful partners rather than spiritually called. Thus, by downplaying or omitting certain aspects of their lives, the founders demonstrate how strategic narrative framing can be used to promote and shape particular meanings and images.

In the case of the founders, there appears to be an attempt to establish a narrative of unconventionality and spiritual curiosity, seeking wisdom from diverse sources. Their search for answers and dissatisfaction with the status quo in the narratives seem to emphasise either an active pursuit of answers or an acceptance that the answers they receive are not good enough, normalising esoteric experiences like Peter's interaction with White Eagle or Dorothy's vision of Jesus. The analysis of specifically chosen memories rich in imagery and emotion appears to craft a distinct, heterodox identity and beliefs, which were used to establish the legitimacy of mysticism and set them apart from the beginning of their lives. By positioning themselves as spiritual pioneers who transcended conventional limitations to create the community, the founders made clear boundaries between the ‘ordinary world’ of mainstream society and the ‘transformed realm’ of Findhorn. These narratives established the field's legitimate dispositions of openness to guidance, spiritual sensitivity and willingness to challenge conventional authority, while creating the foundational mythology that would attract like-minded seekers. One might wonder

whether the same incidents would have been interpreted differently if they had gone on to very different lives, and not in the pursuit of claiming the specific set of beliefs as the founders of Findhorn.

Habermas & Bluck's 'autobiographical reasoning' (2000) adds nuance in understanding the narratives of the founders and the creation of the Findhorn beliefs. Autobiographical reasoning suggests that individuals use their past experiences to make sense of their self-formation and belief system. These belief systems, understood as "the stories we tell ourselves to define our sense of perceived reality" (Uso-Domenech & Selva, 2016, p.148), also link back to McAdams' construct of narrative identity, where our stories both construct our sense of reality and selective interpretations of incidents give rise to meanings and the creation of identity. In the case of the Findhorn Foundation, the authors demonstrate autobiographical reasoning, selectively interpreting and embellishing the retelling of actions and motivations to suit their particular narrative and establish their credentials as spiritual leaders of the community. This is evident in the various anecdotes, as described by Peter Caddy, where having faith is accompanied by receiving money or resources to fulfil all their requirements, or being directed by their intuition to undertake specific activities, such as Dorothy hearing "stop and write" or Eileen listening to an inner voice that provided her answers. By framing and presenting the above anecdotes as evidence of their faith and their experiences of the knowledge of supposed esoteric truths and access to non-human sources of advice and guidance, they attempted to legitimise the ideology of Findhorn Foundation as a place guided by divine guidance.

The significance of the founders' narratives and their legacy in the community is another paradox. The community, as an evolving entity, is also continuously framing its own image, and how it selectively presents and frames the founders' narratives is dynamic. An illustration of this is Peter's biography on the 60th Year celebration website, which presents a very condensed, positive portrayal, eliminating all flaws. It is also interesting how these beliefs and words of the founders have evolved over time to become neutral for example *inner listening* is now framed as "Access the

knowledge that already lives within you” (Findhorn Foundation, n.d.) which is very different from Eileen's earliest conception of “Be Still and Know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10, as cited in Caddy, 1991) This connects back to the evolving nature of collective framing which draws on the most relevant and strategic ideas of the original thought to promote a particular viewpoint.

The founders' retrospective construction of childhood spiritual sensitivity can also be read through a utopian lens, and their positioning of mainstream religious and social institutions' inadequacy, along with cultivating a desire for alternatives, performing the educative function of utopia (Levitas, 2013).

### 5.3.2 Seekership and Spiritual Bricolage

The founders' young adulthood years (1930-1960s) were characterised by intensive engagement with diverse spiritual traditions. This pattern reflects what Sutcliffe (2003) terms “seekership”, which involves active exploration, selective adoption and eventual synthesis of practices from multiple sources. Understanding this process helps establish how Findhorn's educational approach emerges from a creative bricolage of varied traditions.

Between their late teens and early forties, each founder engaged with multiple spiritual systems. Peter Caddy's exploration included the Rosicrucian<sup>35</sup> teachings and Dr Sullivan's "Soul Science"<sup>36</sup> lectures, which provided foundational practices, including affirmations such as "I Can," "I am Power," and "I am love", as well as faith-based manifestations (Caddy, 1996, p.34). This pattern of seeking wisdom from multiple sources, such as Tibetan monasteries, Mt. Kenya<sup>37</sup>, and the ruins of

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<sup>35</sup> Rosicrucian movement traces its origins to 17th-century manifestos claiming an esoteric brotherhood of spiritual adepts, though various modern organisations claim this heritage.

<sup>36</sup> Dr George Sullivan (Aureolis). Dr Sullivan was the Supreme Magus, or chief, of the Rosicrucian Order Crotona Fellowship (ROCF), then based in Christchurch, near Bournemouth, England. The lectures contain mystery teachings on man's role in the universe, the nature of energy or vibrations, and the mastery of self through the science of positive thinking (Source: Findhorn Foundation, <https://celebratingoneincrediblefamily.org/soul-science-lectures-1-4>).

<sup>37</sup> Mount Kenya is Africa's second-highest mountain at 5,199 meters (17,057 feet), located in central Kenya about 150 kilometres northeast of Nairobi. The mountain holds deep spiritual significance for the Kikuyu people, who traditionally believed it was the earthly dwelling place of their supreme deity, Ngai.

Babylon, and from people like Ram Sareek Singh<sup>38</sup>, demonstrates what Sutcliffe describes as the seeker's "animated spiritual quest" involving physical travel and interaction (2003, p. 202). Eileen Caddy's engagement was more resistant than exploratory. Her exposure to the Moral Rearmament Army (MRA)<sup>39</sup> was through her first husband, Andrew Combe, who took her to their "quiet times"<sup>40</sup>. However, she recalls pretending to write during these sessions to avoid being "branded as a non-believer" (Caddy, 1992, p. 24), preferring a "more direct relationship with God, without institutional mediation" (ibid). Her seeking took the form of rejecting available institutions in search of unmediated experience. Dorothy Maclean's exploration was the most systematic and intellectually oriented. Her connection to Sheena Govan, whom Dorothy claimed "altered the course of my life" (Maclean, 2010, p. 5), and more so, after her marriage to John Wood, who introduced her to the Service of Universal Worship<sup>41</sup>, she was exposed to diverse traditions, including those of Alice Bailey<sup>42</sup>, Rudolf Steiner<sup>43</sup> and Krishnamurti<sup>44</sup>. She participated in both

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<sup>38</sup> Also known as the Master of Badrinath, a mysterious spiritual devotee whose image allegedly could be captured on photographic film. Singh subsequently became Peter's major inspiration for the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment.

<sup>39</sup> Founded in 1938 by American Lutheran minister Frank Buchman as an evolution of his earlier Oxford Group movement. MRA promoted "absolute moral standards" (honesty, purity, unselfishness, love) as a solution to social and political problems during the pre-WWII and Cold War era. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Moral-Re-Armament>

<sup>40</sup> A central spiritual practice within the Moral Re-Armament movement, involving a disciplined period of silent meditation and prayer, typically practised each morning. During "Quiet Time," practitioners would sit in silence with pen and paper, seeking divine guidance on personal and moral issues. They believed God would communicate specific "thoughts" or guidance that should be written down.

<sup>41</sup> Service of Universal Worship - A syncretistic religious service created by Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882-1927), founder of the Sufi Order in the West (Universal Sufism). Established in the 1920s, this ceremony reflects the movement's principle that all religions contain divine truth and should be honoured equally. <https://sufimovement.org/the-universal-worship/>

<sup>42</sup> Alice Bailey (1880-1949) - British-American theosophist and prolific esoteric writer who founded the Arcane School in 1923. Originally a member of the Theosophical Society, her work significantly influenced the development of the New Age movement, particularly concepts of planetary consciousness, group meditation, and spiritual evolution. [https://www.lucistrust.org/books/about\\_alice\\_a\\_bailey](https://www.lucistrust.org/books/about_alice_a_bailey)

<sup>43</sup> Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) - Austrian philosopher, esotericist, and founder of Anthroposophy, a spiritual movement blending Western esotericism, German idealism, and clairvoyant insights. Initially involved with the Theosophical Society, he broke away in 1913 to develop his own system.

<sup>44</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) - Indian philosopher and spiritual teacher who dramatically rejected his role as the Theosophical Society's designated "World Teacher." Krishnamurti's work involved teaching through dialogues, talks, and writings, emphasising direct observation of one's own mind, freedom from psychological conditioning, and the inadequacy of belief systems and methods.

White Eagle Lodge <sup>32</sup> and local Sufi groups. She writes that these diverse teachings and explorations contributed to her understanding of the spirit and psychic phenomena, as well as her acceptance of other non-human dimensions of life.

Seekership, as elaborated by Sutcliffe (2003), proposes that individuals could become “seekers of personal transformation” (2003, p. 37), engaging in personalisation of spiritual ideas and an individualistic pursuit of seekership. In contrast to traditional religious participation, which often involves defined roles for members or congregants, Sutcliffe characterises the seeker as a “religious individualist, mixing and matching cultural resources in an animated spiritual quest” (ibid, p.200). The memoirs and the multiple experiences of Peter, Dorothy and Eileen, throughout their retelling illustrates this process of seekership, as they recount their engagement with diverse philosophies and traditions. Seekership emphasises the idea of self-reflexiveness, and the seeker's quests are “simultaneously projected onto the social world through travel, pilgrimage and social interaction, and introjected within the self to create an expanding field of subjective, qualitative experiences” (ibid., p.202). There is a process of evaluating, selecting, and rejecting various traditions, followed by a constant revision of their understanding of guidance, God, and the mentors who have influenced their perspective.

This process of seekership, as exemplified by the founders, can also be seen as a form of self-directed education. Actively engaging and evaluating the various spiritual ideas and practices allows individuals to construct their own personalised belief system and sense of self. Furthermore, the founders, in encouraging other members to seek their own guidance, also promoted self-education as a means of self-development. Sutcliffe (2003) also proposed ‘seekership’ as a “*habitus*” shaped and reinforced by the pluralistic environment and visible in new religious movements, but also extends into domains like education, lifestyle and workplace behaviours. Wade Clark Roof (1993) in *A Generation of Seekers* connected seekership to a defining feature of the ‘baby boomer’ generation, who sought spiritual fulfilment through individualised choices rather than inherited tradition. Of

course, as a conceptual lens, seekership is another social model for understanding people's actions rather than determining cause and effect. Sutcliffe (2003) also discusses how it can be learned from the environment one is immersed in, and involves a selective adoption of elements that resonate with one's own experiences and needs, rather than adhering to a specific authority. It can act as a filter for negotiation between one's existing and competing belief systems. It is also viewed as a vague concept that lacks substantial theoretical depth or active engagement with the empirical field (Nangia & Ruthven, 2023). However, the idea portrays that Peter, Eileen, and Dorothy exemplified a mix-and-match of different traditions and created a Findhorn-specific understanding from the outset, which has now become a tradition in its own right. Further, even today, members who engage with the community may be themselves negotiating and incorporating elements of their existing understanding with the Findhorn belief system to further their personal belief systems, as examined in Chapter 6. This seekership frame could also be seen as the development of field boundaries and the positioning of members as spiritual pioneers. The founders created distinctions between 'insiders' capable of direct spiritual experience and 'outsiders' who could not. The boundary-making also created Findhorn as a space where such distinctive practices could be valued.

The founders' engagement with diverse traditions suggests a pattern consistent with what Levi-Strauss (1966) termed as *bricolage*, meaning improvising from available materials rather than engineering new systems. Whether this was a conscious strategy or organic spiritual development is difficult to determine from their retrospective accounts, which emphasise divine guidance over deliberate selection. What emerges, however, at Findhorn seems to be a synthesis of diverse exposures, Christian language and God concepts (particularly from Eileen), Rosicrucian manifestation and affirmation practices (Peter), and Theosophical nature spirits and New Age cosmology (Dorothy), combined with practices like meditation, inner listening, MRA's quiet times. Whilst I characterise this as *bricolage*, some may characterise it as *eclecticism* or *spiritual seeking* that drew on available resources, and interpretation would depend partly on how one weighs intention and cultural power

dynamics. This pattern of seekership can also be read as a utopian practice where the founders were not merely collecting spiritual techniques but constructing an imagined future in which spirituality, ecology and community could be integrated in ways that existing practices did not conceive yet.

Although the founders' beliefs were shaped by their cultural, social, and ethical contexts, they also drew on traditions such as Sufism, Rosicrucianism, and Theosophy. They adapted them to their particular understanding, while completely ignoring the existing contexts of their choices. This approach served to both imbue legitimacy and establish the proprietary of the Findhorn belief system, but it also raises questions about the consequences of such selective adaptations.

Furthermore, as collective framing evolved, the ideas became increasingly separated from their original contexts and selectively shaped the community's collective understanding of reality. This is seen in Peter's faith and manifesting from the Rosicrucian roots, becoming 'work is love in action' as a core Findhorn principle.

The founders, by describing Peter's intuitive leadership, Eileen's divine communication, and Dorothy's connection to nature, were also creating distinctive forms of capital within the community, namely spiritual capital, which would then become valued within the Findhorn community and help distinguish them from conventional religious or other credentials. This spiritual capital could then be converted into social capital through followers and visitors, cultural capital through publications, talks, and newsletters, and eventually into economic capital through donations and fees.

Even today, the community hesitates to talk about a specific way or a prescriptive idea of God or a source of wisdom. A FAQ section on the website states, "We honour and embrace all paths to spiritual growth" (Findhorn Foundation, n.d.), encouraging individuals to continue searching for ways that work for them. Once considered countercultural in relation to established religions, spiritual bricolage is increasingly viewed through the lens of the bricoleur or seeker who actively filters and reconstructs spiritual knowledge to build their identity (Johnson, 2012). Arising

from the Age of Enlightenment, in which religion was increasingly sidelined as a private endeavour and a personal choice of belief systems, spiritual bricolage led to greater experimentation and a need to seek alternative explanations among seekers dissatisfied with the larger, damaging events, such as war and conflict (Altglas, 2014). The founders' stories provide numerous examples of seeking to engage with diverse traditions and selectively choosing aspects of them for personal growth.

However, scholars critical of New Age spirituality argue that bricolage is seen “to serve ‘the consuming self’ pursuing his or her ‘well-being’ (Partridge, 2004, p. 117) and often allows individuals to create their own subjective mythology (Possamai, 2007). Since the Findhorn Foundation self-claims to be a spiritual and ecological community, foregrounding their explanation of spirituality and the factors that influenced their spiritual beliefs is arguably justified. However, it is also worth considering whether the founders' claims were taken at face value within the community, or whether the members continued to engage in their own process of ‘spiritual bricolage’ while anchoring themselves to the Findhorn Foundation's Core beliefs.

The founder's bricolage approach appears to have become institutionalised as a defining characteristic of the Findhorn Foundation, both as a field and as a means of differentiating itself from other communities by creating space for innovation and adaptation. While ‘spiritual bricolage’ appears to be a positive movement, it also has its potential downsides. Carette and King's emphasise how spirituality is used more as a “cultural trope to promote efficiency and revamp modern identities” (2005, p.1) for those who seem *disillusioned* by institutional religions and making it a personal choice rather than a collective endeavour. This shift towards the privatisation of religion has contributed to a “loss of a sense of community and compassion for others in modern societies” (ibid., p. 14), with a decreased sense of belonging to any particular religion. Furthermore, religion is not lost but rebranded as spirituality that uses the cultural assets of religion, but in a way that it can become a profitable venture (i.e. co-opted by neo-liberal capitalist ideologies).



Eileen's recounting of stopping guidance (See Section 5.4.3) so that everyone can take responsibility for their own growth seems to emphasise the goals of self-development as an individual task, with the community's role as a designated space that supports members in making that change. Although the community aimed to align everyone within it, it also serves as a boundary between the community and the rest of society, creating a distinct space. This individualisation of spiritual self-education also aligns with the broader shift towards individualised and privatised forms of learning in contemporary society, which Henry Giroux terms 'bare pedagogy' (2010, p.185), which he describes as a market-driven social and political practice which emphasises individualistic, competitive, and economics-oriented self-serving education without much focus on the broader goals of civic and moral responsibility. Thus, in a community like the Findhorn Foundation, that is both connected and functioning within the existing social and political structures, it is probably a source of tension when one thinks about the interplay of individualistic spiritual development and the role of the community, as well as the way the community interacts with broader society.

### 5.3.3 Mentorship and Authority Transitions

Within the three memoirs, there is evidence of the influence of many mentors from whom the founders have learnt and engaged. This mentorship process is highlighted in their chronological stories before reaching the Findhorn Caravan Park. It is also highlighted in the community history, which draws on the work of many thinkers, including David Spangler, Sir George Trevelyan, Robert Ogilvie Crombie (See Section 5.4.2), and others not within the scope of this study. Apart from individual mentors, there is also strong evidence that partner organisations and communities engaged in similar areas of interest have influenced the community. Organisations such as Universal Link and Liebie Pugh,<sup>45</sup> The Rosicrucians, Moral Rearmament Army, among

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<sup>45</sup> Liebie Pugh (1888-1966) - Enigmatic British spiritual teacher who founded the Universal Link in 1961, based in St. Annes-on-Sea, Lancashire. **Universal Link** - A spiritual network connecting individuals and groups through Pugh's teachings and the channelled messages she disseminated. <https://celebratingoneincrediblefamily.org/the-living-record-the-universal-link>

others, have also been part of the bricolage and contributed to the Findhorn Foundation's collective identity.

However, the Findhorn's founders' relationships with their mentor, Sheena, highlight another crucial aspect of seekership and spiritual bricolage: the challenges of navigating the dynamics of authority and commitment, and of operationalising relevant frames for the community. The founders' relationship with mentors, specifically Sheena Govan, exemplifies both the crucial role of external authority in their spiritual development and the pattern of eventual separation that enabled them to establish independent legitimacy. Understanding this dynamic illustrates how Findhorn navigated the tension between spiritual influences and the claim to autonomous authority.

### **Sheena Govan's Formative Influence**

Sheena Govan, a spiritual teacher operating in Britain during the 1950s-60s, gathered a circle of seekers whom she mentored in the practices of inner listening and spiritual guidance. All three founders underwent intense training with Sheena during the 1950s, describing her influence as transformative. Peter credits Sheena with teaching him to access "deep inner knowing beyond words and pictures that prompted immediate action" (Caddy, 1996, p.78). Her pedagogical approach emphasised discipline, obedience and surrendering personal will to divine guidance. For Eileen, Sheena's influence was even more profound and contested. When Eileen first experienced an inner voice at Glastonbury, she "thought she was going crazy" (Caddy, 1992, p. 33) because of the guilt she felt about leaving her children and defying social conventions in her relationship with Peter. Sheena, however, validated her experience as genuine divine guidance and instituted a rigorous training regime. Eileen recalls "being terrified of Sheena" (ibid., p. 45), who demanded that Eileen meditate daily, record every message received, and share all guidance with Sheena. This relationship was fraught with resistance as Eileen "did not believe in the voice or divine visions" and resented Sheena's control. However, over time, Eileen internalised the practice, and inner listening became the foundation of her spiritual

identity. Dorothy Maclean served as Sheena's secretary, typing the guidance received during meditation sessions and organising her teachings. Dorothy describes this period as "one of intense learning and feels that daily interactions with Sheena fuelled her growth and served as a strict mirror that allowed her to work on her guilt and inner demons" (Maclean, 2010, p. 26). Through this work, Dorothy developed her own practice of inner listening, eventually receiving guidance independent of Sheena, who encouraged and validated her personal messages.

### **Power Dynamics and Spiritual Authority**

The Sheena relationship reveals complex power dynamics within spiritual mentorship. On the one hand, she provided essential training, validation, and a community of fellow seekers. Her authority rested on her claimed spiritual prowess and access, as well as the ability to recognise and cultivate similar capacities in others. She also demanded absolute obedience, framing resistance as ego attachment and an issue. On the other hand, this created dependency. Major life decisions were based on Sheena's guidance or validation. Eileen and Peter's affair, for instance, was validated and formalised in her presence. Eileen's resistance was framed as she must "learn to put God first, not you. When you set foot on the spiritual path, God must come before everything, no matter what the cost" (Caddy, 1992, p. 54). Dorothy's role as her friend and secretary perhaps enabled her eventual autonomy more easily than Eileen's or Peter's direct dependency. Also, the process of mentorship with Sheena and other mentors raises questions about power dynamics at play in mentor-seeker relationships. Maya Warrier's research on individuals seeking 'gurus' found that seekers were aware of multiple paths and choices and "used the 'gurus' as temporary anchors in their seeking journey" (Warrier, 2003, p.33). Furthermore, people often become attracted to 'gurus' who seem to offer solutions, instil faith in their spiritual superiority, or provide an extraordinary experience. The more relevant and valuable the guidance is, the stronger the bond. The breaking away from Sheena in the latter parts of their lives, and "claiming she had become unhinged," demonstrates the cycle of engagement, followed by disillusionment and disenchantment. The eventual separation could

also be seen as the Findhorn founders' assertion of their independence from previous spiritual authorities. The pattern of engagement and disengagement also demonstrates how members of emerging fields differentiate themselves from existing fields and maintain legitimacy through selectively valued practices.

### **The Break: Framing Authority Transition**

A pivotal moment occurred when Eileen received guidance to burn all of Sheena's teachings, a directive she followed despite objections. Dorothy recalls losing "many of my own journals and writings in that fire as well" (Maclean, 2010, p.51) and notes "I believed Eileen's hatred for Sheena influenced the burning, not guidance" (ibid.), This incident also reveals contested interpretations of divine guidance and suggests personal conflicts masked by spiritual framing. By December 1957, all three founders received guidance to separate from Sheena, which they framed as a necessary evolution. Peter claims Sheena had "begun to deteriorate" and "lost her discernment" (Caddy, 1996, p.146). He presents this separation as a means of protecting the integrity of their work. The final separation was in 1963, with gratitude but firm breaking away. While Peter, Dorothy, and Eileen (reluctantly) initially accepted Sheena as a mentoring authority, their narratives reveal a gradual process of disengagement and a reaffirmation of their own beliefs and experiences. As Sutcliffe suggests, "the effect of engaging with a multipolar field of authorities is that all formations become relativised and de-totalised" (2017, p.19). This idea is reflected in the founder's eventual break from Sheena, which they attribute to their spiritual guidance and a firm commitment to the core practices of Findhorn Foundation. (Although the deterioration conveniently coincides with their need for independence) This raises an interesting question about the role of mentors and network organisations in the community today, and how members validate the diverse influences and consolidate their thoughts within their daily lives.

### **Strategic Functions of Separation and Educational Implications**

Bourdieu's field theory hints at the strategic necessity of this separation. The autonomy of Findhorn as an independent field may have been needed to

differentiate its authority from Sheena's, whilst retaining her methods. They may also have managed to create a boundary that distinguished Findhorn as a new independent spiritual field rather than as an extension of her group. However, it also raises questions about why they initially needed Sheena's validation and about the workings of mentorship in such situations.

This cycle of engagement and disenchantment also raises important questions about the role of power and its potential for abuse in spiritual or intentional communities, such as the Findhorn Foundation. How do individuals navigate their spiritual autonomy within the influence of charismatic leaders, mentors, or communities? Moreover, how might the effect of commitment and engagement impact the educational experiences over time? This dynamic may also reveal patterns regarding the temporary nature of external spiritual authority, the framing of inner authority as the ultimate goal, and the development of one's own connection. A similar shift occurred in the community when Eileen's 1971 guidance instructed members to build their own inner listening practice rather than relying on her, a parallel transition from centralised to distributed spiritual authority, further examined in Section 5.4

### 5.3.4 From Personal Practice to Community Vision

By the early 1960s, each founder had developed distinctive practices that would become Findhorn's three core principles. This section examines how personal practices emerged from the formative experiences analysed above and were positioned as the foundation of community life.

#### **Peter Caddy: Manifestation and Work as Spiritual Practice**

Peter's practice centred on faith-based manifestation and a conviction that aligning with divine will and maintaining unwavering faith would attract the necessary material resources. Rooted in his Rosicrucian training, this approach involved daily affirmations, visualisation of desired outcomes and taking actions as if success were guaranteed. Peter describes applying these during his RAF career where he would affirm 'I Can' and then act with complete confidence, knowing the resources would

appear" (Caddy, 1996, p. 34). Also important was Peter's conception of work as spiritual practice, influenced by Sheena's teachings "to do everything with love to raise the vibrations" (Caddy, 1996, p.78) Whether at Cluny hill hotel or in the community, he insisted every task from cleaning toilets to greeting guests be performed with complete attention and love. This integration of spirituality and daily work would become Findhorn's "work as love in action" principle, which was the idea that ordinary activities performed with right intention are a form of spiritual practice.

### **Eileen Caddy: Inner Listening and Divine Guidance**

Eileen's practice was inner listening, which she did as a daily meditation to receive direct guidance from God. Beginning with her Glastonbury experience ("Be Still and know that I am God"), Eileen developed a discipline of early-morning meditation, stillness, and recording whatever messages emerged. These ranged from practical directions ("Peter should apply for the job at Cluny Hill") to spiritual teachings ("Love is the key to everything") to community vision ("You are building a Centre of Light"). Eileen's guidance was not for her alone but for the collective. First, only Peter and Dorothy relied on her guidance; then, her messages were read in morning meetings in the community until 1971 to guide all decisions. This positioned Eileen's inner listening as a form of spiritual capital not only for her personally but organisationally, as her access to divine wisdom became essential for community functioning. Her practice exemplified what would become Findhorn's first core principle, which is that divine guidance is accessible directly through inner listening, bypassing institutional religious authority. Although initially this access was monopolised, with only Eileen receiving guidance for the group, creating a hierarchical structure.

### **Dorothy Maclean: Nature Spirit Communication and Co-creation**

Dorothy's distinctive contribution was communication with nature spirits, which she termed 'devas' (using the Sanskrit term meaning "shining one"). During the early Caravan Park days, Dorothy received guidance to connect to the "elemental spirits

of earth, air, fire and water to seek ways of conscious co-operation with them” (Maclean, 2010, p.196). In Dorothy's account, a chance incident led her to reach out to the essence of a Garden Pea for a conversation about how humans could work in partnership with nature. Dorothy conceived ‘devas’ as “archetypal overlighting beings” governing plant growth. She describes them as having “group consciousness” rather than individual personalities representing entire species or ecosystems. Her communication involved asking questions during meditation and receiving responses in the form of images, feelings, or words, which she interpreted and recorded. This practice became the foundation for Findhorn's core principle of “co-creation with nature”, or the belief that humans can consciously partner with nature spirits to restore ecological harmony. Peter credits Dorothy's deva communications as “essential to forming the community”, as the garden was almost like a pilot. They were experiencing both the growth of vegetables and the development of a community of like-minded people. (Caddy, 1996)

The framing of personal practices as universal principles also performed a crucial field function of positioning the founders' specific culturally situated experiences as generally accessible spiritual truths. This universalisation both democratised practices and obscured their particularity, reflecting the founders' middle-class, Western, Christian-influenced backgrounds.

### **From Caravan Park to Community Foundations**

What started with their stay at the Findhorn Caravan Park after being unemployed, socially ostracised and materially poor, was framed by them as an opportunity. Peter believed they were pioneering something new; they were being stripped of everything but their faith, to start all over and demonstrate that faith can make anything possible. Eileen's guidance consistently encouraged them to have faith, assuring them that their location was permanent and that “all efforts will bear fruit” (Caddy, 1996, p. 208). Dorothy's nature communication directed practical garden work and decisions on what to plant, when and how to work co-operatively with elemental forces. These three approaches created a synergistic system in which

Eileen provided direction through divine guidance, Dorothy provided method and practical guidance, and Peter executed the decisions with faith. The resulting Findhorn Garden, with thriving vegetables in sandy, inhospitable soil, appeared to them as the empirical validation of their combined practices, which drew visitors, publicity and attention, including BBC coverage<sup>46</sup>, legitimising the founders' spiritual claims in certain circles. Together, these three principles also created a comprehensive spiritual practice system that forms Findhorn's distinctive educational philosophy, where spirituality is integrated into daily life.

### **Birth of a Community Vision**

As their practices proved popular, resources and visitors began to arrive, and the founders started to conceive of the experiment as more than a matter of personal survival. Guidance received by Eileen in Dec 1963 told them “to look upon this place as a permanent home and know that all efforts will bear fruit. They were to follow Peter's vision and seek help when they needed anything and cooperate” (Caddy, 1996, p.208) Peters role was to “build a temple and a place of refuge, a centre of light in the coming darkness... a place that demonstrated a God-centred lifestyle” (Caddy, 1996, p.226). This vision positioned Findhorn as more than a retreat or an escape. It framed the community as prefigurative, embodying the changes needed in the broader world. The garden was demonstrating ecological partnership, and guidance was not just about directing individuals but also about accessing wisdom for oneself, and work was modelling spiritualised labour. By framing their practices as demonstrations with broader significance, the founders established what social movement theorists call “prognostic framing” (Benford & Snow, 2000), thereby positioning their community as a solution to diagnosed societal problems. This prognostic framing would prove essential for attracting members and legitimising the community's existence, as examined in Section 5.4.

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<sup>46</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m002l23l> and <https://www.findhorn.org/blog/video-a-blast-from-the-past-the-findhorn-foundation-community-in-1973>



The convergence of practices and the Caravan Park activities in the founders' narratives appears as organic and divinely orchestrated; however, it was explicitly framed as a spiritual opportunity rather than a consequence of their actions or loss of job. Without dismissing the founders' beliefs, there is still a recognition that meaning was constructed around events, with specific factors selected, emphasised, and narratives that legitimised their emerging community. There are no stories of manifestations not being met or of challenges arising from the guidance. The practices themselves (inner listening, manifestation, nature communication) were not invented at Findhorn but were recombinations of elements from the founders' prior spiritual explorations. The innovation was the synthesis and the claim that this particular combination was beneficial. Understanding this constructed nature is essential for analysing how Findhorn's educational approach was developed as these practices became institutionalised, not because they were objectively superior, but because they were strategically framed as solutions to contemporary spiritual seekers, successfully demonstrated through material results (gardens) and embedded in structures that helped reproduce them across new waves of members.

Section 5.4 examines how these personal practices became institutionalised during the community's establishment and growth phases.

## 5.4 Field Establishment at Findhorn

The preceding section described the founders' formative experiences and spiritual framing till the 1950s. This section examines how those personal practices transformed into institutional structures during Findhorn's establishment and growth phases (1960-1980), tracing mechanisms of field construction, including boundary creation, position formation, capital accumulation, and rule institutionalisation. In social movements, frames serve as deliberately crafted "symbols by actors in social movements, which are applied and intended to mobilise supporters and demobilise opponents of a given cause" (Lindekilde, 2014, p.202) to tell the movement's story and significance. The founders' memoirs also seem to frame their experiences within the socio-cultural macro environment of the 1960s, a

decade known for the flourishing of mystic practices as antidotes to the “individualistic, materialistic, decadent and secular West” (Altglas, 2014, p.324). Through diagnostic framing (Benford & Snow, 2000), the founders identified problems in Western society at the time on both individual and collective levels. By situating their stories within the broader cultural narratives of the time, the founders present the Findhorn Foundation as a natural and necessary response to the needs of the time rather than a fringe or idiosyncratic endeavour. Framing also serves another purpose in social movements like the Findhorn Foundation. The memoirs are positioned as meaningful and provide a base for why the Findhorn Foundation exists, with smaller anecdotes serving as evidence and legitimisation of the authority of the founders. This section traces how the founders' personal practices transformed into institutional structures during the following years. This analysis focuses on the field establishment mechanisms, including how boundaries were created, positions and capital, and rules and structures that would sustain the community beyond its founders.

#### 5.4.1 Caravan Park Years – Crisis as Opportunity

The Caravan Park years may be understood as what Crossley (1999) terms the founding period of a working utopia, attempting to demonstrate their viability through practical demonstration. The testing conditions described and the following success provided the empirical foundations for the community's utopian claims.

##### **Material Crisis and Spiritual Reframing**

When the Caddy's and Maclean moved to the Findhorn Caravan Park after Peters' job termination as a hotel manager, they found themselves out of money and out of social circles. The caravan park Peter recalls was "a dump near garbage cans and overgrown wild foliage" (Caddy, 1996, p. 186). However, Eileen's guidance reframed this crisis as a divine opportunity. Messages she received "This is part of My plan for you. Have faith, and all will be well. I have brought you here for a purpose" (Caddy, 1992, p. 89) and “this situation will show you exactly who your real friends are” (Caddy, 1996, p.187). This reframing seems to portray what could be interpreted as

failure as a spiritual test, and to demonstrate that spiritual principles can sustain life without conventional employment or social acceptance. Their narrative reframing exemplifies what Snow and Beford (2000) term “diagnostic framing,” in which the problem is defined as materialism and the solution as spiritual disconnection, serving as a narrative for seekers dissatisfied with materialistic success measures, whilst also excluding those for whom economic security is important.



Figure 6: The Caddy Caravan. (Findhorn Foundation)

### **The Garden as Empirical Validation**

In 1963, when Peter began a small vegetable garden to supplement their limited resources, the sandy, nutrient-poor soil was considered unsuitable for cultivation. Peter approached gardening as a spiritual practice, working with attention and faith. Dorothy also followed her guidance to “seek ways of conscious co-operation” with nature spirits (Maclean, 2010, p. 196). She began her practice of attunement to what she called the “deva of the garden pea”, requesting co-operation and guidance. The garden's success, with extraordinary vegetable yields and a thriving plant system, impressed both visitors and local gardeners, as well as a nearby Soil Association. The garden thus became material evidence validating the founders' claims and providing “empirical credibility” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p.619). This

empirical validity was crucial for the field's establishment and demonstrated that the social field has value, providing material evidence. The Founders' spiritual capital (Eileen's guidance, Peter's manifestation and Dorothy's deva communication) also gained credibility by showing visible results of invisible spiritual claims. However, this validation also likely minimised Peter's horticultural knowledge, intensive physical labour, or favourable weather conditions, while emphasising divine guidance and deva cooperation, showing how strategic framing selects which causal factors receive emphasis.

### **Boundary Making – Who belongs?**

In the mid-1960s, as visitors began to arrive, drawn by word of mouth and organisational networks, Eileen's guidance indicated that "many will come who are meant to be here" (Caddy, 1992, p. 94). This established an important boundary mechanism, setting an expectation that visitors were not all meant to stay, but that those who felt aligned with their approach and could contribute skills and resources were to be welcomed. This selective acceptance could be understood as what Bourdieu terms field boundaries or as implicit rules that determine insiders/outside. Insiders accepted the reality of divine guidance or believed in nature spirits and embraced work as a spiritual practice. While appearing organic, this self-selection could also function as an exclusionary mechanism, with spiritual discernment used to maintain the community's composition. The community also remained geographically bounded (the Caravan Park), socially bounded (those who aligned with the principles), and symbolically bounded (those who felt called versus casual visitors). Their words also provide a common collective frame of the community, which Benford & Snow define as "action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimise the activities and campaigns of a social movement organisation" (2000, p.614). The memoirs also offer a common language for the founders and, subsequently, members to understand and verbalise their role and involvement in the community.

### **Early Capital Accumulation**

During this phase, founders could be said to have accumulated several forms of capital. Spiritual Capital in the form of gardens as evidence, Eileen's predicted developments coming through, Dorothy's deva communication resulting in thriving plants, and stories of Peter's manifestation bringing resources when needed. Spiritual Capital at Findhorn can be understood as a recognised capacity for direct spiritual experience and communication, specifically, inner listening to divine guidance, communication with nature spirits and faith-based manifestation. This capital, however, was experiential rather than credential-based, pragmatically validated, and relational, meaning it required recognition by others to function as capital.

They also accumulated cultural capital by documenting their experiences. Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes three forms of cultural capital: embodied (incorporated dispositions and knowledge), objectified (cultural goods such as books and instruments), and institutionalised (credentials and qualifications). Eileen's journals, Dorothy's recorded nature communication, and Peter's notes also created objectified cultural capital, serving as knowledge and written history for the community. Initial visitors and connected networks within ecological and spiritual new-age circles gradually built social capital and enhanced their reputation. The community's rich objectified capital lives on and is used as artefacts and community resources even today. However, it also could create challenges of misinterpretation or rigid application. Codified practices often risk losing the original spirit, and archived material could become dogma rather than inspiration.

All of the above also started to convert into economic capital through donations. More importantly, they secured a long-term lease of the land, converting their temporary situation into a more permanent base.

### **Field Establishing Actions**

Several actions were also added to the field establishment. The daily routines that consisted of morning meditations with Eileen's guidance being shared, work in the garden and community and collective meals creating temporal rhythms structuring

community life. The Garden was central with caravans arranged around it, and specific work areas and a sanctuary (meditation space) were built. Distinctive vocabulary emerged with words like tology (process of silent form of connecting with each other or with nature), guidance (messages received while attuning), devas (nature spirits). Practices such as inner listening before decision-making, seeking permission from land and nature spirits before planting, changing land use, and community meetings for discussion became ritualised. The 'Findhorn story' began to take shape and was shared with visitors and networks to create a founding mythology. The founders seem to encourage a set of spiritual practices that were selectively abstracted, repackaged, and promoted as a universal, value-free proposition appealing to the bricoleur, offering "take-homeable and effective techniques of self-realisation" (Altglas, 2014, p. 326) as ways of self-improvement and growth.

#### **5.4.2 Growth and Legitimation**

The community's growing legitimacy during this period aims to demonstrate not only internal coherence but also external validity, showing that alternative arrangements are not just desirable but practically possible, perhaps also performing the educative function of desire (Levitas, 2013).

#### **Media Exposure and Visitor Influx**

In 1966, BBC Radio Scotland broadcast a documentary about the Findhorn Garden, bringing more attention to the community. A BBC television documentary followed this in the "Man Alive" series, which reached a broad audience and further served as a legitimisation function, implicitly conferring validity. This publicity created a steady stream of curious visitors, tourists and potential other seekers, and Peter recalls "guidance foretold many visitors, and we needed to prepare to receive them" (Caddy, 1996, p. 263). The community began purchasing additional caravans and mobile homes to accommodate guests, funded by donations from impressed visitors and early members. This period also tested the community's capacity to maintain coherence while expanding and to see if their practices could be scaled

and withstand diverse approaches of people with different backgrounds and expectations.

### Strategic Visitors and Social Capital

Several influential visitors during this period further added social capital and enhanced its legitimacy. The arrival of David Sprangler and his partner enhanced the conceptual knowledge of New Age themes and the Caddy's felt the focus of the community "was not only demonstration of work as 'love in action but also as a training centre where theory and study could also be made available" (Caddy, 1996, p.313) He also formalised a vision for the community beyond the Caddy's.

(Fig.7) This led to the establishment of the Findhorn College, which held classes on skills and subjects ranging from New Age wisdom, outdoor leadership, public speaking and communication with angels. It closed down in 2023. Sir George Trevelyan, through his lectures and recommendations, attracted visitors from educational and artistic communities. R. Ogilvie Crombie (ROC), an Edinburgh scientist who claimed to communicate with nature spirits, validated Dorothy's deva communications, bolstered their

credibility in alternative spirituality circles, and served as a mentor to Peter. These and other such visitors represented what Bourdieu (1986) calls 'social capital' or networks and associations that provide resources and legitimacy(1986) by connecting Findhorn to other such individuals, movements and positioning the community as an entity within the broader field of New Age circles.

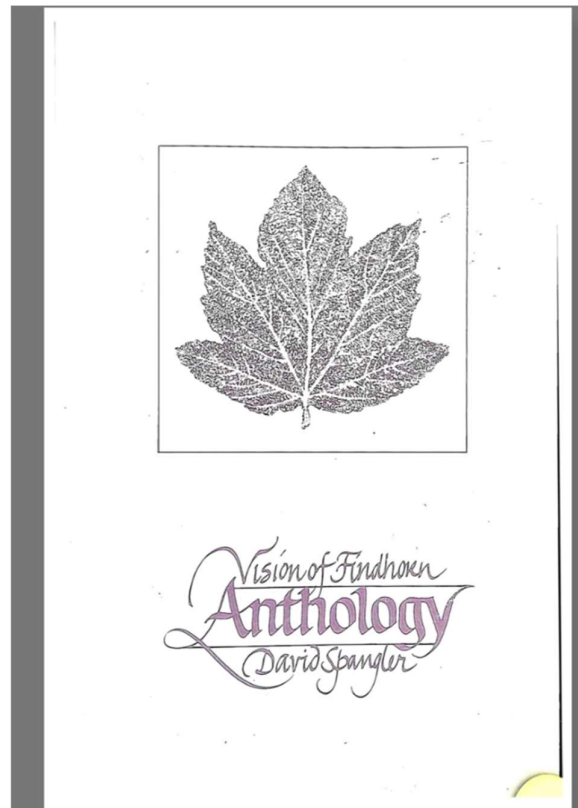


Figure 7: David Spangler's Lectures were converted to Vision of Findhorn. (Book Cover Image)

### **Publication and Cultural Capital**

The founders and the community also began creating publications that translated experiential knowledge into transmittable cultural capital. *The Magic of Findhorn* (1975) by Paul Hawken reached international audiences and attracted global visitors. Eileen's guidance compilations and Dorothy's nature communications were typed and distributed for potential members, and community newsletters kept a growing network informed about community developments. These publications spread Findhorn's message, attracted potential members, generated a modest income, and, most importantly, created cultural capital. New members could read Eileen's guidance, could learn about Dorothy's deva communication and enable the field's reproduction beyond the founders' direct teachings or access.

### **Governance and Hierarchy**

There was a hierarchy which characterised this period. The founders held positions of authority, and Eileen's guidance shaped major decisions. Peter was the manager, and Dorothy focused on the garden and participated in the community direction. Some long-term community members began building status and mentoring newcomers who were expected to learn, observe, and adapt to community norms and to demonstrate alignment with spiritual principles. Where Eileen's guidance created a monopoly on decision-making, long-term members would have begun to develop tacit knowledge about the community.

### **Field Consolidation Mechanisms**

Several developments during 1966-1971 consolidated Findhorn as a sustainable field. Some implicit and explicit norms began to emerge. The acceptance of divine guidance, expectation of practising inner listening, working with spiritual attitude and respect for nature were now a part of the way the community ran. Certain beliefs became Doxic or taken for granted, such as the availability and access to both



divine wisdom and nature communication, as well as the belief that the community is special, divinely guided, and serves a greater purpose. New members were also expected to develop these dispositions, such as practising daily meditation, using the community vocabulary, approaching work with attention and care, and building sensitivity to spiritual dimensions. By 1971, it had become a coherent, relatively stable social field with well-defined boundaries. However, a pivotal shift would make the field more institutionalised.

### **Capital Conversion**

The above period also illustrates capital conversion: the founders claimed capacities served as spiritual capital, which was converted into cultural capital (publications) and social capital (media coverage, influential visitors), which in turn was converted into economic capital (donations, fees), which was then converted into spatial capital (property). Each conversion expanded field resources while creating economic sustainability.

## **5.4.2 Institutionalisation and Distributed Authority**

### **The 1971 Guidance**

In October 1971, Eileen received guidance that would alter the community's structure. The message instructed members to "Stop relying on my guidance for the community. Each of you must develop your own inner listening. Take responsibility for your own spiritual growth and for the community's direction" (Caddy, 1992, p. 178). This represented a seismic shift because so far, Eileen's guidance had been the community's primary authority. Peter describes this as one of the most challenging transitions because they had become accustomed to Eileen's guidance, which directed everything. Now members had to see that they had their "own access to the same source of inner truth" (Caddy, 1996, p. 315) and make decisions through their inner knowing and collective wisdom. This guidance could be seen spiritually (founders framing) as members being given autonomy and being ready to become independent. It could also be represented through what Weber terms "routinisation of charisma" (1947/1968), which transformed the founder-centred community from

a central authority into distributed institutional structures that could sustain the field beyond the charismatic leaders and allow it to reproduce itself without the founders' direct control.

### **Formal Governance Structures**

In the following years, the Findhorn Foundation was registered as a Scottish Charity with religious, educational and charitable aims, formalising its legal status for tax benefits and property ownership and creating an institutional boundary beyond the founders. A core group was created with three departments: Administration, Education, and Community Operations. Each department had a focaliser, their term for a leader chosen to avoid hierarchical connotations while still assigning responsibility. Focalisers were expected to attune to inner guidance and collective wisdom while making decisions.

### **Field Transformation Mechanisms**

These structural changes could be understood as transforming the field by distributing and democratising spiritual capital from Eileen's inner listening capability to all members, developing their own inner listening mechanisms. Further formal programs, workshops, and publications allowed the knowledge to be codified, teachable, and reproducible beyond the community and its founders. Peter's managerial authority was distributed to the focalisers, and Eileen's spiritual authority to the members. Dorothy also left the community in 1973, moving to North America with David Spangler to establish a new community. The founders' personal practices were now institutionalised through required participation, and the belief that Findhorn was worthwhile because of Eileen's guidance shifted to a collective focus on creating a new consciousness, expanding the founders' vision.

### **Developments between 1973 and 1980**

Several other developments, such as the purchase of Cluny Hill Hotel (where Peter, Eileen and Dorothy had worked in the 1950s), represented a symbolic and practical victory because their guidance had predicted a return. Cluny also became the

community's primary educational centre, hosting workshops and programs, while the Caravan Park remained residential. After Dorothy's departure in 1973, Peter also moved to Hawaii in 1979. Although Eileen remained, she became peripheral and resided in the community till she passed away in 2000.

The community also developed formal educational offerings, such as the Experience Week, an introductory program for visitors that provided an overview of community life, principles, and practices. They offered various topical workshops and conferences on spirituality, ecology and community skills as well as other New Age themes. They also connected with other intentional communities, ecological organisations and spiritual movements, becoming a node in broader networks.

Thus, what began as three individuals' personal journeys and spiritual practices transformed into an institutionalised community with clear boundaries, positions, rules and capital, as well as embodied practices, doxic beliefs, a shared illusio and formal structures, this field is established through the strategic framing of narratives, the accumulation of diverse forms of capital, the development of

## Framing - Field Establishment



Figure 8: Framing Field Establishment Summary (Author Generated)

transmittable practices, and the creation of structures that distribute authority beyond the founders. While the founders framed this as divinely guided evolution, it also serves as a construction of a social field, as summarised in Fig. 8.

## 5.5 The Dialectical Process Narratives – Structures -Practices

Sections 5.3 and 5.4 documented the founders' experiences and community development chronologically. This section examines how these processes functioned as field construction through three key mechanisms. The relationship between narratives, structures and practices is dialectical rather than linear.

**Narratives shape structures:** The founders' framing of their experiences as spiritual quests involving divine guidance, nature communication and manifestation established what would be valuable (spiritual capital), who would be authoritative (those with demonstrated capacities) and what rules would govern (developing spiritual capacities)

**Structures Shape practices:** Once established, field structures shaped daily practices. Capital distribution would determine who taught whom, positions structured participation in decision making, and rules governed appropriate behaviour. The doxa shapes perceptions, and habitus generates actions. Members thus do not constantly refer to founder narratives but enact the structures that those narratives establish.

**Practices reproduce/transform narratives and structures:** Daily practices both reproduce existing structures (members embodying expected habitus) and create possibilities for transformation (new interpretations /evolving meanings). The 1971 guidance shift exemplifies practice transforming structure.

This dialectical understanding avoids both simple determinism, which posits that founders designed everything, and voluntarism, which posits that community members freely create meanings. Instead, it reveals ongoing mutual shaping where inherited structures constrain possibilities while practices create opportunities for evolution.

### **Mechanisms for Translation**

Several mechanisms translated founders' personal experiences into institutional structures. Documentation became a community resource, enabling transmission

and reproduction. Personal practices became community rituals, which allowed them to be embedded in daily rhythms, making them seem natural rather than constructed. Informal practices became formal structures, such as community gatherings, that began with attunement and governance mechanisms. New members were socialised through experience week and immersion in the community through work and mentorship, expecting dispositions to internalise through repetition. All these mechanisms contribute to field sustainability beyond the founders' influence.

### **Power Dynamics**

Field Analysis would also reveal power dynamics. While framed as a spiritual gift, spiritual capital functions as a power resource and those with recognised spiritual capacity could influence decisions and define legitimacy. The founders' narratives established them as exceptional, thereby granting them unchallenged authority. It may be said that participation requires resources (time, money, flexibility) that are more readily available to middle-class seekers, yet this was framed as spiritual readiness rather than material privilege. These power dynamics do not invalidate Findhorn's achievements but complicate narratives of egalitarianism, and understanding them is crucial for assessing educational possibilities and limitations.

### **Utopian Aspirations**

The dialectical relationship between narratives, structures and practices could also be seen as a distinctively utopian dynamic where the community is perhaps maintaining the tensions between what is 'not yet' and what they are. The narratives present the direction and aspiration, and the iterations negotiate the gap between the potential and possible, whilst generating knowledge and movement logic and also becoming a 'process utopia' (Harvey, 2000).

## **5.5.1 Implications for Understanding Educative Communities**

This analysis of Findhorn's founding suggests several emerging insights and implications for understanding intentional communities as educative spaces.

1. Narrative framing is Field construction – How intentional communities or social movements tell their story is not neutral history but active creation of structures, values and boundaries. Understanding ICs requires analysing their narratives as strategic constructions (Benford & Snow, 2000; Bourdieu,1993).
2. Multiple capital forms shape learning – ICs operate through diverse capital types (Bourdieu,1986), in this case, spiritual, cultural, social, symbolic and economic. All these forms shape educational structures, access and outcomes and analysing only formal educational structures misses how power operates through capital distribution.
3. Implicit Curriculum matters – Beyond explicit teachings, intentional communities transmit worldviews, dispositions and values through immersion, socialisation and habitus formation. This implicit curriculum may be more potent than formal programs.
4. Field Sustainability requires institutionalisation- Communities would be helped once they translate the founder's charisma into reproducible structures, creating both possibilities and tensions for navigation.
5. Gap between Utopian aspirations and practice generates collective knowledge - The iterations of utopia in practice could be understood as the learnings of the community and create collective know-how, lore and meaning for the community.

While these patterns emerge from historical analysis, their full theoretical development I will need to examine contemporary practice and synthesis, which I will address in Chapter 7. These implications extend beyond Findhorn to other educational and social alternatives, such as ecovillages, religious communities, and democratic schools, all of which may be creating fields with particular forms of capital, positions, and practices that shape learning.

## 5.6 Transition to Chapter 5B

This chapter has analysed how the founders' personal narratives and field establishment processes (summarised in Fig.8 and Fig. 9) created an implicit educational philosophy. Chapter 5B extends the analysis by examining explicit educational articulations in early community publications, formal program descriptions, and pedagogical structures developed during the community's early phases. Where Chapter 5A addresses how personal experiences became institutional structures, Chapter 5B elaborates how implicit educational intentions became explicit community pedagogy. Together, 5A and 5B establish the historical field necessary for analysing contemporary practice and answer the first research question about how the founders' ideas were translated into the community.

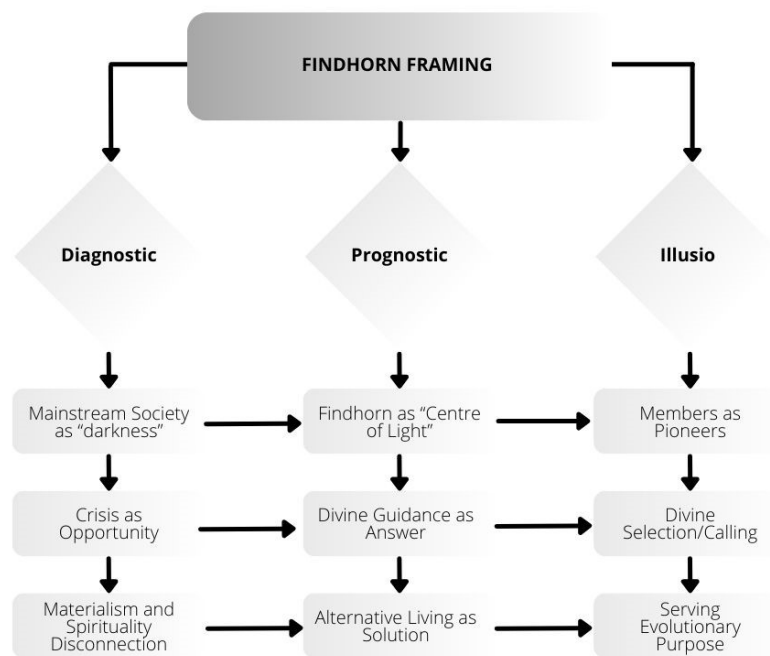


Figure 9: Findhorn Social Movement Framing Summary (Author Generated)





## 5 B- Findhorn and Its Educational Intentions

In Chapter 5A, I discussed how the Findhorn Founders constructed and framed their narratives to establish a field and used their personal spiritual practices, of *inner listening*, co-creation with nature, and spirituality-infused work, which were transformed into institutional structures through the process of documentation, ritualisation, capital accumulation and distributed authority. Chapter 5A thus focused on the implicit educational philosophy embedded in field construction processes, as reflected in the determination of valued knowledge and in implicit curricula and practices towards learning. The founders and long-term members can thus be seen as custodians of the field, establishing boundaries and strengthening its foundations. Thus, how the Findhorn Foundation frames its identity and purpose is not merely descriptive but performative, and they actively shape the community's educational practices and relationships.

In this chapter, I build on the discussion from Chapter 5A to examine the explicit educational articulations that formalised these implicit orientations into a systematic pedagogical approach. Specifically, I analyse how early community publications, particularly Eileen Caddy's compiled guidance messages, community newsletters and two texts, "Foundation of a Spiritual Community" (1991) and Spirit of Findhorn (1994), codified the founders' vision into transmittable educational thoughts to examine how these sources position educators, learners, and content in relation to one another, and how they contribute to both continuities with the founder's intentions and to strategic reframing that enabled broader transmission. This transition from implicit to explicit field practices helps in answering the first Research Question.

The publications that I have used<sup>47</sup> are extracts of specific selections of the guidance that was recorded by Eileen Caddy to focus on specific themes of the foundations of the Findhorn Foundation. I have used these texts to codify further how they can provide clues about the community's initial description of who can be an educator, who is the student, and what constitutes valuable knowledge. As one focuses on the specific educational philosophies and practices of the community, it is crucial to consider how the framing is both shaped and moulded by the founders and members through their publications, and how this framing influences every aspect of its educational approach. Further details are also in Appendix 1.

Chapter 5A employs a Bourdiesian field theory to analyse how founders established Findhorn's social space. This chapter builds on that foundation while introducing Searle's (1995) concept of collective intentionality to examine how field structures generate shared educational purposes and coordinate members' actions. Section 5.7 explains how the three core practices were articulated through the lens of educational theory. Sections 5.8 and 5.9 analyse how collective intentionality shapes educational relationships and how founders' narratives and guidance were codified and translated to educational aims, educator roles, learner characteristics, and valued content using the I-SMLE framework as the analytical tool. The primary data in this chapter represent deliberate attempts to construct specific messages for members and external audiences. They are performative documents or strategic articulations that shape community identity and practice. I continue to treat these publications as founders' narrative work now directed towards systematising rather than justifying. Where memoirs established the legitimacy of founders through biological coherence, these texts establish pedagogical expectations.

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<sup>47</sup> Foundations of a Spiritual Community and Spirit of Findhorn

## 5.7 The Findhorn Foundation as a Spiritual and Educational Community – Founder Frames to Lived Beliefs

As detailed in the previous chapter, the Findhorn Foundation presents itself as an intentional community with an educational focus. Peter, Eileen and Dorothy's personal spiritual practices evolved into the three core principles during the 1962-1970s period. These three practices of Inner listening, Work as love in action, and Co-creation with nature were initially enacted informally but slowly became systematised, teachable methods. They also become the 'content of utopia' (Levitas, 2013), the specific vision or direction towards the utopian aspiration.

### 5.7.1 Underlying Ontological Beliefs

Peter, Eileen and Dorothy brought different ontological perspectives that collectively shaped the community's educational approach. While their personal journeys varied, three key ontological assumptions emerge that directly inform Findhorn's educational philosophy.

1. Accessibility of Divine Guidance through specific practices – All three founders believed that wisdom could be accessed through deliberate inner practices like meditation and *inner listening*, establishing these as primary educational tools rather than any external teaching authority. This, however, raises questions about the process of sensemaking and the shift from an external entity to something internal, thereby blurring the concepts of an external God or a guiding presence over time within the community.
2. The unity of all beings with a divine source – Although expressed differently by each founder, there is a shared ontological position of "guidance" from non-human entities as reality and a constant search for different knowledge sources to build or validate this worldview. Dorothy's belief in the 'sentience of nature' particularly influenced the community's core practice of co-creation with nature, which is a cornerstone of their educational curriculum. Members approach the natural world as a partner and teacher rather than a

resource. Her guidance was often interpreted through the meaning-making of images and symbols, rather than direct words, which often raises questions of subjectivity and the influence of socio-cultural knowledge and environment.

3. The Manifestation of spiritual principles through practical action- Peter Caddy's commitment to work is love in action, reflecting a pragmatic ontology where spiritual truths must be embodied in tangible work. This belief directly shapes Findhorn's educational methodology, where community tasks are understood as essential learning experiences rather than mere maintenance activities.

The social nature of ontology emphasises that it is not isolated but is co-created within social and cultural contexts (Tuomela,2013). These foundational ontological positions were perhaps accepted and subsequently transformed into the community's practices and core beliefs. These practices would then help create a distinctive educational environment where traditional hierarchies between teacher and student are deliberately blurred. Instead, the 'divine' is positioned as the ultimate educator, with human teachers acting as facilitators to help learners develop their own connection to inner guidance.

#### *Core Practices as Primary Educational Approach*

The three core practices of the Findhorn Foundation derived from the above assumptions represent more than just the founders' beliefs. They could be understood as the primary educational approach through which the community's pedagogical vision is enacted. By examining how these practices are framed, we can gain insight into the distinctive educational approach that defined Findhorn as a field of practice.

#### *Inner Listening from Eileen's Skill to Distributed Epistemology*

Chapter 5A discusses the shift from Eileen's guidance to everybody seeking their own guidance, marking the transition to a distributed spiritual authority. *Inner*

*listening* is now framed as the foundational educational method at Findhorn, and the community website describes it as “opening the doors within to the divine stillness and to the source of all guidance. We recognise that learning how to come into *attunement* with the divine within, listen to its voice, trust what we hear and live our individual and collective lives in this *attunement* is the central process by which this community – and humanity – evolves” (Findhorn Foundation, 2021).

This articulation shows the shift from Eileen's specific practice to a universal human capacity. Also, the explicitly Christian framing of Eileen's original practice (Be Still and Know that I am God) is neutralised to the divine, broadening its accessibility across diverse backgrounds. Third, it is positioned as the central process stance that legitimises knowledge not through external authorities or intellectual analysis, but through cultivating a relationship with one's internal sources of wisdom, rather than one among many, elevating it to primary epistemological status.

The educational implications of inner listening as a skill requiring development (content to learn) and an educator (how knowledge is accessed) make inner listening both a prerequisite and an outcome. Thus, one needs inner listening capacity to access inner listening. While traditional educational models typically position the teacher as the knowledge holder or authority, Findhorn's framing of *Inner listening* inverts this relationship, suggesting that learning occurs when individuals develop their capacity to access wisdom directly. However, this articulation also obscures tensions. If inner listening is universally accessible, what could explain differences in capacity among members? Moreover, how does one validate conflicting inner guidance? I will elaborate on this in Chapter 6 with member insights.

### Co-creation with Nature: From Dorothy's Practice to Experiential Curriculum

The community frames the practice of co-creating with nature as a method through which “humans can find and bring new and creative solutions to life” (Findhorn Foundation, n.d). This practice, attributed mainly to Dorothy's contribution, is based on her claimed ability to “access the sentience of nature” and the practical results of

her collaboration with nature, which yielded unprecedented vegetable harvests. Although these yields could not be scientifically explained, they validated the approach.

Educationally, this framing seems to establish nature itself as a teacher and learning partner rather than merely a subject of study. Also, co-creation with nature is framed as a skill. Although there is limited empirical evidence to support what could be dismissed as a purely subjective experience, community lore legitimises the value of this approach. Although this legitimisation of 'community lore' rather than verifiable evidence raises questions about how spiritual claims become institutionalised knowledge and who benefits from such acceptance, it does attract outsiders, especially at the intersections of ecology and spirituality.

### *Work is Love in Action as Pedagogical Methodology*

The third core principle reflects Peter's worldview and commitment to following guidance and intuition with unshakeable faith and optimism, believing that everything will work out if it is done with clear intention and love. This framing transforms mundane community labour into a spiritual practice and educational opportunity, where learning is not separated from daily work but is embedded within it. The community and the tasks within it become a primary learning environment, not formal settings or classrooms, and work frames itself as an expression of love rather than mere productivity. This framing also creates tensions: how does one differentiate between excellent tasks and spiritual growth, and whether members are workers, learners, or spiritual practitioners, creating ambiguity between educational and operational roles.

### *Integration of Practices into an Educational System*

Together, these core practices of the Findhorn Foundation seem to inform its educational methodologies and curricula directly. The emphasis on *Inner listening* translates into prioritising self-reflection and intuitive knowledge. In contrast, the emphasis on co-creation with nature is reflected in ideas such as permaculture, ecological habitats, and the deification of nature through terms like angels or devas.

Lastly, the idea that work is love in action is evident in the approach to community tasks and services, which are framed as opportunities for spiritual growth and practical skill development. Members and guests are encouraged to view them as part of their educational journey.

*“Finding stillness, attuning or listening to what’s within, and then trusting and acting on this guidance, is how our community lives and evolves – and we believe this way of living can support humanity to evolve. The Findhorn Foundation and community is a gateway to this new world and a living demonstration of it” (Findhorn, n.d).*

Comparing early publications with contemporary articulations reveals language shifts such as 1. God -divine- inner wisdom/higher self or 2. Obedience to divine will – alignment with inner guidance seems to emphasise agency, choice and personal empowerment. These shifts maintain core commitments while moving from religious to spiritualised to psychological language, broadening accessibility without abandoning them. Contemporary formulations show more directive language reflecting shifts towards what Heelas & Woodhead might term individualised spirituality (2005). Articulating these practices as a systematic educational approach rather than as founder preferences helps build credibility and may position the community as offering valuable methods rather than charismatic personas. How members describe and navigate these practices will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

The intersection of ecology, community living, and spiritual practices is not unique to the Findhorn Foundation. For instance, the Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage<sup>16</sup> abovealso aspires to demonstrate sustainable communitarian living. However, the principles that enact the vision are framed in more practical ecological and economic terms (e.g., avoiding motor use, sustainable fuels, and a circular economy) (Dancing Rabbit, n.d.). In contrast, the Auroville community is more focused on the principles of Integral Yoga and consciousness-building, demonstrating a sense of universal unity (Auroville, n.d.). Thus, it becomes imperative to view communities as unique

ecosystems animated by their own peculiar ways of existing. These distinctions also highlight how each community's framing can shape its educational offerings and determine the kind of language and initiatives that are offered, both within and to the external world, with a differing balance of skills, spirituality, and social transformation. There is also evidence that communities learn from one another and influence one another, as seen in the borrowing of Rosicrucian ideas and the influence of David Spangler, who subsequently established Lorian<sup>48</sup>, which takes a more emphatic approach to spiritual development through its framing (Lorian, n.d.). In the next section, I explore how these beliefs are connected to the community and its approach to educational functions through the lens of intentionality and shared purpose, which is derived from how the community frames its existence.

## 5.8 Collective Intentionality and Shared Purpose as the Foundation of Educational Relationships

While field theory could explain how Findhorn established its social space and rules (Chapter 5A), collective intentionality could reveal how shared educational purposes actively shape learning relationships within that field. Unlike traditional education, where institutional authorities determine educational goals, Findhorn could be understood as operating through a collective agreement on how learning occurs, creating what Searle (1995) terms "social facts" that guide member behaviour and intentions.

Intentionality is defined by Jankowic and Ludwig as the "property of being about, or directed at, something" (2016,p.1), and collective intentionality brings focus to being directed by "joint actions and attitudes, their relations to individual actions and

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<sup>48</sup> Lorian Association/Community - A spiritual and educational organization founded in 1974 by David and Julia Spangler (directors), Dorothy Maclean and others who developed the community's practices and teachings. The community is based around the teachings of David Spangler (b. 1945), who experienced a spontaneous spiritual vision in 1962 that led him to develop what became known as "Incarnational Spirituality". Unlike Findhorn's physical community model, Lorian operates primarily as a dispersed educational network offering classes, publications, and online programs.  
<https://lorian.org/>



attitudes, and the implications for the nature of social groups and their functioning”(ibid,2016,p.1). As a community, if one were to believe that the founders proposed collective intentions for the community as a whole and its members, it could follow that members are jointly focused on accomplishing that vision. John Searle (1995) proposes that all intentionality is individually held but could be collectively communicated to create social facts by prescribing functions to artefacts, for example, Eileen's guidance messages were collectively understood as authoritative community decisions. This and other doxic beliefs of the field could be said to be collectively shared beliefs.

Chapter 5A also discussed how the *illusio* of participation in Findhorn was worthwhile. This positioning established a collective educational intention, in which members demonstrated a commitment to the idea that the Findhorn Foundation is an educational spiritual ecovillage. Here, members live by core principles that they agree to as a condition of joining the community. We could argue that the group has collectively created a social fact held by all members. Others (Meijers, 2001; Gilbert, 1998) argue that collective intention involves the creation of expectations and obligations among individuals based on their acceptance of the commonly held view. Thus, members have a specific role to play towards the common view. Gilbert proposes that there is a special kind of thing, a ‘*synthesis sui generis*’” (1996, p. 268), that becomes the focus of the collective intentionality powered by individual intentions and a joint commitment.

Chapter 5A also discussed the formation of *habitus* through spatial and temporal rhythms. One may think collective intentionality may explain how this *habitus* enabled coordinated action without explicit direction. For example, daily attunement rituals preceding community activity where members form a circle, observe silence and probably demonstrate work with inner guidance in action. When expectations are formalised further, this creates what Meijers (2001) describes as shared obligations, in which members feel accountable to the collective process regardless of personal preference.

So, if field structures constrain possibilities (capital, boundaries, positions, rules), collective intentions animate those structures so members experience constraints as shared commitments rather than external impositions. This dialectical relationship could thus be said to reproduce and strengthen the field across changing membership.

Below, I illustrate how founders' framings could be interpreted as converted into the community's collective intentions.

### 5.8.1 Shaping the Educator-Learner Relationship

Collective intentionality reconfigures traditional teacher-student dynamics at Findhorn. The community's shared belief in "*inner listening*" positions education as empowering learner autonomy rather than dependency on human teachers. Through collective acceptance of inner guidance as legitimate, knowledge claims arising from meditation, *attunement* to nature or intuitive insights gain validity, unavailable in conventional educational settings and create distinctive learning pathways where, for example, A community member's intuitive impression of what plants should be placed together, during gardening, might be accorded as much educational value as a researched presentation

### 5.8.2 Transforming Content Selection and Valuation

The community's shared intention to "demonstrate a new way of life" privileges experiential, intuitive, and practical wisdom over others, shaping both curriculum development in formal programs like experience week and community workshops, as well as informal daily community activities. For example, during Experience Week, as participants, most exercises focused on our responses to activities and on reflection in silence as a primary learning method, rather than on acquiring information about the community, illustrating a relationship between the learner and the content as one of active co-creation rather than passive absorption.

### 5.8.3 Tensions within Collective Educational Intentions

The variety of members' motivations, from spiritual growth to ecological concerns, raises important questions about how consistently these collective intentions shape educational experiences. As Wray (2002) notes, collective acceptance of certain practices does not necessarily indicate uniform belief; people may seem to accept voluntarily by virtue of feeling it may be true, or by not actively rejecting it, or by accepting it in light of considerations of one's goals. My observations during Experience week also revealed varying degrees of engagement with different aspects of the community's educational philosophy, suggesting that while overt acceptance of collective intentions may be widespread, individual opinions likely differ significantly.

However, when members are in various work departments within the community, the ritual of collective *attunement* before starting any task establishes an overt acceptance and subscription, even if members may hold opposing views internally. The implications for educational interactions could also be considered, including whether staunch beliefs would allow for critical thinking or ensure more engagement, and how open and inclusive one feels when holding diverse perspectives. However, the tension between collective and individual educational intentions could also be seen as a productive feature of the Findhorn's educational model, creating space for personalised learning pathways and critical engagement versus maintaining camaraderie and engagement within the community.

The Findhorn Foundation started as a collective project by the Caddy's and Dorothy, but seems to have become Gilbert's special kind of thing' that the members collectively aspire to establish. It may be implausible to assume that all members share collective beliefs about the community's intentionality. However, it may be easier to deduce that members voluntarily accept some of the social facts established by the community and therefore collectively organise themselves and their actions as a group towards the described goals. The 'Experience Week' exemplifies how the community curates its thoughts and beliefs in a specific way for

visitors or potential new members. Through the careful selection of activities, tasks, and experiences by trained members, the experience week serves as a mechanism to share the community's intentions and collective purpose, reflecting Meijers' (2001) notion of creating shared expectations and obligations. Conversely, the outcomes of these shared experiences and interactions also feed back into the collective community intentions and may help shift or refine them over time.

### *Collective Intentionality as Educational Innovation*

Connecting this back to the educational relevance of intentionality in Education, Friesen states, "In the pedagogical situation, the teacher intends to change the relation of the student to content from unnecessary uncertainty or confusion to clarity and confidence" (Friesen, Osguthorpe, 2018, p.256); the exploration of the intentionality of the founders of the community could help establish the basic tenets of a pedagogical relation between the community and its members. These intentions are both explicitly stated in publications and documentary evidence and implicit in the community's membership rules, rituals, and practices. However, collective intentionality could also be seen as an aspect of participatory sense-making (De Jaegher & Paolo, 2007), which brings in the question of sustaining these intentions with a very fluid membership base, as well as evolving social and cultural realities, the role of frames in that process and the dynamic nature of educational philosophy within social movements.

In the following section, I focus on the founder's documented intentions and early publications by identifying specific phrases or quotes, which I then present thematically. I begin with the community's overall stated intentions, followed by its specific educational objectives. Throughout this process, I am using the Integrative Social Movement Learning and Education framework as both a guide and an analytical tool.

## 5.9 Framed Intentions as an Educational Community

The Founders' intentions in the Findhorn Foundation case have been described at two levels. In most documents, the descriptions are recorded guidance messages compiled by Eileen and published in collections. Additionally, I have reviewed earlier newsletters, where the intentions were written as messages for followers interested in the Findhorn evolution in the early years. Combining these resources and presenting them in a summarised form, I have attempted to draw on the Founders' intentions in their conception and vision for Findhorn Foundation. Founders' memoirs presented spiritual experiences as personal journeys, whereas newsletters and publications universalised these experiences as accessible principles. This shift from first-person testimony to neutral second-person imperatives transforms personal experience into membership requirements, suggesting that what the founders did, members must also do, thereby establishing institutional norms rather than individual choices. The four overarching institutional intentions positioning Findhorn's educational purpose are discussed below.

### 5.9.1 Spiritual Centre of Light – An Overarching Frame and Institutional Identity

*"I want you to see this centre of light as an ever-growing cell of light. It started as a family group; it is now a community; it will grow into a village, then into a town, and finally into a vast city of light. It will progress in stages and expand very rapidly" (Caddy, 1991, p. 164).*

Findhorn Foundation was positioned as "*a centre of light*" and "*a place of synthesis and integration where many different people would be able to unite and work together in love and in harmony*" as well as "*a place of change which would keep on growing and developing along the lines of guidance by the divine spirit*" (ibid, p.164). The 'centre of light' metaphor, which Chapter 5A identified as diagnostic framing (mainstream society as darkness), positions the community's fundamental educational purpose of illuminating knowledge that remains obscured in

mainstream society. While Stock (2020) notes the prevalence of the archetypal metaphor of light and education, at Findhorn, this metaphor serves as a field-establishing function, positioning the community's educational offerings as access to wisdom that conventional education/society cannot provide. The centre of light framing could also be seen as explicitly utopian in the structural sense that Jameson (2005) identifies, positioning the community as a prefiguration of a transformed future, demonstrating new possibilities. The challenge with this metaphor is that it establishes expectations of superiority. This simplistic dichotomy of Findhorn being the light and the world as darkness may not reflect reality, and the community may not unconsciously want to position itself as superior. More critically, the light/darkness metaphor could position Findhorn members as enlightened and outsiders as deficient, creating exclusion even in the face of universal love and inclusivity claims.

### 5.9.2 Transformative Space for Pioneers (Setting the *illusio* for the kind of learners it seeks to attract) and Member Identity

The framing of the community members as "*fully dedicated souls*" (ibid, p.157) to serve as "*pioneers and explorers into the new*" (p.157) while expanding outreach to bring in "*more and more souls*" (p.157) establishes field boundaries by setting specific expectations about who are the legitimate learners within this educational field and what could be the motivation or *illusio* that will attract such members and create a commitment to a cause and willingness to be risk-takers towards something new. Unlike conventional education systems, eligibility focuses more on attributes such as commitment, adaptability, and spiritual dedication. This framing, as noted in Kanter's (1972) work, may encourage cognitive and affective attachment to both the cause and the community, and simultaneously describe not just who will learn, but also approach learning as an act of pioneering new frontiers rather than as a matter of mastering established knowledge.

In the broader tradition of utopian movements and new age movements, it is common to consider new movements as special or a new spiritual or social order

(Wessinger, 2000). Prof. Leyburn, in his book *Frontier Folkways*, described frontiers as "that region on the outer edge of settlement where pioneers are forced, for the sake of survival, to make new adjustments to a raw environment. It is a region, it is a process, it is even a state of mind" (1935,p.1), which evokes an image of members who would be both adventurous and dedicated to the community's vision, and in doing so, will also be able to inspire and encourage others. Subsequently, this helped frame their participation as a commitment to a larger cause, also positioning the Findhorn Foundation as both a critique of societal structures and a solution to their perceived shortcomings. This approach aligns with Kanter's (1972) analysis of Intentional communities, which argues that successful communities often employ strategies that encourage commitment among their members by fostering cognitive attachment to both the cause and the people, and also instilling mechanisms of 'sacrifice' or 'investment' towards the community's cause. However, this 'pioneer framing' could mask the privilege required to access and participate in such personal exploration and may suggest access is limited to a certain class of people. (namely educated and affluent)

### 5.9.3 Demonstration of the Impact of Divine Guidance as Prototype for the New World – Solution Frame

Emphasising divine guidance as the primary educational method at Findhorn Foundation fundamentally restructures the educator-learner relationship. By positioning the divine as the ultimate teacher, the texts establish a distinctive pedagogical relationship where human educators serve not as knowledge authorities but as mediators or facilitators of this divine guidance as seen in the following quote "Just a handful of people, guided and directed by Me, with their lives wholly dedicated to Me and My service, can change the old way of life into a completely new way" (Caddy, 1991, p. 99).

This framing also legitimises founders' educational authority by positioning them as channels rather than originators of wisdom. It attempts to establish a non-hierarchical educational ideal in which all community members are seen as having

potential access to the same divine source of knowledge. Most of the initial publications of the community focus on the importance of faith and acceptance of a divine voice and accept the idea that there is a higher purpose for being in the community, “I want you to see this, My chosen place” (Caddy,1991, p.94), and for the community itself, which is divinely orchestrated. “I can do all things in and through those who love Me and obey My word. It is necessary for this My centre of light To grow and expand”(Caddy, 1991, p.165). The focus on divine election appears to serve as a means of providing both legitimacy and special status to the community, while also establishing a purpose that seems transcendental or connected to a higher purpose rather than material comfort or gain. The community members would thus demonstrate a new way of life by following the methods set out by the Founders and focusing on their own growth through subservience to the divine guidance.

The overarching intentions described above establish the foundational elements of education as an essential starting point. These framed intentions were further elaborated with more specific views on the aims of education for members, the community's educational goals, and how to achieve them. The following section builds on the specific themes that emerged in my reading of the data.

## 5.10 Aims of Education at Findhorn

Chapter 5A discussed how the Findhorn Foundation and its founders' narratives could be understood as an implicit field construction process, both through its origin story and *raison d'être*, which tries to establish a perspective on its educational aims, rooted in a holistic, transformative approach to personal and collective growth. Each aim is simultaneously an educational goal and a utopian aim, specifying both what members must become and what the wider world needs. This dual function of individual formation and collective possibility shows the potentially utopian potential of education within the community.

These overall educational aims represent a critical element of what the I-SMLE framework identifies as Content/World, which encompasses the specific skills,



knowledge, and dispositions considered valuable within this educational field, towards which the focus of both the educator and the learner lie. These aims also shape the pedagogical skills and methods which define how educators and learners relate to this content. The aims identified can also be understood through the I-SMLE framework as operating under the four key dimensions- they help define the educational content, shape pedagogical relationships, construct member identity and engagement and design the learning environment. While I present these separately for analytical clarity, in practice, they function as an interconnected system. The specific areas highlighted in the readings are detailed below.

### 5.10.1 Content/ World: What is to be learnt?

#### *Spiritual Transformation as Core Educational Aim, Content and Goal*

The central aim of education at the Findhorn Foundation appears to be spiritual transformation, which aligns with what the I-SMLE framework identifies as the primary content within the educational triangle. As one community text describes

*“Feel yourselves being lifted out of the darkness of all this false teaching into the glorious Light. Leave behind all the old, let it die a natural death and enter the New reborn in spirit and in truth and know the meaning of true freedom”* (Caddy & McVicar, 1994, p.91).

The above lines position spiritual transformation as not merely a personal goal, but the central educational content around which all other learning is organised. The description refers to education as guiding students from “false teaching” and illusions to a direct, lived experience with truth and unity with the divine. This transformative journey is not merely intellectual but involves an experiential shift in consciousness. It enables students to awaken to their true nature as inseparable from the divine, ultimately leading to *“your(their) realisation of Oneness with me. (God)”* Here, I have used the term “spiritual transformation” with a caveat that the community has evolved from its original vocabulary of God to the divine, which is more open to interpretations based on people's understanding of the divine. Pargament defines “spirituality as the search for the sacred” (1999, p.12), with his

explanation of the sacred inspired by Durkheim's conception, referring to the community or the individual deeming something sacred based on its significance or ability to inspire awe, respect, or fear, or even symbolic significance collectively determined. Pargament (2006), in a separate paper, details his conception of spiritual transformation, dividing it into primary and secondary transformation, where primary transformation refers to fundamental changes in what one holds sacred and can involve dramatic changes in beliefs, practices or identity, and secondary transformation may involve changes within an existing framework with either deepening, rejecting or altering one's current beliefs or practices. There is, of course, a seemingly oversimplified and probably overgeneralized concept, as well as assumptions about particular ways of seeing both spirituality and transformation. However, in the context of the Findhorn Foundation, there seems to be an understanding that one must, in the process of being 'educated', identify with the divine and the inseparability from the divine. However, this transformation does not specify what or who one should hold sacred; therefore, the words 'divine' or 'God' are understood as placeholders for diverse belief systems to plug in their own appropriate beliefs.

Here, spiritual transformation functions as core content and this emphasis on holistic development challenges the dominant models of education that seem to focus on the ideas of 'human capital model of education' or, more recently, the 'human capability view' (Leoni, 2023) of what education is for, which still seems to identify education as a tool for society's development through productivity both in economic and social terms. Achieving the above aim, as outlined in the texts, involves several objectives that are further detailed below.

#### *Openness to Change as an epistemological stance*

*"There must be change as you move forward into the New Age, and ..... You must be courageous and move forward into new ways" (Caddy & McVicar, 1994, p.77-78).*

The community's emphasis on openness to change shapes both what counts as legitimate knowledge and how that knowledge should be transmitted. Rather than prioritising a particular doctrine or a method, Findhorn's approach values emergent spiritual insights and self-received guidance. Education and knowledge are described as the ability to evolve and take responsibility for growth, fostering flexibility, adaptability to new ways of thinking, and responding with grace and resilience. This also speaks to the pioneer metaphor and the courage it demands. This attitude expects learners to be prepared for uncertainty and reframes disruptions as a spiritual opportunity, which probably also helps pre-empt resistance or anxiety. Learners are encouraged to embrace opportunities to face their fears and prime themselves for new ways of living and being. This aim thus shapes not only what is learned, but also how knowledge must be conceived, and privileges emergence and evolution over fixed transmission.

### 5.10.2 Pedagogical Relationships: How educators and Learners must Interact

#### *Seeing Perfection in All: Shaping Pedagogical Relations*

Another aim is cultivating the ability to see perfection in all, which directly influences the pedagogical relations that refer to how educators and learners perceive and interact with one another.

*"Hold the vision of perfection, Harmony and beauty ever before you and see it in everything and everyone" (Caddy & McVicar, 1994, p.138).*

*"In every soul, there is that true perfection. There is that Christ image. There is that spark of God. It may be unrecognisable with all the dirt and filth that covers it; but those who know, who are sensitive, see deep down beyond all the surface confusion to that which is the truth" (Caddy & McVicar, 1994, p.138)*

The above lines seem to advocate a specific pedagogical stance, encouraging people to recognise the inherent value and potential in others as a core educational

practice, and to look beyond the surface to recognise the inner beauty, perfection, and image of God in all beings. This creates the assumption of a distinctive pedagogical relationship, in which the educator's primary role becomes witnessing and affirming the learner's inherent qualities rather than perceived shortcomings.

The idea of divinity in everything is not unique to the Findhorn Foundation. It has its roots in other traditions like the concept of 'Imago Dei' (emphasising divinity in humans) or the Advaita concept of the 'Tat Tvam Si' (denoting the self is a part of the absolute). It is interesting how the narrative of viewing others is emphasised through the lens of looking for God and how it could be seen as "relational connectedness" (Norsworthy, 2024, p.5), determining how people in the community are expected to relate to each other and the assumptions that they must hold about the members. This aim directly structures the pedagogical relations within the community and seems to encourage looking beyond the surface differences and connecting at the level of commonality. Critically, the potential to measure this aim seems unattainable, and it appears more like a generic guideline or a helpful suggestion. However, it raises questions about equality, inclusion, and social justice within the community and its practices, as well as how members' lived realities reflect these issues. If everyone's divinity is theoretically equal, how would conflicting messages be handled?

### *Unity and Brotherhood: Learning through the Relationship*

The texts state, "When each person can truly find that spirit of oneness, with *no one trying to be a reformer or to set the standard, that is being one in My spirit*" (Caddy, 1991, p. 83). Thus, the aim of fostering unity and brotherhood connects individuals to the collective while also shaping the design, practices, and environment, as well as the educational experiences within the community.

This framing establishes a specific design for the educational environment in which relationships among community members serve as the primary medium through which learning occurs, shaping the pedagogical relationship. The emphasis on "*the creation of a world where Universal Love starts within each individual and works its*

way out" (Caddy & McVicar, 1994, p.138 ) shapes how spaces, activities and interactions are designed to facilitate specific forms of learning about connection and unity. However, learning occurs through horizontal, mutually beneficial relationships, flattening the teacher-student hierarchy and positioning members as both learners and educators.

### 5.10.3 Identity and Engagement: Who the learner Becomes

#### *Inner Peace and Stillness as Habitus of Individuals*

The emphasis on cultivating inner peace and stillness represents an aspirational 'habitus.' As the quote below states

*"You cannot help the world situation. If you allow yourselves to become involved in it. You have to be immune to the disease, Or you too will contract it, And then you can be of no help whatsoever" (Caddy & McVicar, 1994, p.137).*

The above framing positions the development of inner peace not merely as a personal benefit, but as an essential educational aim that builds the specific *habitus* required to function effectively in the field. By encouraging members to develop *"this inner peace, students become 'masters of every situation' and 'really responsible, dedicated souls'" (Caddy & McVicar, 1994, p.134).* Thus, it is not just a way to learn but a way of being that members must cultivate to function effectively within the community.

While spiritual transformation seems to be the overarching aim of the community, the way it can be achieved could also be considered the aim of education. Groff and Smoker, in their work inspired by Buddhism, mention how "spiritually based peace theory stresses the interactivity between all things and the centrality of inner peace" (1996, p.92), which seems to align with the Caddy's and acknowledges the holistic nature and role of peace as the way to a more sustainable world. The practices and importance of its core principles, including inner listening and

harmony with nature, can also be seen as explicit expressions of their beliefs and intentions for both the community and its members.

However, does the emphasis on inner peace somehow imply a focus on individuals and their detachment from the rest of the world, or a passive form of peace? Yet, if inner peace is supposed to change the world, this suggests an active process of also trying to bring about outer peace, which could be limited by both the geographical distance and the insular environment of the community. This recognition does not overlook the knowledge exchange and the efforts the community makes to spread awareness and share its learnings; however, at an individual level, it may seem more like a personal quest. Some of the ways to achieve Inner Peace and Stillness, as per the guidance, are detailed below.

#### *Radiating Love and Light – Expected embodied Disposition of members*

The aim of radiating love and light is to build a narrative of the responsibility that community members must hold in serving as both embodiments and transmitters of the field's core values. Findhorn thus positions the radiation of love and light as a mechanism for maintaining and expanding the field, enabling community members to build the capacity to embody its core values.

*"Let the Love within bubble over like water And flow to all alike. Let there be no discrimination in you, For all are of Me, All are one family... More and more Light is needed in the world, and you are all part of that glorious Light, so hide not your Light" (Caddy & McVicar, 1994, p.101).*

As the quote above suggests, education at the Findhorn Foundation aims to empower members to express universal love and light by being free of judgment, discrimination, and separateness and willing to serve as beacons of hope and inspiration for the world. The aim suggests a telos of identity formation and what members should become and how they should present themselves to the community and the wider world. It positions members as both products and reproducers of the community field.

### *Personal Responsibility through Engagement*

The emphasis on taking personal responsibility can be understood as a reflection of members' identity and engagement, shaping specific aspects that define how individuals participate in the educational process. The expectation that *"You will no longer try to change other souls, but will learn to live in such a way that others will want to know what it is you have got that they have not"* (Caddy & McVicar, 1994, p.107) presents members as self-responsible exemplars who focus on their own transformation and allow others to learn from their lived experiences rather than trying to teach others through words. Further, members should be "in complete control of every situation" and *"have a real sense of responsibility to see a job through, no matter what it is and to see it through perfectly"* (Caddy & McVicar, 1994, p.133). This aim constructs learner agency, wherein transforming oneself becomes the mechanism for teaching others.

### *Living in the Present Moment: A Tool for Learners*

The emphasis on living in the present moment as seen from this quote: *"Be like a very small child, Free and joyous with no concern for what tomorrow may bring and live in the ever-present now"* (Caddy & McVicar, 1994, p.91). could be understood as a suggested practice for learners. It encourages members to live in the present moment and embrace the freedom of a childlike existence, thereby unlocking creativity, joy, and authentic self-expression. This aspect again draws on many traditions, such as Stoicism, which also finds modern expression in concepts like mindfulness, Zen, and Buddhism (Hadot, 1995), emphasising the identification of what can be known and controlled and focusing solely on the present moment. However, this aim serves as a concrete practice or method for engaging with educational experiences.

## **5.10.4 Integrated Nature of the Educational Aims**

The above aims are by no means exhaustive, but are also very tricky to distinguish as intentions, as expected outcomes, or as educational knowledge to be transmitted. For example, suppose members are to strive for perfection in all

aspects; the specific content or skills required depend on how “perfection” is understood within the community. If it means alignment with divine will (as suggested by inner listening), then education must expose members to contemplative practices; however, if it means flawless execution of tasks, skill development and technical knowledge become important. As an aim, it may be something that every member in the community views the other as (See perfection in all), and it becomes attitudinal, which means developing skills of perspective taking or empathy. However, it is difficult to distinguish between aims or intended direction, content (what is taught) and outcomes (results), and they can only be observed through daily interactions and self-assessment. This blurring of boundaries emphasises the challenge of values-based education. Unlike discrete knowledge and skill sets, values must be known, practised and embodied. Thus, the above aims become content when taught, an expectation when modelled and reinforced through community norms and an outcome when internalised and expressed through member interactions. Thus, implementing such an education requires an approach that honours the multiplicity. Consequently, these aims should not be understood as distinct objectives to be achieved sequentially, but as interconnected orientations that shape the entire educational ecosystem and create a distinct field in which multiple elements operate simultaneously and influence complex, interconnected practices. A single morning attunement ritual, for instance, may simultaneously teach about inner guidance (content), model receptivity to divine communication (expectation), provide practice in the skill development of inner listening, and produce moments of insight (outcome).

I now turn to the practical implementation of these aims. Borrowing from the framework of Integrated Social Movement Learning and Education as described in Chapter 3, the following section elaborates on the dimensions of the educational triangle and how the texts frame the characteristics of the educator, the learner, and the content/world.



## 5.11 Who is the Educator? Transforming Traditional Educational Roles

Chapter 5A describes how founders established spiritual authority (positioning themselves as divinely chosen), presented spiritual capital through claimed capacities, and then democratised authority through the shift in the guidance mechanism. This section examines how publications articulated educators' roles, revealing a strategic reframing that positioned divine as the ultimate teacher, founders as channels, and other members as facilitators rather than authorities, and inner guidance as the primary tool.

### 5.11.1 The Divine as the Ultimate Teacher: Reshaping Educational Authority

The most distinctive aspect of the Findhorn's educational model is the positioning of the divine as the ultimate educator, fundamentally altering power dynamics within the educational field. The authority of the divine as the final word is stated with quotes like "Every action should be made only under My guidance", *"I am guiding and directing you into those new and uncharted waters"* or *"Learn to call upon Me, to lean upon Me, to draw from Me. To put your whole faith and trust in Me"* (Caddy & McVicar, 1994, p.84).

This framing establishes a specific form of educational authority that transcends human expertise or institutional credentials. While the notion of divine guidance may be inspiring to some, it is also helpful to consider how this discourse shapes power dynamics within the community. Power is not simply repressive; it also produces and shapes identities, desires, and worldviews (Foucault, 1980). Does the emphasis on divine guidance also contribute in any way to obscuring the role of human agency and responsibility? How do individuals examine and challenge or even understand actions and decisions attributed to divine guidance? Moreover, does this acceptance lead to passive acceptance instead of liberal agency? Furthermore, could positioning divine guidance as ultimate authority create

an unfalsifiable system in which questioning or criticism is dismissed as a function of un-enlightenment?

### 5.11.2 Emphasis on Inner Guidance over External Authority: Tools for Learners

*“Keep turning to Me. Listen to what I have to say to you in the silence,” and “Cease looking to others for help. Look for it within, and you will find it. Always go to the source for the answer, and do not be satisfied with anything second-hand or anything that is not of the very highest”* (Caddy & McVicar, 1994, p.72).

The above lines emphasise the importance of self-responsibility in seeking inner guidance and relying on it as a primary educational tool, which also influences how learners engage with content, positioning them as active co-creators rather than passive recipients of knowledge. By positioning inner guidance as the ultimate authority, human teachers are repositioned from knowledge holders to facilitators of connection. The educator is thus the ‘divine within each’. This may also be seen as a distinctive design for educational interactions, in which authority is deliberately decentralised, creating a more horizontal relationship among members.

### 5.11.3 Role of Founders as Educators: Knowledge Generation and Transmission

The founders occupy a complex position within the Findhorn's educational field. They were being prepared to lead the community and the people who would come to the community and *“have had the training, have the qualities needed for this tremendous task, and will see it through to final victory”* (Caddy, 1991, p. 155). The founders were, however, supposed to provide freedom to each member and not have a hierarchical structure but teach *“by example. How you live and how you quietly go about doing My will have far more effect on mankind than shouting many wonderful words from the rooftops and failing to live what you preach”* (Caddy & McVicar, 1994, p.108). While the notion of the founders as facilitators seems plausible on face value, their status, writings, thoughts, and methods still influence

the community's understandings and practices. More problematically, this channelling narrative, when taken as a divine mandate, allows founders to exercise authority without responsibility, raising questions about leadership in such environments. The role of charismatic authority (Weber, 1947) can be a powerful force in shaping social and educational practices even when it is not formally codified. Furthermore, their books and quotes are still used as collective knowledge and field reinforcement.

#### 5.11.4 Human Teachers as Facilitators: Community Environment and Practices

Community members are to be educators, not so much by teaching as by facilitating and helping new members through example and action. They are to provide an environment where *"Every soul can learn to stand on their own feet and sound their own note loud and clear"* (Caddy, 1991, p.72). Further, the members must ensure that "each person was to develop their own unique qualities, and *they had to be given freedom to do so. There had to be no attempt to enforce conformity*" (ibid., p.172). The Findhorn approach positions human teachers as facilitators who support learners and help maintain a sense of community and shared purpose. This aligns with progressive pedagogies that emphasise learner-centred and collaborative approaches in education. However, the absence of formal leadership could pose significant challenges, including chaos and misdirection due to conflicting guidance or intentions among members. Thus, the role of community members is to create conditions for self-directed learning and an environment that supports others; however, this environment is constantly shaped and guided, which can reproduce paternalistic relationships and dependencies. Experienced members invariably hold informal authority and may maintain control through tacit knowledge of the community and its workings.

#### 5.11.5 Educator's Role: Tensions and Implications

The multiple and seemingly contradictory conception of the educator reveals several tensions.

The **Authority Paradox** refers to the divine being positioned as the ultimate authority, accessible through individual inner guidance, thereby intertwining external authority and individual autonomy. Additionally, despite the emphasis on non-hierarchical relationships, the founders and long-term members have had a significant influence on the implicit power dynamics and the shaping of educational thought.

**Embodiment and Instruction** – The emphasis on teaching by example creates a distinctive pedagogical approach that challenges conventional distinctions between being and teaching. Furthermore, the facilitative approach, although appearing non-directive, could potentially convey a more subtle form of power by influencing the environment and community practices.

The following section focuses on the learner. Understanding who the learner is and the assumptions made about them is essential to comprehending the full scope of the Findhorn Foundations approach.

## 5.12 Who is Learning? Who is the Student?

Chapter 5 A identified some implicit criteria functioning as field boundaries, those who are “called” versus causal visitors, or those possessing spiritual sensitivity and commitment. This section focuses on the explicitly articulated learner characteristic of strategic universalisation, which positions Findhorn as open to all, while also describing ideal members and formalising membership expectations. The member is also a learner, forming the core of any educational environment. Additionally, understanding them as participants in social movements raises questions about why they learn and what motivates them to continue being members of the Intentional Community or the field.

### 5.12.1 Diverse Yet Unified Learners: Member Identity and Engagement

The conception of learners starts with an emphasis on diversity, as seen through the following quote: *“The young and the old will be drawn here. All nations, all colours,*

*all creeds shall gather together in perfect peace and harmony in this place*" (Caddy, 1991, p. 162) This framing establishes a specific learner identity that values diversity while maintaining shared purpose and positions diverse backgrounds and perspectives as valuable to the collective learning environment.

The learners at the Findhorn Foundation are described as individuals with a *"hunger to find righteousness"* and a willingness to *"seek and search for the answers"* with a *"deep inner longing"*. A shared desire will unite them for spiritual growth and commitment to living in peace and harmony. They will commit with *"wholehearted dedication"* and *"be willing to learn and never feel [they] know all the answers"* They will collaborate and *"contribute to the whole"* with their unique gifts and work with *"determination and patience" from this point forward on the "path" of human potential and planetary evolution* (Caddy & McVicar, 1991). This framing also suggests parameters of who will be attracted to the community and why they should become members. The text emphasises several characteristics of the ideal learner at Findhorn, which are detailed below.

### 5.12.2 Divinely Guided Learners: Framing for Members' Identity

The learner is seen as someone drawn to the community by a higher authority or a divine plan, as evidenced by statements such as *"It is I who brought you together, placed you here in this specific place to do a very specific work for Me" Or "You are all part of My infinite plan. You each have a part to play in the overall picture."* This positioning establishes a specific legitimacy to learners' presence as a result of divine selection rather than admission, and learner engagement is framed as fulfilling a higher purpose rather than purely learning for those who feel 'called' learners, setting inclusion and exclusion criteria to the field and maintaining the narrative of the field of Findhorn as an educational field for a specific kind of learner.

### 5.12.3 Unique & Valuable Learners

Each learner is viewed as an individual with unique gifts and talents to contribute to the community. As the guidance states, *"Every soul who comes here will have something unique to contribute to the whole."* This framing values individual differences as essential to the community and thus learning methods must be designed to incorporate them rather than standardised content.

#### *Committed and Open-minded Learners: Habitus Building*

Learners are expected to take responsibility and be proactive about their spiritual growth, rather than waiting for it to happen. The guidance advises, *"You cannot hope to grow spiritually. You cannot hope to open the door to allow the new to enter, revealing wonder upon wonder to you."* They must not be *"half-hearted"* and must be ambitious about their spiritual development by building faith and relationships with the divine. The learner is also described as open-minded and receptive to new ways and ideas of living and being in the community. This is evidenced by statements like *"Be prepared for the most wonderful and yet unexpected things to come about, for all old moulds to be broken, all old conventions, all those old links with the past which have held you bound and fettered."* Thus, learners are expected to develop and embody qualities of commitment and openness towards the learning process within the community.

### 5.12.4 Learner's Role – Tensions and Implications

While the publications present a compelling vision of the ideal learner at the Findhorn Foundation, several assumptions and potential limitations warrant further elaboration.

**The Educator Learner Paradox** - In the traditional pedagogical triangle, the student is understood as someone placed within or chooses to be a part of the educational process and aspires for some improvement while accepting the educator. The student referred to here is the one who seeks membership in the Findhorn community. The student could thus be placed in a pedagogical relationship by being

part of the community in any capacity and thereby enter a pedagogical relationship with the community and its people by proxy. The possibility of choice is significant here, as many visitors or attendees of Experience Week may not opt for a more permanent educational engagement with the community. This is further reinforced by the community's selection process, where individuals are not directly admitted but rather inducted into the community's practices and beliefs, and are invited only after due deliberation to determine their fit. There is also a dual role where existing members serve as educators; thus, there is no clear delineation between the roles of a student and an educator most of the time, with roles being adapted as per tasks or needs.

**Assumptions about Spiritual Motivation**—The quotes seem to assume that all learners at Findhorn Foundation are primarily motivated by spiritual aspirations and a desire for spiritual growth. While this may be true for many, it risks excluding or marginalising individuals drawn to the community for other reasons, such as an interest in ecology, communal living, or personal development.

**Economic & Social Barriers** - The text emphasises diversity and inclusivity, which is admirable. Still, it does not fully acknowledge the economic and social barriers that may prevent some individuals from becoming learners at Findhorn. The remote location, coupled with the limited industry and economic opportunities, means that people who wish to be drawn to the community must have sufficient savings or arrangements to cover their expenses and personal needs. Thus, the students at Findhorn are diverse, but only if they can self-sustain, possibly obtain a visa, and have the economic and social means to be students. As Carrette and King (2005) would argue, the contemporary spiritual marketplace often caters to privileged individuals who have the luxury of time and resources for self-exploration.

**Determining Suitability and Inclusion**- The text suggests that learners will be drawn to Findhorn and will naturally find their place in the community. In practice, however, determining the learners' suitability and inclusion likely involves judgements and decisions made by those in positions of authority. This raises

questions about the criteria used to make these decisions and the potential for bias and exclusion.

**An assumed Learning Outcome-** The qualities described in the text that a student will possess emphasise dedication, determination, patience, perseverance, and being willing to learn and be a perfectionist until they find the answers they long for. The implied message is that there are answers. However, the endpoint is questionable, which also raises the challenges of describing spiritual claims, as there is no measurable yardstick to determine the above qualities. Hence, the students' determination, interest, and motivation again lie in the hands of the people, and the relations within the community determine the students' suitability and inclusion.

The Findhorn Foundation's conception of the learner reveals a complex interplay between spiritual aspirations, personal growth, and community dynamics. Where the ideal learner is characterised as divinely guided, uniquely valuable, committed to spiritual growth, open-minded, and actively seeking guidance, it also presents several challenges and potential limitations. The assumed spiritual motivation may not account for the diverse reasons individuals are drawn to the community. Further, economic and social barriers, though not explicitly addressed, likely influence who can participate in Findhorn's educational experiences. Also, the blurred lines between educators and learners, while fostering a dynamic learning environment, complicate traditional pedagogical relationships. Furthermore, the emphasis on intangible qualities such as dedication, determination, and spiritual growth raises questions about how learning outcomes are measured and evaluated.

Both the educator and the learner are engaged with the content simultaneously, as I briefly touched on in Section 5.10. The following section provides a further breakdown.



## 5.13 What is the Content of Education?

The Content can be understood as the knowledge to be taught, the skills to be learnt, and the attitudes learners must demonstrate. The content derives from the intentions and core practices, but also seems to hint at broader personal and social changes that members are expected to undergo while part of the community.

The primary content, as mentioned in Section 5.10 on spiritual knowledge, has two key areas emerging as curriculum. The first area focuses on understanding and accessing divine presence and utilising it for personal growth and development. The second focus is being able to live in the community with the principles of oneness and love, and building skills of cooperation for collective growth.

### 5.13.1 Core Spiritual Knowledge: Content / World

The basic requirement is for all members to recognise that they must learn *“Until you(they) have found what you (they) are looking for along this spiritual path, which is your(their) realisation of Oneness with Me”* (Caddy & McVicar, 1994, p.53). This can be done in the following ways.

#### *Understanding and Acknowledging Divine Presence*

The fundamental recognition of divine presence within oneself forms the core knowledge content at the Findhorn Foundation.

*“Know that we are One And that I AM within the very centre of your being”* (Caddy, 1994, p.132).

*“I am always here, but unless you become consciously aware and I of My divine Presence, of Me you cannot hear My voice”* (Caddy & McVicar, 1994, p.93).

As the lines above show, the fundamental premise of the Findhorn Foundation lies in the belief that its guidance offers a way for members to find strength and clarity through the process of believing in a connection to the divine. The process of Caddy’s and Maclean’s first establishing the connection and using their insights to

spread the message seems to portray a possibility that all members can create a connection to the divine. The earlier versions of community documents seem to emphasise a God figure, but over time, Eileen frames it as a connection to one's higher self. The secular nature of the community and the shift are also visible in the updated statement, "The Findhorn Foundation is dedicated to embodying the core truths at the heart of all faiths. Our transformative experiences inspire individuals to rediscover their inner spiritual wisdom and uncover their true life's purpose" (Findhorn Foundation, n.d). This section represents a specific definition of what counts as essential knowledge. Unlike conventional educational content, which focuses on external information, Findhorn chooses to position self-knowledge and connection to the divine as primary content to be mastered, which shapes the I-SMLE.

#### *Knowledge of Inner Guidance as a System*

Once members can acknowledge there is divine presence and it is available for all of them, they must then "*listen, become very sensitive towards ...My slightest whisper, I am within each one And I speak from within*" and also "*learn to act from deep inner promptings and do not waste time going around asking advice*" These quotes illustrate the how members are supposed to access divine presence and use it for self-development, through cultivating awareness and being able to reach the source within is also emphasised. This is characterised by developing an internal authority rather than relying on external sources, with the documents noting that it is developed through stillness and by building sensitivity to the source. Thus, the ability to access inner guidance becomes a skill that members must develop to enhance their own growth.

#### *Recognition of Universal Oneness*

As the members recognise accessibility and guidance from the divine, they must also be able to understand that "*All are of Me, all are one family. Accept that brotherhood of man, ...will have to reach the point when you(they) can really see and understand the Oneness of all life*" These quotes suggest that members are to

focus on finding their connection to the sacred. There is also an emphasis on knowing that all others are also connected to the same source. This knowledge is best experienced rather than intellectually understood and is an integral part of the development journey.

However, unlike conventional curricula in formal institutions, which are subject to expertise, peer reviews, and evidence, the content here relies on subjective experiences and faith-based acceptance. Could this create an educational environment where critical enquiry may be discouraged in favour of conformity?

### 5.13.2 Community Living as a Skill

*“This is a living, working centre. Therefore, it is necessary for each one who comes to take part in the living and working together”* (Caddy, 1991, p. 92) Beyond spiritual knowledge, Findhorn identifies practical knowledge of community living as essential educational content shaping the design, practices and environment and establishes key areas of community knowledge whilst emphasising that members are here and *“what (they) have been pioneering here in this centre will have to be put into practice and lived in a great many places. Group living is a thing of the future”* (Caddy, 1991, p. 99) talking about the community's potential as a learning site for others. In addition to the values and aims discussed in Section 5.10, members must develop the following skills while in the community.

#### *Understand Group Dynamics and Conflict Resolution*

Knowledge of how groups function forms an essential content area as central to the educational experience. As quoted *“You are a group You work as a group You live as a group Therefore it needs group effort to attain harmony”* and also hinting at conflict as necessary by lines like *“Living as you are at this time in such close quarters, you each have to learn a greater sensitivity and understanding of each other. You are all completely different”* (Caddy, 1991, p. 65) Thus the important aspect of being in the community is to recognise the importance of the group in the process of self-development and to be able to use living in the community as a way of growth. Members are expected to learn how to navigate conflict and develop an

understanding of others, representing a specific approach to interpersonal skills as essential knowledge. As the quote below suggests, the essential element of community living and harmony is to *"adjust yourselves to people and circumstances...learn to love your neighbours... to cooperate with them .. to see yourself as a member of a community as part of a whole rather than as a self-important individual"* (Caddy, 1991, p. 74).

#### *Integrating and balancing individual needs with the collective*

The skill of living in the community is also suggested as the ability to integrate and balance personal development with contributing to the collective development of the community. As this line suggests, *"Each soul must learn to stand on their own feet and sound their own note loud and clear,"* and *"You each have your different roles, and they are entirely different, so you need never try to copy anyone else"* (Caddy, 1991, p. 72). These quotes seem to hint at an educational approach in which social wisdom and collective intelligence are as important as individual insight, and finding that balance becomes a skill to be developed. However, the determinants of harmony and group goals could still be decided by established members and may privilege a certain set of people, while marginalising dissenting voices as problematic.

### 5.14 Conclusion: From Implicit Field Construction to Explicit Educational Philosophy

This two-part historical analysis addressed Research Question 1, which asked how the founders' beliefs are enacted into practices, by examining both implicit field construction (5A) and explicit educational articulation. (5B) Together, the enactment could be understood as a multi-stage translation in which founders' beliefs were narratively framed to establish legitimacy, structurally embedded through field construction, and pedagogically systematised through formal articulations. The chapters also trace the founding of what Crossley (1999) terms working utopias through their translation to explicit pedagogical codification. This translation is

never complete and is neither uncontested but an ongoing project. The educational significance of this process, perhaps, is its utopian character of not transmitting established knowledge but cultivating an orientation towards a not-yet realised possibility, which, as Chapter 2 suggests, is the educational function of utopian aspirations.

Chapter 5A demonstrated how the social field construction could be understood (Section 5.5) through narrative framing, field structures, capital conversion, routinisation, reproduction and dialectical process as summarised in Figs. 8 and 9. This chapter examined how field practices were codified into explicit educational philosophy. The translation process could be understood through how personal practices (inner listening, manifestation, deva communication) were articulated as universal methods accessible to all members, and how field doxa and *illusio* were formalised as collective educational intentions that coordinate member action and implicit criteria and characteristics for educators, learners, and content.

### **Collective Intention Cultivation**

Field Doxa (divine guidance, reality, nature spirits, existence) could be seen as translated into collective intentions, in which members are overtly jointly committed to personal and collective transformation through specific methods. Publications reinforce this shift from individual founder beliefs to shared purposes, coordinating educational relationships.

### **Pedagogical Systematisation**

The publications, decentralised authority, and community structures, such as experience week and induction programs, could be understood as a process of codifying implicit practices into an explicit educational philosophy summarised in Fig. 10, articulating educator roles, learner characteristics, valued content, and educational aims. Informal, embodied, founder-specific practices became a teachable, generalisable curriculum enabling transmission beyond the founders' direct presence. These mechanisms operate dialectically, in which reinforced beliefs

shape structures and strategic choices, and ritualisation, along with the continuous evaluation of language, is an ongoing process.

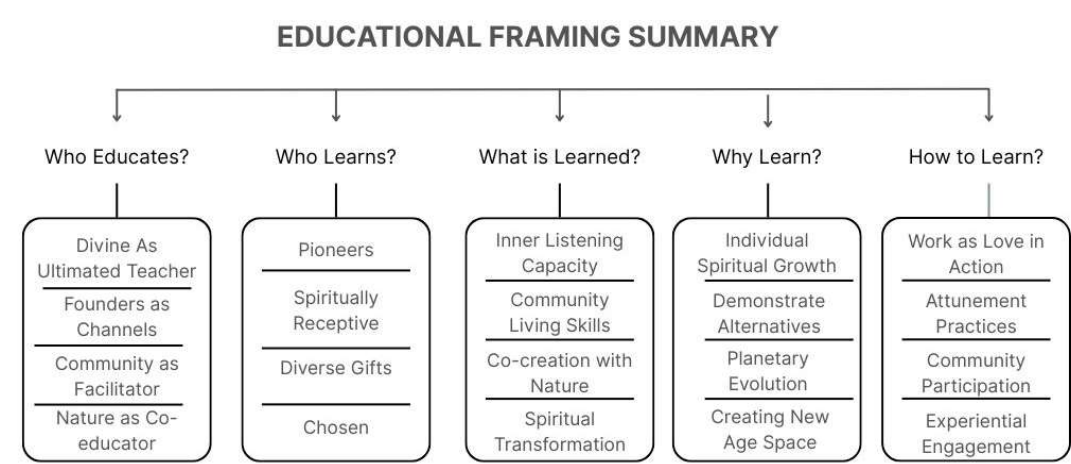


Figure 10: Findhorn Educational Framing Summary (Author Generated)

The key elements of this textual analysis are: First, the founders framed Findhorn as a “centre of light” with a mission to demonstrate a new way of living grounded in spiritual principles. Second, they established specific conceptions of who can be an educator (the divine, the founders as channels, and community members as facilitators), who were appropriate learners (spiritually receptive “pioneers”), and what constituted valuable knowledge (inner guidance, practical community skills, and ecological awareness).

However, the founder’s conception represents only the intended educational framework. How this vision is translated into practice, how the members perceive these principles, and how the educational approach has evolved over the decades of community life need further examination. The following chapter, therefore, turns to the voices of community members. Through an analysis of in-depth interviews with six community members who joined between the 1960s and 2020, Chapter 6 reveals how participants understand educational relationships and practices. This analysis will explore the tensions, adaptations, and evolutions in Findhorn’s

educational approach as it transitioned from a founder-guided community to an established movement with multiple generations of members.

## 6. Members' Experiences and Their Contribution to I-SMLE

### 6.1 Introduction

In Chapters 5A and 5B, I have discussed how the founders' narratives and framing influenced the formation of the field, its establishment, the community, and its purpose, as well as the framing of its educational role in terms of intentionality. (In the analysis, intentionality is understood as a property of the community's educational design rather than individual interactions. Thus, unplanned encounters and organic community dynamics are understood as educational as they occur within deliberately designed social structures). In this chapter, I address RQ 2, which is how contemporary members experience and articulate the educational intentions and learning within the community by addressing two sub-questions. The first question is what attracts members to Findhorn and why they stay. It examines member profiles, formative influences, and mechanisms sustaining commitment, using Bourdieu's concept of *illusio* and social movement mobilisation (Snow et al., 1986). The second question describes how participation shapes their learning and development, exploring how engaging in community work, rituals, relationships, and interactions generates learning. These sub-questions are interconnected, as what attracts members shapes how they participate, and participation shapes developmental influences and reasons for staying. The I-SMLE framework operates as an organising presence throughout the analysis, directing and shaping attention towards educationally significant dimensions of participants' accounts, while the coding process remained responsive to participant language and meaning. The themes and subthemes within the broad categories provide interpretive coherence for presenting the results.

The I-SMLE framework structures this analysis, examining educator-learner-content relationships within the community and how members' narratives describe the characteristics of educators, content, and learners. Throughout the analysis, I have



attempted to privilege member voices while also recognising that the selection and presentation of the quotes inevitably reflect my analytical lens. The six participants who agreed to be interviewed may represent those more willing to discuss their experiences, or the so-called success stories of members who have found meaning and belonging. Those who have left for various reasons remain largely absent, and survivor bias may create a more appealing portrayal, potentially excluding critical or disillusioned voices from this analysis. Together with Chapter 5, this chapter provides further insights into how founders' beliefs became and continue to be enacted as educational practices. The chapter starts by elaborating on the learners and their motivations, followed by a discussion of continuities and evolution between founder expectations and members' narratives of who the educator is and what the content is. I then turn to the relationship axes between them and finally synthesise my answers to preliminarily address RQ 2. The codes and themes are in Appendix 2- Themes and Codes -Interview Data (Chapter 6)

## 6.2 Who is the Learner (Who joins Findhorn and Why?)

The Caddys and Maclean, through their memoirs, diverse publications, and talks, effectively created and presented the Foundation's story, community identity, and its offerings to potential members. While social movements engage with various audiences, this analysis focuses on current members and how the Caddy's presented frames align with them. Building on frame alignments for social movements (See Section 3.3) meaning "the linkage of individual and social movement organisations (SMO) interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary" (Snow et al., 1986, p.464), This alignment is achieved through micro-mobilisation, i.e. "the interactive and communicative processes that affect -frame alignment" (ibid, 1986, p.464). The Caddy's and Maclean's approaches are presented as influenced by their upbringing and spiritual seeking, including their exposure to diverse traditions and mentors. Similarly, community members' testimonies reveal their interpretive frames and motivations

for joining the community. Bourdieu's term *illusio* (Section 3.3) provides a valuable lens for understanding why diverse individuals claim to be committed to the Findhorn Foundation. Based on the presented members' self-narratives in the interviews, the following provides insights into their backgrounds and reasons for their choices.

### *Demographic and Temporal Overview*

The six participants interviewed represent diverse backgrounds and arrival periods at the Findhorn Foundation within a notably homogenous demographic of predominantly Western, educated individuals with sufficient resources for intentional community living. They span multiple decades of membership from the 1960s to the 2020s, offering insights into how the community has evolved. The participants include medical professionals, educators, technologists, and social activists from predominantly Western countries (the USA, the UK, and Germany). The participants I spoke with have received higher education, suggesting a particular socio-economic and educational profile common amongst the community members. The interviewees consist of four women and two men, ranging in age from the early thirties to the seventies at the time of the interviews. The interviewees ranged from two long-term residents (with over 30 years of experience) to two mid-term members (with 10-30 years of experience), and two newer members (with less than 5 years of experience). These diverse pathways to membership could illuminate how the Findhorn Foundation's field attracts a specific kind of learner, though the small sample size limits what can be said. The demographic homogeneity raises questions about whose voices are represented in this analysis and is a limitation of my study. However, it also speaks to broader patterns of accessibility to Intentional communities like Findhorn and the challenges of access or economic capability.

The following sections analyse how members describe their experiences in terms of components of the I-SMLE framework, beginning with their motivations for joining. The members' profiles reveal the evolution of the Findhorn Foundation from its 1960s approach to spirituality, grounded in Rosicrucian-influenced beliefs, to a

contemporary eco-spiritual centre that is more inclusive of diverse faiths (Sutcliffe and Bowman, 2000). The diversity of professional and academic backgrounds could also suggest the community's appeal to educated, socially conscious individuals seeking alternatives to mainstream society. The narratives also seem to demonstrate how intentional communities like Findhorn serve as meeting points for multiple social agendas, including environmentalism, alternative spirituality, and community living. The members' stories of integration also suggest a combination of spiritual seeking, social consciousness and personal transformation themes that have been a part of their journey within the community. Sutcliffe and Bowman describe this as personal religiosity or typically termed spirituality, that is, a "practical and flexible resource for the everyday world that is simultaneously goal-oriented action, re-sensitisation to the realms of the magical and unexplained" (2000, p.5)

#### *Member Profiles and Mobilising Factors*

##### **FFA: Seeking Direct Spiritual Experience**

FFA (American who joined in the 1960s) description embodies the early wave of spiritual seekers drawn to Findhorn's premise and promotion of its direct divine connection. Raised Presbyterian, she felt critical of conventional religious boundaries as evidenced by quotes like "At 11, I asked, Why aren't there any more angels or prophets?" (Participant FFA) She discovered the Findhorn Foundation through her interest in various sources, including Edgar Cayce, and a formal training in transcendental meditation. An initial experience week and a plan for a three-month program turned into a lifetime at the Community.

FFA's journey is among the narratives of how Findhorn's field initially attracted those already disposed towards seeking spiritual experiences – maybe aligning with the "pioneers" the founders described in their framing of the community. However, her profile— educated, middle-class, and with resources for international travel — also suggests the community's appeal to those with significant cultural and economic capital.

## **FFD and FFF: Spiritual Exploration and Personal Crisis**

FFD's journey represents spiritual seeking catalysed by *disillusionment* with traditional religious structures. Raised in a traditional Christian household, her ambitions to be in the convent were dashed by the food quality there. Her exposure to humanism and religious education sparked her interest in philosophy, education, and spirituality, leading to global travels that explored Buddhism, Osho, and other forms of Spirituality. This pattern of seeking alternative spiritual frameworks also aligns with Findhorn's positioning as a space for direct spiritual experience. FFD's journey, she states, was accelerated by personal events. "After a relationship split, I realised I do not know who I am ... I've been acting one way but saying other things" (Interview, Participant FFD). This moment of identity questioning and an Experience Week in 1981 cemented the desire, and in 1986, she made her move permanent. She has worked in various areas, including education and community service. Her narrative aligns with Findhorn's positioning for those seeking a space for personal change and identity reconstruction. (although it potentially raises questions about how individuals distinguish between escaping mainstream society for various reasons and actively choosing to live in an intentional community)

FFF, a general practitioner, took a sabbatical in Scotland before aiming to join her medical practice. However, a short trip to Findhorn Foundation led her to put down roots in Findhorn, where she has been for the last three decades. Her account describes growing up in a working-class Catholic family, and a medical crisis, as well as her father's suicide, spurred discomfort and feelings of the need to explore alternatives and rebel against established patterns. She felt that at Findhorn she "found ... a life where spiritual practice and awareness is completely a part of common daily routine, where you can have deep conversations over meals and where spirituality is embedded in daily lives rather than for Sunday mornings" (FFF). This sentiment reveals, how for her the community functioned as a field where professional identity could be integrated with spiritual seeking and gave her a sense of inclusivity and belonging. Over the years, she has worked in various community health and wellbeing roles, incorporating the integration of professional skills,

spiritual practice, and community belonging. (It may also be worth considering that certain types of professionals may find it easier to align within the community if they find work in their area of expertise.)

### **FFB: From political activism to spiritual community (1990s)**

FFB's path to Findhorn illustrates the community's alignment with those engaged in environmental and social justice movements. Describing herself as "very active politically and environmentally and a feminist" (FFB), she participated in the German squatter movements and environmental causes, and she was also an active member of a women's community. A two-hour workshop on a Saturday afternoon at Findhorn Sacred Dance was the turning point. The workshop's methodology, as well as the experiences of silence and attunement within it, drew her to join more sacred dance groups. Somewhere around 1989, she attended her Experience week and additional community workshops. In 1991, she came back for a two-year program and then stayed on. Her journey could illustrate the appeal of the Findhorn's field beyond purely spiritual seekers to those seeking to integrate social activism with spiritual practice, reflecting the community's attempts to evolve as both an educational space and a social movement.

### ***FFE: Ecological Values and Community Seeking (2020s)***

As a recent member, FFE represents the contemporary evolution of Findhorn's appeal. Following an undergraduate immersion experience in Japan, he developed an interest in ecology and environmental conservation. He was drawn to Findhorn not primarily through its spiritual legacy, but through its integration of ecological practices and community living. His attraction to "a shared spiritual life with other people that was not necessarily tied to an organised religion or any sort of a leader" (FFE) suggests the community's evolution towards a more democratised framework that emphasises collective experience over founder authority. His two-year engagement with the community, followed by plans to leave, also suggests a more fluid relationship to the field than the earlier members, potentially reflecting changing patterns of commitment in contemporary intentional

communities. (Although there would have been many leavers even in early years whose accounts have not been considered, it may be interesting to consider the appeal based on those who contributed towards the growth of the community versus those who now join an already well-defined social field.)

### **FFC: Bridging Alternative Education**

FFC had always aspired to be a scientist and had a strong interest in computers and technology. Teaching in an after-school program for kids in Ithaca quickly changed his focus to children, psychology, and education. A feeling of need for community and an ideal environment for children to grow led to a dissertation on Intentional Communities, which in turn led to a visit and residence at the Findhorn Foundation. His goal was to bridge the Findhorn Foundation's experience for students and adults worldwide. Having lived in many Intentional Communities, he returned to Findhorn. Unlike members primarily seeking personal spiritual development, FFC was motivated by the educational potential of community living and seeing the broader potential of educational innovation to be shared as he shares “I mean, it's almost like each community is singing a song or.. or telling a story, and you can't hear it unless you're there” (FFC) He has now moved to an organisation that is involved in spiritual education.

The above profiles reveal what Levitas (1990) identifies as the utopian impulse, whether religious disillusionment, political activism, ecological concerns or personal reasons, the lived experience of inequality makes utopian alternatives thinkable and desirable.

## **6.2.1 Formative Influences and Seeking Patterns as Habitus / Motivation**

The members' summary above reveals some common formative influences that shaped their eventual attraction to the Findhorn Foundation. Seeking patterns or seekership (See Section 5.3.2) is understood as an “activity in which individuals

reject institutions in favour of a quest through different religious teachings and traditions, adopting a problem-solving attitude to religious practice, with goals such as healing, peak experiences, or 'enlightenment'" (Robertson, 2020, p. 743).

Although seekership is considered a sociological category, it also illuminates a counter-cultural trend in which individuals often recognise societal issues and explore alternatives, creating an impetus to join movements such as the Findhorn Foundation. These seeking patterns, while framed as spiritual quests, also reflect the privilege of having both sufficient resources and social and cultural capital to explore alternatives, raising questions about who can afford such spiritual seeking. Additionally, the longevity of some members seems to contradict long-term seeking behaviour, suggesting they have settled or found something to satisfy their quest (or does living in an intentional community accommodate continued exploration without physically relocating?)

**Childhood / Religious Disillusionment** emerges as an oft-spoken catalyst with participants describing either rebellion against restrictive traditions like FFA seeking answers or as FFF shares: "how a health crisis changed things" or encouragement from families that "question the establishment" (FFE) Snow & Beyerlein (2018) also emphasise the connection between new religious movements (NRM) and social movements and most people who sought NRMS were mobilised due to not just the social aspect of the movement but also religious seekership. However, Moon (2023) argues that most NRM research tends to focus on disaffiliation or challenges, making the intersection of seekership and social movements less appealing. However, it does seem to align with the framing of the community as an alternative to mainstream society, as discussed in Section 5.9

**Educational and Cultural exposure** through formal education, travel, and engagement with social movements also created what members describe as a sense of spiritual seeking. Participants consistently referenced transformative encounters with alternative practices (transcendental meditation, sacred dance, Eastern philosophies, as mentioned in the profiles above) that expanded their worldview even before they discovered Findhorn. It also suggests a threshold of appeal based

on pre-existing exposure. Bovens and Wille (2021) discuss how levels of education determine political participation and agency, and how education provides the necessary knowledge and skills, as well as the critical thinking required to challenge and question the status quo and seek alternatives, while also conforming to the implicit field boundaries set by the founders.

**Social Activism** provided another pathway with environmental and feminist movements serving as bridges to the community. FFB's journey from German environmental activism to sacred dance workshops, or FFD's approach to feminism, played an important role in the search for the Findhorn Foundation. These patterns could suggest that Findhorn attracted individuals already disposed towards spiritual experimentation or social change with sufficient cultural and economic capital to explore alternatives. This also connects with adult education research, which considers social movements as sites of lifelong learning (Crowther, 2006; Foley, 2001). Here, participants learn by attempting to achieve the movement's objectives (Crowther, 2006), thereby sustaining engagement and building civic skills (Hoggan-Kloubert et al., 2025). However, this also raises questions about how Intentional Communities are accessible to those with significant existing advantages and whether membership potentially reproduces rather than challenges social inequalities, despite their egalitarian ideals. While framing these journeys as 'seekership' could obscure the material conditions and ability that enable such exploration, could it be a luxury for a few? Interestingly, the seeking patterns above illuminate members who are already exposed to recognising and investing in a demonstration of alternative possibilities and maybe perhaps a characteristic of intentional communities more broadly, unlike in formal educational institutions, where educational desire cannot be assumed.

### 6.2.2 Field Illusio: Sustained Commitment to Findhorn

Both Social Movements and Intentional Communities are created and sustained through their membership. Ralph Turner, a prominent sociologist, argued that



“movements seldom achieve substantial and lasting successes without strong components of personal transformation” (1983, p.178) that can sustain their engagement and commitment. The three core motivations that emerge from member narratives are discussed below.

### *Spiritual Identity in Daily Living as Ongoing Motivation and a Shared Habitus*

Members emphasised Findhorn's unique integration of spirituality with daily life, as FFC (though this framing may romanticise what could be understood as control) shares, “It is about bringing the sacred into everyday life.” At the same time, FFD values “spirituality is embedded in daily life rather than segregated into Sunday morning service.” The quotes above speak to the importance of the daily lived spirituality in both being in the community and upholding the community's overall purpose. The members share their belief that the Findhorn Foundation is a place where they found something different from their existing lives, and it was the catalyst for making the move permanent, aligning with not just personal benefit but investment in the utopian project itself. (Though this could also suggest a successful narrative alignment between personal needs and community offerings rather than an objective assessment of the community's uniqueness) Comments like “I've never been drawn to what I think of as very transcendental spiritual paths that ignore the physical or don't honour the physical” (FFD); or another member, FFB, sharing her faith in “an angelic realm that's truly willing to intervene and be helpful,” seem to show the various ways of distinguishing justifications in members' minds and words. However, members have differing interpretations of spirituality, and these diverse interpretations of practices have co-existed within the community. While this inclusiveness can feel very welcoming, one could also question what members really mean when they say 'sacred' or 'spiritual' (but that is not the focus of this project).

Members expressed that they live in a community where spiritual practices and conversations are integral to their daily lives, and these encounters create a shared ‘spiritual *habitus*’ that informs their actions and worldviews. According to Isaac et al. (2020), enculturation and social learning contribute to the success of social

movements. The development of spiritual habitus over time, as evidenced in members' accounts of Peter's disciplined approach to compulsory morning meditation, demonstrates that the founders actively created ritualistic habit-building for early members. As FFB notes, "Every morning there was Eileen giving guidance, and everybody was listening. And since then, it has changed." Showing the evolution towards more freedom and individualistic practices in the present, suggesting reflective adaptability and evolution based on societal trends and the changing membership.

### *Community Connection as Field Reinforcement and Illusio Sustainability*

FFB describes "falling in love with the whole group... overwhelming love" (FFB), representing a powerful emotional investment in the field. The narratives reveal how community belonging functions as a mechanism for sustaining members' investment in the field. When FFC reflects "...we've forgotten what it essentially means to live in community and harmony with each other on the planet" (FFC), suggests members view Findhorn as recovering something important for human experience. This perception strengthens the commitment to the community's purpose. The psychological rewards of belonging create what Bourdieu would recognise as sustained *illusio* in the community game. FFEs recognition that "I don't realise how much I was actually seeking that feeling of community and.. a lot of the positive feeling that comes from being there is the feeling that you belong somewhere and that you're a part of something that's bigger than you" (FFE) demonstrates how emotional fulfilment reinforces participation in the community. This aligns with Tajfel & Turner's (1986) social identity theory, where group membership often becomes part of the self-concept and sustains participation through the activation of the "group prototype" (Brewer & Silver, 2000, p. 154). Nevertheless, this affective intensity may often obscure critical judgment of community practices.

However, this dynamic also reveals tensions. FFAs willingness "...to give 100% ... even if, when we were being challenged or even mismanaged"(FFA) may suggest

that community belonging may sometimes sustain participation despite problematic practices and the affective attachments increase the willingness to trust the intentions and motives of fellow members as FFA completes “there was still the overall mission and purpose was for something I could go for” (FFA) However, this very strength could also inhibit critical examination of the community, creating conditions where the pedagogical game itself becomes less open to questioning or transformation which could lead to exploitation. Could this also be considered the ‘sunk cost fallacy,’ where members may think questioning the community is equivalent to questioning their life choices?

### *Shared Multiplicity of Interactions, Relations and Roles: Social Capital*

The interviews also reveal how members depend on complex, multiple, stable connections forged through different settings, including work, community gatherings, and social settings, which seem to contribute to the ideas of belonging and connection within the community and the cause. As one member mentions, it's like the same pool of people that you're seeing in all of these different like settings. formal and informal” (FFA), or another shares “I feel there is an intimacy, a depth that I don't think I would find so easily outside” (FFB). Bisung & Elliott describe social capital “as a resource that actors stand to benefit from by virtue of membership in social networks or structures” (2014, p. 195), and in this case, the overlapping educational, work, and social relationships provide high levels of social capital. It could also contribute to an echo chamber, where everyone within the community validates each other's experiences.

Even as another member appreciates, “experiencing like a deep community love around about me, and that was what was getting me through” (FFE), whilst sometimes the same community can also be “overwhelming” (FFE), suggesting how shared multiple relations can also be challenging and sometimes cracks in the network could easily break the commitment to the community because of the network density. Thus, social capital can both enable connection or also amplify exclusion based on the strength of the members' connections and relationships.

### *Community Living as an Educational Method: Educator-Content Relationship*

Peter, Eileen, and Dorothy envisioned the community as a spiritual place of transformation, and the members' narratives echo that emotion. Members have described the community's role as a learning space for individual and collective transformation. FFD says, "There's something about what you can achieve with other people." Another member shares, "It could be possible anywhere, but it needs obviously a group of like-minded people who are willing to engage." (FFB) and FFA shares "You know the culture of the community is an expression of spirit. The educational work is our expression." The sustained commitment and the investment in the field are emphasised above. However, this commitment could also represent what could be termed the "sunk cost fallacy" (Arkes & Bloomer, 1985), in which members who have invested significant time, money, and identity may find leaving the community difficult. It also shows how communities can apply subtle retention mechanisms by creating a narrative of the community's importance through its processes of socialisation and enculturation, which one could consider educational intentions within intentional communities. Having explored who joins the Findhorn Foundation, who the learner or social movement member is, and their motivations for commitment to the field, we now turn to examine how these members experience educational authority within the community.

### **6.3 Who is the Educator?**

Chapter 5B (Section 5.12) revealed a distinctive positioning of the self as the educator, as the ultimate conduit of divine wisdom, with founders as prepared channels of divine guidance and community members as facilitators. This section examines the experiences and interpretations of current members regarding the educator, revealing both continuities and significant evolutions in the community's understanding of who educates.

### 6.3.1 Divine Guidance as Educator: From Centralised Divine Voice to Diverse Experience

The founders positioned the divine as the ultimate educator, emphasising a direct connection to divine wisdom as the primary educational authority. Contemporary members describe a more diverse and individualised relationship with divine guidance. While early members like FFA sought direct spiritual messages similar to Eileen's, as mentioned, "when I was first here, the guidance, you know, because it was also quite close to when I mean I got here in '76 and Eileen. And Peter, were still here, and Dorothy and David visited, and you know, getting guidance was still kind of the thing I don't hear a voice very often, although occasionally I do" (FFA), some others like FFE describe a more embodied and integrated experience: "for me it's the singing, it's in the dancing...It's a physical opening and I feel like this is, then it is coming from a higher source" (FFE) This apparent opening of diverse interpretations of spiritual authority may be seen as subtly creating new forms of hierarchy based on perceived spiritual advancement, articulation ability of individuals experiences, and potentially even marginalising those who struggle with the community's spiritual vocabulary due to the interpretation of spiritual authority with members diverging in their practice and understanding. The individualisation of divine authority reflects what Heelas et al. (2005) term the "subjective turn", in which personal experience supersedes institutional forms of religious authority. The members seem to create their lived experiential reality of divine guidance away from the charismatic authority of Eileen defined by Weber as to "supernatural, superhuman or... exceptional powers" (1947, p.348) towards a more "routinisation of charisma" (Schoon & West, 2017) meaning a shift from founder charisma to an institutional version, through a proliferation of interpretations and adds to the diversity of interpretations within the field. This routinisation has contributed to the importance of *inner listening* as a ritual without necessarily following only Eileen's way. Critical questions remain regarding how members negotiate competing claims to spiritual authority and the extent to which individual interpretations can diverge before threatening community coherence.

### 6.3.2 Founders' Legacy as Continuing Educators

The founders positioned themselves as channels rather than originators of wisdom, establishing a non-hierarchical ideal while still maintaining significant educational authority. Long-term members describe an evolving relationship with the founder's legacy. As FFB states, *"explicit or implicit. They are there."* Another member notes, "They set the foundation, they set the template, and then they step back and say over to you. You're gonna make this work or you're not. ..The lessons are there..The books are written, and the scrolls of guidance is as relevant today as it was 20,30, 50 years ago. The job is to live it, not to be directed" (FFA)

This ongoing influence operates through multiple channels, including their books, videos, messages, recorded guidance, community stories, and rituals. However, members' experiences suggest a shift from direct authority to inspirational influence. Newer members like FFE claim less direct engagement with founders' teachings: "I was. I was just purely drawn to the fact that this was a place that had the college and spirituality going on in it. I didn't... I wasn't really bothered about who the founders were. I'm really interested in the history." This changing relationship reflects an evolution in educational fields, in which founding principles are reinterpreted and adapted to contemporary contexts. The transition from almost guidelines to institutionalised wisdom suggests how the community has tried to preserve its educational identity while allowing for renewal and reinterpretation. Further, early contributors like David Spangler (and others) also seem to be very prominent in members' conversations. However, there are also evident influences from other educators and ideas drawn from individual members' backgrounds, interests, and specialisations (Steiner-FFA, Ecology-FFE) that are not from the community, suggesting a continued bricolage with diverse traditions. The evolution demonstrates how second- and third-generation members negotiate inherited wisdom while adapting to contemporary contexts (Metcalf, 2004), and also reflects what Lynch (2007) identifies as a characteristic of progressive spirituality: meaning-making constructed from multiple sources rather than adhering to a singular doctrinal system. However, could this also lead to the diffusion of the community's

identity, to power struggles between original member-believers and new ideas, and to the legitimacy of that new knowledge within the existing bricolage? Could this borrowing also represent 'spiritual shortcuts' where wisdom is appropriated from cultures without access to the social and cultural struggles that produce those teachings?

### 6.3.3 Community Members as Educators: Exemplifying the Community Principles while Generating and Transmitting Knowledge.

The founders emphasised that community members should teach "by example" and demonstrate the community's values, not through words but through daily life practices. Contemporary members describe a complex ecosystem of educational roles that extends beyond the founder's emphasis on example alone. There is some structural approach to education within the community that combines formal and informal educational roles. There is a combination of organised programs, people specialisations, and skills-based workshops within the community. (See Fig.10 for a contemporary sample.) There are also efforts made to host speakers in complementary areas to share knowledge within the community. As FFA notes: *"So I think, particularly those years of being able to, of doing it, coming through the foundation. It was, in a way, more structured and held. We had supervision, you know, and new things would come through, and we would. We would have the time to look at them. We would have internal conferences."* The importance of educational efforts by the community was stated by FFD as *"We were encouraged in a way to to take a workshop. We had conferences every year that we were encouraged not just to look after, but to attend. We have a retreat house on Iona, and I used to go and spend a week in the Retreat house every year."* This suggests that aspects of formal educational opportunities are important.

The Experience Week emerges as a crucial formal educational initiative serving as an introduction to the community for aspiring members. This formally designed workshop, led by trained community facilitators, offers outsiders a glimpse into the

community and guides them through the workings of community life. Findhorn members frame and showcase the community as a place of spiritual and ecological significance, offering guided access to its rituals and beliefs. The educators also seem to convey the utopian potential by being exemplars and advocates of the community.

Many interviewed members discussed their experience of the week and how it catalysed their decision to move to the community. This first experience serves as a mobiliser and a way to lay out the field and its workings, as well as to show how beneficial it is to be part of it. Although community members, the educators have a specific intention and curriculum for the week. The Experience Week could thus be seen as both an educational initiative and a recruitment mechanism. While members frame it as transformative, it could also be seen as the conversion of members seeking potential into commitment to the community experience. This raises questions about the commodification of spiritual education and highlights the challenges faced by intentional communities as they also strive to survive within the broader economic environment. The choice of focalisers and the training could also be seen as implicit hierarchical assumptions about individuals (in terms of length, spiritual credibility, and communication skills) as educators.



Further, the members of Findhorn Foundation also act as educators for people

outside of the community and hosts workshops on complementary subjects that exchange knowledge

within and outside the community. There are efforts made to disseminate that experience for outsiders through various engagements with outside organisations, such as the UN, Gaia, and the Foundation for Intentional Communities,

among others. The archives contain a historical collection of early-year conferences that featured diverse thinkers and speakers addressing various issues in New Religious Movements, Eco-

Spirituality, and human behaviour. Even now, their calendar is quite diverse and advertises various events for members (Fig. 11), allowing members to

come together, learn from one another, and from experts. Thus, there are many formal educational opportunities within the community, with people

volunteering to take on educator roles. The external workshops also illustrate how the community builds its community capital in the

broader field of social movements and utilises the

generated knowledge as content for others

interested in aligned areas. These engagements can

also be understood as an accumulation of symbolic capital that legitimises the

Findhorn Foundation's positioning within the broader field of social and ecological

movements.

Apart from the structured and formal programs, conferences, and workshops,

members emphasise that community members also take on roles as formal

educators in skills. As FFE notes, *“Basically, there's like a lot of people that have their*

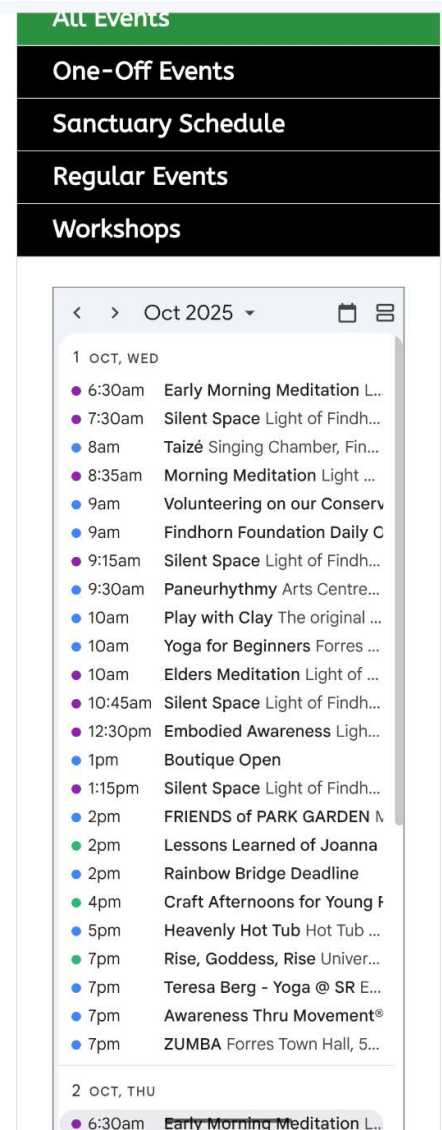


Figure 11 List of Workshops Sample (Findhorn Website)

*own creative practice and creative pursuits. A lot of them do it professionally. Some of them are just doing it in their own time. but there's a culture of encouraging each other to share these things. and whether it's that they have events that are called sharing at the Universal Hall."* This blend of formal and informal educational roles represents an elaboration of the founders' vision, maintaining the emphasis on lived example while developing more structured approaches to knowledge transmission.

### *Community Members as Informal Educators*

Apart from all the formal educators that members are exposed to, the importance of community members as peers and mentors, and of daily interactions, is reiterated. Thus, daily conversations and working systems can themselves be instrumental in members taking on roles as educators or learners. Therefore, aspects such as mentorship, informal advice-taking, and support through groups may lead to temporary educatorship. As FFB states, "We might then have other trainings where we talk about this. What do you do when you have a difficult person in the group who knows everything better or something, and then we do role play." Another member FFC notes, "So what I loved about this.. I mean recorded always living, living education, you know. So we are not sitting in classrooms and listening to lectures, even though we did this sometimes, too. But it was always... it was much more seen."

The experiences, the structuring of rituals, and the space are all intended to create an opportunity for education both individually and collectively. Thus, the importance of people becoming temporary educators within workspaces, depending on the tasks and situations, is also seen as valuable. As FFA notes, "The education actually happens like this, our skill in education happens actually in the work department...and you know I, one of our principals, is work is love and action. So this is where we learn it. There we have our challenges."

The community's design of its workflows, departments, work, organisational culture, and communication styles all seem to demonstrate intentionality and purpose in implementing the community's principles and vision. The idea is not that

it is specific people, but rather belonging and living in the community itself, which serves as self-educational. As one member states, “we are not sitting people in a seminary and telling them about leadership and giving them, you know, long lectures and bar, and what a good leader needs to be, and how they include. No, we're putting them in the kitchen.”

The practical approach of using experiences as opportunities for self-education is evident in the quotes above, which reiterate the importance of people gaining essential skills and knowledge through participation in community life. Although this approach aligns with the ideas of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) or Dewey’s (1938) approach of learning through doing, it also reveals potential tensions in newcomers' integration. How accessible is the community's vocabulary, rituals, or methods, and what does the community do to manage knowledge, skills, or, most importantly, belief gaps? As observed during my interaction with participants of the Experience Week, it was hard to be totally acynical when one is first presented with new thoughts.

#### 6.3.4 Comparison and Evolution of Educational Authority

The analysis of members' experiences reveals both continuities and evolution in who serves as educators at the Findhorn Foundation. The founders’ frames of Divine guidance, as well as the founders' and community members' roles as educators, remain intact. However, each element has evolved to accommodate changing membership and social contexts. The most significant shift appears in the democratisation of spiritual authority, with members describing increasingly diverse pathways to defining what divine guidance is and the ways of accessing it. Similarly, the founder’s direct authority has evolved into a more complex relationship with their legacy functioning as an inspiration rather than a prescription for newer members. The continuity of members' emphasis on community members as educators suggests that the practical experiential approach to learn from members represents the most durable aspect of its educational thought. The educational authority, however, may not be understood as fully democratised nor traditionally

hierarchical, but as dispersed and implicitly stratified through cultural capital, spiritual credibility and institutional positioning. The complex ecosystem of educators described above shapes and is shaped by the content that members engage with during their time at the Findhorn Foundation. The following section describes what members describe as their primary learning domains, revealing how content reflects and reinforces the community's evolution as a social field.

## 6.4 What is the Content / What are Learners Learning?

Educational content in Findhorn or within any social movement could be understood as what members are encouraged to focus on, acquire knowledge about, and practice while being part of the community. Unlike formal educational content, which is transmitting established knowledge, the content within the community is oriented towards capacities needed for a not-yet realised future. Again, the content is primarily useful within the alternative community arrangements but is also presented as transferable. Through the lens of Bourdieu's field theory, the educational content can also be understood as cultivating the '*habitus*' that becomes second nature to community members. At Findhorn, this includes learning the community's ways of working, specific language, and interactions that are distinctive to the community and contribute to the collective commitment and belief in maintaining the social space, or the field, of the community. Chapter 5B revealed two primary domains of educational content: Spiritual knowledge and living in community. This section examines how current members experience and describe what they learn at Findhorn, revealing both continuities and critical tensions in the transmission of content.

### 6.4.1 *Inner listening*: From Divine Command to Diverse practice

*Inner listening* functions as Findhorn's core educational practice, evolving from Eileen's structured divine messages to contemporary, diverse approaches that challenge traditional spiritual authority. The founders positioned guidance received through *inner listening* as the fundamental educational content, with Eileen emphasising direct communication, "Therefore listen, become very sensitive

towards it, so you do not miss My slightest whisper." This practice was initially framed as receiving messages from God, though Eileen later described it as connecting with her "higher self." Contemporary members reaffirm the centrality of *inner listening* while describing a significant diversification in how its practice is understood and experienced.

### *Diversification of Spiritual Authority*

The shift from the founder's experiences of *Inner listening* to accommodate different ways and methods of *inner listening* is presented in most conversations. Quotes such as "they are so different, ask 100 people here, and you will get 100 different answers," (FFB) and emphasis on "there are so many different ways. There are so many doorways," (FFB) suggest both the inclusivity and definitional challenges this diversity represents. Where "Some people hear voices like Eileen did. Some people just have a sense, like Dorothy. Did some people just have a clear, you know, Trust?" (FFF) Although the quotes suggest a democratisation of the practice, they also raise questions about community coherence. While this plurality could align with individual preferences, it may potentially challenge the community's ability to validate and integrate these varied experiences into a collective understanding.

### *Physical and Embodied Experience - Body-Mind Connection (Learner-Content Relationship)*

The founders emphasised spiritual knowledge as primarily cognitive and intuitive, though Dorothy Maclean's work with nature introduced more embodied elements. Contemporary members have significantly expanded the embodied dimension of spiritual practice, highlighting it as a physical experience "that feels like a very physical thing. When it happens." And "You know this now that we know this way. The brain is here in the heart of the guts, and they all inform"(FFC) This emphasis on embodied wisdom represents an evolution beyond the founders' approach, incorporating contemporary understandings of embodied cognition: "for me, it's in

the singing. It's in the dancing...It's a physical opening. I feel it physically that something moves through me" (FFB)

This shift towards embodied spirituality allows members to access guidance through multiple pathways "I listen to my body. My body knows very well if it's my ego." And "my body is just gonna, like, not let me decide otherwise."(FFD) While maintaining the founders' emphasis on accessing inner wisdom, this evolution reflects broader societal trends towards integrating physical and spiritual dimensions of experience. The emphasis on bodily wisdom as a path to spiritual development appears to offer an accessible and democratic approach to spiritual practice. However, it leaves the door open for complications when collective decision-making processes could be influenced by conflicting guidance. Some members believe they only have episodes of *inner listening*, as one says, "Usually, that will happen like before I make a big change or transition in my life" (FFD). The temporal patterns further complicate this picture. Individual members also appear to suggest that *inner listening* serves as a practical tool for decision-making and life navigation. This dual function of both spiritual development and practical guidance raises interesting questions about the integration of the practical and spiritual aspects of community life, as well as the challenges of delineating guidance from members' personal preferences and how they navigate that individually and collectively.

#### *Prerequisites for Inner Listening Practice (Habitus/Skills) and Barriers*

The founders emphasised stillness, regular practice, and trust as essential prerequisites for accessing inner guidance, with both Eileen's and Dorothy's stories illustrating their practice as a result of discipline, consistency, and trust. Current members maintain similar prerequisites, suggesting a continuity in this aspect. Members emphasise quietness "you need to be still. You need to sit still"(FFB), regular practice "you have to practice...But if I would stop, then then it wouldn't happen at all", trust "I just have a knowing in a way like Yes, that's what I should do, and no, I shouldn't do that" and patience "Sometimes I think all it was a waste of time...but that doesn't mean I'm not going the next time" (FFB)

However, there are also some barriers. The founders' texts present *inner listening* as universally accessible and reliable when properly practised. In contrast, contemporary members also acknowledge uncertainty: "I think here, I think, in the you know what can happen is people think. Oh, I have to hear it like Eileen" (FFA) or "you definitely think that there is something to, and they're listening? I *have not quite figured it out yet*" (FFE). Others recognise potential misuse "in the 70's getting guidance was still kind of the thing, and then it did feel like it got a bit abused where my guidance said I needed a rest this morning, or my guidance said I could, should leave my family and go off with this lover. You know, lots of silly guidances around. So we're not. So we yeah, we don't preach it quite that way any longer" (FFA). This emerging evolution in the community's approach to its core practice represents a more nuanced perspective on *inner listening* while raising questions about the validity and universality of the practice for members and especially for new members who may struggle. The democratisation of *inner listening*, while inclusive in principle, may inadvertently create new forms of hierarchy based on perceived spiritual advancement or articulation of experience, while leaving those struggling as marginalised, maybe creating subtle exclusion.

#### 6.4.2 Community Living as Educational Content

The founders in Chapter 5B emphasised community living as a practical application of the spiritual principles, focusing on understanding group dynamics, developing interpersonal skills and balancing individual needs with collective welfare.

Contemporary members describe community living as not merely applying spiritual principles, but as generating a distinct form of knowledge that is unavailable through individual practice. As one member explains, "It is something about the whole, the whole being greater than the in the parts, you know. There is something about what you can achieve with other people" (FFB). Another describes the community as a "mystery school" that creates a "visceral experience of being more than us as individuals" This framing of the community as generative of transpersonal knowledge represents an evolution beyond the founders' more individualistic framework. While the founders emphasised community as a context of spiritual

practice, contemporary members take it a bit further as context for producing a form of wisdom that transcends individual experience that can only be accessed through collective engagement and creates “*an expression of spirit*” (FFA). This could also be seen as a utopian educational claim where collective living arrangements are seen as more desirable than life within mainstream society.

The interplay between individuals and community transcends distinctions between formal and informal ways of learning, and the community here presents itself as both context and curriculum for learning that is rooted and emerges through social interaction, shared work, and collective meaning-making. The data illustrate Bourdieu's field-specific vocabulary and *habitus*. The use of metaphorical terms, such as ‘visceral experience,’ suggests that this learning is challenging to articulate and requires being within the community to understand it. However, this raises theoretical conceptualisation challenges, as it is not easy to explain how the pedagogical function of community as a mystery school or viscosity is understood within the community. Moreover, whether claiming access only within collective engagement creates a system shielding critique from outsiders or temporary visitors is questionable.

#### *Progressive Skill Development: Formalising the Founders' Approach (Learner-Content Relationship) or Informal Credentialling?*

The founders emphasised practical community skills acquired through participation, but provided limited explicit structure for skills progression. The members describe a more structured progressive approach to skill development through community living. One member explains how newcomers “First learn the knowhow to just focalise<sup>49</sup> the salads... And then we give them more responsibility. So then they focalise the whole meal,” (FFB). This progression then extends to group facilitation as the member continues, “but you have to include other people. ... So first they have to learn a skill that's important... “ They have group projects, you know, so garden

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<sup>49</sup> Leading a specific work activity



focaliser, or who holds the ship as to hold a whole group. So they're a group holding skills" (FFB).

The above articulated progression seems to represent a formalisation of the founder's approach, maintaining the emphasis on learning through doing, while creating pathways for development. The model also appears to be organic, but could also function as a hierarchical process based on members' accumulated capital. The integration of practical skills with group facilitation and conflict management seems to suggest a sophisticated understanding of how community living develops multiple competencies simultaneously: "It's quite a complex job, I mean. You could say oh, just cleaning the kitchen, but holding it, holding the spiritual values, bringing a group together with never been together, dividing the work, making sure it's done to a certain standard, and so on" (FFB). Further members are expected to work within and lead groups of people for tasks, suggesting a more managerial scope of community living. As a member notes, "They have to step into their leadership... They have to learn how to make decisions... They learn how to let go at times, you know and include people in what they are doing, giving them a good experience and timing. This emphasis on leadership and group work hints at the inclusion of social dimensions of learning and also reveals expectations from members within the community.

This evolution could also suggest how the founder's experiential approach has been refined through decades of community practices into a more deliberate pedagogical method. However, it may be worth questioning whether members have access to this implicit curriculum and whether there is equitable access for all members. Furthermore, how do members balance their interests, talents, and individual skills while also ensuring that community work does not suffer? Although this approach aligns with contemporary social educational theories that emphasise collaborative skills development, it also presents potential tensions regarding power dynamics in what appears to be a somewhat informal apprenticeship model.

*Attitude towards Community Experiences as Habitus/ Skills to be developed.*

The founders' texts emphasised surrender to divine guidance as the primary disposition of community life. The interviewees view community living as an educational opportunity, offering essential lessons for personal growth. As FFD emphasises her belief "that the community practice in a way, is living in community.. my relationships, ...how I am with other people have been big learning part my life ...that relationship, that kind of having to work together and understand each other and notice our responses to each other. That's been a big part of my learning, I would say, you know, it's having an ultimate belief that I will be given what I'm. I'm. Given what I need." This framing appears to represent an embedded habitus of interpreting their experiences through the lens of personal development, rather than a critique of community structures.

Alternatively, it could also function to sustain commitment even when members encounter problems, as I repeat FFA's quote, "But even if, when we were being challenged or even mismanaged... there was still the overall mission and purpose was for something I could go for so, and the various times I thought I might leave. The next exciting thing was offered to me here, and I was like, okay, I'll do that" (FFA). Here, FFA acknowledges both challenges and mismanagement situations that could otherwise prompt exit. Yet she remained because her commitment to the overall mission and purpose provided meaning, and the community offered the next exciting thing, suggesting that framing all experiences as learning opportunities may inadvertently function as a retention mechanism. However, when difficulties are consistently reframed as learning opportunities, the community's responsibility is sidelined. As another member states, "You know you will have all the problems of the world here... people do come thinking... everybody will be loving... they get upset because there's conflicts... That's the material. It makes you grow" (FFD). While this perspective reflects experiences as content, it simultaneously obscures the difference between productive challenge and problematic practice.

This attitude appears to be situated at the intersection of individual autonomy and social conformity. As another member quotes, “Your only choice is when you take it the right way, and so on, some level we don't get to choose the curriculum. The curriculum is the manifestation of divinity in the material world, and our only choice is whether we are going with the flow. So to me, spirituality is recognising that we're all doing it, whether we know it or not, or whether we want to or not”(FFF), sharing the reframing of the challenges as essential to personal growth.

### *Balancing Individual and Collective Needs: Curricular Focus or Ongoing Tension*

The founders emphasised the need to “learn to adjust to people and circumstances, learn to love your neighbours ..to cooperate with them.. to see yourself as a member of a community As part of a whole...Rather than as a self-important individual” (Caddy, 1991) while also maintaining that “each soul must learn to stand on their own feet And sound their own note loud and clear” (ibid). Current members articulate this need as an ongoing responsibility. As FFB states “it is my personal responsibility to figure out how to contribute to the community...while also making sure that i am taking care of myself.” However, members also acknowledge barriers that complicate this ideal balance. Informal hierarchies based on “how long they'd been there” (FFE) create differential access to community resources and decision-making powers. Additionally, practical barriers (FFE), such as limited housing or demographic factors like social inclusion or an ageing population (FFD), may indicate that members have unequal access to community living within the community, with some participating on the fringes.

The founders presented community living as a natural, organic process guided by divine wisdom, with limited acknowledgement of human dynamics. Contemporary members offer a more critical reflection on how power shapes community living and learning. Thus, although the community living model may develop genuine competencies, it may also socialise members into community-specific ways of being that may limit critical examination of institutional structures.

### 6.4.3 Environmental /Ecological Practices as Content

The founders' documents that I have analysed do not feature ecological awareness as a very prominent part of the content, although Dorothy's association with nature and its importance in the practice of co-creation with nature are emphasised as established in Chapter 5A. However, it seems more like a dimension of spiritual focus rather than an explicit focal area. However, an ecological focus has now become a central pillar of contemporary educational practice at Findhorn Foundation, representing what members describe as a shift toward planetary consciousness. This evolution reflects broader environmental movements while maintaining the community's distinctive integration of spiritual and ecological awareness. The positioning of ecological practice as a spiritual expression rather than a separate idea builds on Dorothy's co-creation with nature and manifests in the community's relationship with nature.

#### *Knowledge about ecology and Interconnectedness*

Members describe a worldview emphasising interconnectedness. As FFA shares, "You know it is a spiritual worldview. It does say we're all not only all breathing the same air and interconnected that way. . . We are a oneness within our diversities" This knowledge for the community, as per members, emerges not just from a theoretical position but manifests as "an eco-village where we where we live in harmony and don't and use renewable resources" (FFB). The community enables ecological principles to be embodied as knowledge through daily practices. As FFD shares "how working "in the gardens... the whole co-creation with nature and understanding more about the intelligence" became integral to her learning process, suggesting that ecological education occurs through direct participation rather than abstract instruction. There is a belief that everything is connected, as FFF notes, "I see everything as coming from that essential source... everything in the material world is just a manifestation of that. And I believe everything in the material world is on a journey to manifest that divinity in the material world" (FFF). These statements emphasise the value of the natural environment and the

acknowledgement of interconnectedness as a fundamental assumption in the community. This spiritual dimension appears to distinguish the field and framing of the Findhorn Foundation from purely secular environmental movements, positioning the community's ecological stewardship within a spiritual rationale.

### *Skills in Sustainable Living and Working with Nature*

The practical dimension of ecological education encompasses both technical skills and what members describe as “*attunement*” with natural systems. FFE’s observation that “Findhorn is more sustainable than, like most of Scotland”, reflects commitment to renewable energy, organic agriculture and resource management within the community. Members develop capacities or understanding of permaculture, renewable energy systems, and ecological building techniques, but frame these as expressions of spiritual relationship rather than merely technical knowledge. There is some research supporting these claims, showing that members' ecological footprints are significantly lower than the UK average (Tinsley & George, 2006). Through its innovative practices, the organisation also provides insights for sustainability education and eco-pedagogy. Although the transferability of such initiatives remains questionable, research suggests scale-up challenges due to their dependence on high levels of commitment, resources, and specific social structures (Litfin, 2014; Lockyer & Veteto, 2013). However, attempts at skill-building help build reputational capital for the community (Kunze & Avalino, 2015).

### *Attitude of Stewardship and Reverence*

Perhaps most significantly, ecological education at Findhorn Foundation cultivates what members would describe as a fundamental shift in their relation to the natural world. FFB's description of this connection illustrates this change: "when I, when I walk in the forest... I can make connections to a tree or to a rock... I looked at everything and know there is no separation... between me and what I see." This experiential explanation suggests an interpretation beyond conventional environmental ethics to what members frame as direct participation in ecological consciousness. The community's approach to environmental stewardship seems to

emerge from the motivation of "being a part of the solution, or at least... not being as negative a force as what we would be if we're not" (FFE). Framing ecological action as both a practical necessity and spiritual practice, even comparing their position as being "in kindergarten, I mean as a species. When we look at where we need to be in, in, in our relationship to each other on the planet... we need to like, be in grad school. We need to graduate, you know, because there's some big exams coming" (FFC). As a social movement, the motivation to be part of the solution appears to foster both engagement in education and the community's objective achievement. Although it may be interesting to consider if all the members share the spiritual foundations equally, or whether members pick and choose certain aspects of the community and their focus

The establishment of Global Ecovillage Network at Findhorn in 1995 represents a formal recognition of importance of ecological education, with FFB noting "I don't think that I would still be here if we wouldn't have started in 95 the eco- village movement... So this is a really, really important aspect of how we express our co-creationist nature." This framing hints at members' motivations to continue their commitment to the 'illusio' of the field.

The educational content outlined above thus functions simultaneously as a practical necessity, an identity marker, and a strategic positioning within broader ecological movement social fields (such as the United Nations and Global Ecovillages), revealing functions beyond just knowledge or skill transmission. It also reveals mechanisms of cultivating community-specific *habitus*. *Inner listening*, Community Living, and ecological practice operate as interconnected domains that serve both as mechanisms of individual development and as the collective objectives of the Findhorn Foundation. Simultaneously, the knowledge generated within this process is shared with others to legitimise and sustain the field's uniqueness. The educational content also reveals distinctive relational patterns between educators, the learner, and the content. These content domains operate as interconnected mechanisms. Inner Listening functions as both a means of accessing spiritual knowledge and the method of navigating community life and ecological decision-

making. Community living serves as context, curriculum and outcome, so members learn through participation while their participation reproduces the educational field. Ecological practices integrate spiritual principles and community living principles with practical skills. The following section reveals how this educational content shapes and is shaped by relationships between learner and educator, educator and content and learner and content in practice.

## 6.5 Learner – Educator Relationship: From Hierarchy to Co-Creation

The relationship between educators and learners at Findhorn operates through apparently non-hierarchical structures, while potentially reproducing subtle power differentials. This section examines how the community's relational patterns function in practice, revealing tensions between egalitarian ideals and the necessities of coordination.

### 6.5.1 Distributed Leadership through Task Focalisation: Democracy or Disguised Hierarchy

The founders established a distinctive relational structure that deliberately avoided conventional hierarchies while maintaining coordination, rejecting a traditional teacher-student dynamic in favour of a what could be understood as focalisation – a distributed form of leadership where individuals temporarily guide specific activities without assuming permanent authority. Members describe this system as one of “horizontal accountability” where authority emerges from responsibility and service rather than a position, as FFB shares “so there is more fluidity, and in the whole organisation, I lived with a friend who was my line manager, but in the sacred dance festival I was a focaliser” Members believe that focalisation provides practical coordination while preserving the founder's emphasis on spiritual equality as FFB continued focalisers are “holding the spiritual values, bringing a group together with never been together, dividing the work, making sure it's done to a certain standard, and so on.” While focalisation distributes formal authority, questions arise about

how access and roles are privileged on the basis of cultural capital and community tenure, obscuring power relations through informal networks and accumulated credibility. As FFE commented, “people would make a point of how long they've been there, like I've been here 30 years. So this is how we do things” Also, FFF commented that “although they understood the culture, they often didn't have the skills to do the job in these leadership positions”

### 6.5.2 Fluid Roles between Teacher and Learner: Empowerment or Responsibility Diffusion?

The founders established fluidity between teaching and learning as fundamental to the community's approach, where everyone was to contribute in their own way, rejecting fixed educator-learner identities in favour of mutual exchange.

Contemporary members describe how this fluidity manifests in their daily experiences. As FFC observes, "Some days I'm facilitating a workshop, other days I'm a complete beginner in the garden, learning from someone who just arrived" FFD similarly notes, "There's this beautiful cycle where we all get to be both student and teacher." Members claim that this role fluidity creates a distinctive learning environment where expertise is recognised without creating permanent hierarchies. As FFE describes, "The person who seems most inexperienced in one context might be the one teaching everyone else in another setting." This approach maintains the founders' vision while accommodating the practical needs of a complex community, creating what members describe as "a dance between leading and following" (FFA) that preserves community cohesion while honouring individual gifts. However, could this fluidity raise questions about task accountability and quality control in skilled areas of work and also impact confidence levels, especially for new members who may not feel confident enough to lead?



### 6.5.3 Mentoring relationships: Beyond Guru-Disciple dynamics or Institutional Dependency

The founders approached mentorship that avoided both conventional hierarchy and spiritual dependency. As a text notes, "Another soul can only take you so far along the spiritual path. The rest of the way you have to go alone, and the sooner you realise this, the quicker you will be able to move forward" (Caddy, 1994, p.112), emphasising the value of guidance and personal authority. Contemporary members seem to use the community as a facilitation environment and members as on-call mentors, depending on their needs. There is a repeated mention of the community as a "mystery school"<sup>50</sup>(FFB) providing the mentor at the time of need, based on the lesson to be learnt. This metaphor frames the entire community as pedagogically intentional, in which interactions, relationships, and challenges have potentially teachable value, whilst also positioning learning as unpredictable and emergent. While avoiding guru-disciple dynamics, could this foster institutional dependency, in which the community environment becomes both an enabler and a concealer of potential problems? While focalisation, role fluidity, and mutual learning create opportunities for self-development, they can also serve as implicit mechanisms for managing authority. The readiness to take focalisation roles may not have explicit criteria, but shows how the community subtly validates expertise. Also, does this create potential for inappropriate influence, especially for newer members eager to learn or please?

The educator-learner relationships described above create the context for teaching and learning activities within the community. The following section examines the relation between the learner and the way knowledge is generated and transmitted.

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<sup>50</sup> Mystery schools were ancient educational institutions that taught esoteric spiritual and philosophical knowledge through initiation rites and secret teachings. Found across cultures—from the Eleusinian Mysteries in Greece to Egyptian temple schools and Pythagorean communities—they reserved their deepest wisdom for members who progressed through stages of initiation. The term suggests knowledge that must be directly experienced rather than simply learned intellectually, kept "mysterious" both to preserve its sacred character and to ensure students were spiritually prepared to receive it.

## 6.6 Educator – Content Relationship: Adaptive & Needs-based

The relationships between educators and content at the Findhorn operate through co-creative processes that challenge traditional knowledge transmission models whilst potentially reproducing subtle hierarchies of influence and voice.

### 6.6.1 Co-creation of Content through Collective Practice and Community Needs

The founders emphasised knowledge as something co-created rather than transmitted, as quoted "You will each have something quite different shown to you. Pass on that new Share it with each other." Positioning learning as a collective exploration rather than expert transmission. Current members share how this co-creative approach shapes their educational experience. As FFB states, "In our meetings, we use *attunement* practices where everyone contributes insights, and somehow we arrive at understandings that no single person could have reached alone." FFC similarly notes, "It's not like in a university where the professor has the answers—we're discovering things together, and that's what makes it so powerful." Members emphasise how this method gives rise to collective intelligence and knowledge emerges through participation and collaboration. The above interpretations describe how content is simultaneously produced and transmitted within the group rather than being predesigned or unidirectional. However, the emphasis on collective content creation, while appearing democratic, could also mask how dominant voices and perspectives shape what emerges as collective wisdom. Members with experience, confidence, and perceived spiritual authority may influence group processes and contributions, inadvertently reproducing inequalities in voice and influence. Nevertheless, it also raises several epistemological questions. How is collectively generated knowledge distinguished from group delusion or confirmation bias? Can such knowledge be replicated or validated across different community contexts? Whether this represents genuine

pedagogical innovation or romanticises community dynamics that could be otherwise explained through theories like social learning (Bandura, 1977) or communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) remains unanswered. For example, Wenger et al.'s (2002) work on communities of practice discusses how groups can develop shared memory systems, work together, and solve problems, creating a bond that can also explain collective learning without any elements of spiritual development.

### 6.6.2 Continuous Adaptation and Non-Prescriptiveness as Individualised Responsibility.

A common theme across interviews is that content is not fixed or a single thing. As FFA shares, “You know the one thing that we don't have that Steiner has, or Auroville has, .. We don't have like the one way, .. we have the there is a way. Go find it, go, find your there is a way for you, and your job is to tune in and locate it” which challenges the traditional understanding of educators and their intentions or a pre-determined content. Since the content is tailored to individual needs and pathfinding, the educator (even in this case, the learners themselves) is continually seeking, reflecting, and creating content rather than following a prescribed solution. While this approach honours individual paths, it also places significant responsibility on learners to discern appropriate content and navigate potentially overwhelming choices. It may disadvantage those seeking more explicit instructions or structure.

## 6.7 Learner – Content Relationship: A focus on seekership and self-direction

The relationship between learners and content emphasises individual initiative and seekership while potentially transferring responsibility for educational outcomes to individual members.

### 6.7.1 Active Discovery as a Mode of Learning

The relationship between content and learners is one of initiative, action, and seekership. It seems to be encouraged that members are guided by their inner

guidance, specific aims, and life purpose, rather than waiting for someone else to enlighten them. As FFA mentions, “it's more like I'm responding. I like the world, it is providing and amply providing, and my task is to notice and respond and listen and learn” The emphasis on taking responsibility and finding one's own path is evident in all the members' interviews. However, there is also an inherent unpredictability in what that search could throw up for different learners. As FFF shares, “and then suddenly something shows up like that doesn't fit. And so we have to like, transcend our theory and say, Well, how do we think about this in a in a different way?” It is also possible that the celebration of active discovery could be difficult for members struggling to understand and, more importantly, not even recognising what they are supposed to be discovering, specifically because of the diverse interpretations and assumptions of the older members. However, this could often be seen as a lack of accountability. For members who struggle with integration or believe they are unable to develop their capacities, it may be perceived as personal failure rather than potentially inadequate community support.

#### **Progressive Responsibility through an Integration of Experience, Reflection, and**

**Guidance:** Though there are no formal hierarchies, some members describe a systematic progression from the simple to the complex, creating an informal apprenticeship-like structure. Here, both individual and collective learning occur through the application and reflective integration of one's daily experiences, community interactions, and access to inner wisdom and divine guidance, positioning contemplative practices as essential educational skills. At the same time, self-reflection and contemplation are used as assessment tools.

### **6.7.2 Learning Through Reflection and Interpretation – Mode of Learning**

Another interesting insight that comes across from interviews is the role of reflection and interpretation. There seems to be an emphasis on personal interpretations, and most members situate their learning as realisations about

themselves rather than as knowledge, and as a result of reflection or building awareness. As FFD mentions, “I write a journal every morning, and this is where I reflect often, you know. So there, I allow myself to say, oh, this this person was really blah blah blah. But then, in writing I already noticed, I said, oh, and how did I contribute to this? You know, taking personal responsibility.” Whereas another member seems to believe “We could all be in the same room listening to a teacher or be singing and dancing together, and then have a different experience and apply it in some part of life differently” (FFA). There is thus a complementary process of reflection and interpretation that the learner uses to process the content.

The emphasis on individual responsibility for learning, while empowering some members, may also serve as a mechanism for avoiding institutional responsibility for educational outcomes. When members struggle with *inner listening* or community integration, the focus on personal development and finding your own way may obscure structural barriers or community dynamics that impede learning. Furthermore, the above approaches and relationships occur within a carefully constructed physical and social environment that serves as both context and a learning environment. The following section thus builds on how the Findhorn Foundation's unique environment operates as an educational field.

### 6.7.3 Assessment and Evaluation: Absence of formal measures

While the interviews do not provide much insight into assessment and evaluation, some key points can be gleaned from them.

**Self-Assessment as Primary Method:** The primary responsibility for assessing growth rests with individuals. The individuals seem to maintain their own authority and resist external validation mechanisms; however, there may also be areas where self-deception can persist, either through an inflated sense of achievement or excessive self-criticism. Also, how does one demonstrate competence or show growth, and are there ways that can support those struggling, or do they naturally filter out or remain isolated?

**Peer Mentors as Assessors:** Community members can act as support systems and mentors, but they are also on the same development journey. However, popularity or different forms of capital may influence others' opinions and judgements whilst also perpetuating groupthink or subtle power dynamics within the field. The lack of external validation or recognition beyond community boundaries is, in a way, liberating and may potentially enable intrinsic learning; however, the value of this recognition is limited to allied fields or within the community, which may be considered problematic in mainstream settings.

**Exit as Ultimate Assessment:** Members' departure from the community could also serve as an assessment, where some may leave if they do not align with the community and its ideologies, or in search of further exploration, both suggesting movement and an assessment of the impact of community life and allowing for a decision.

## 6.8 Environment of Findhorn: Living Laboratory for Ecological Learning

The Findhorn Foundation functions as a 'field' that shapes its educational possibilities and outcomes. The physical environment also could be understood as representing the spatial dimensions or materialisation of desired social aspirations. Unlike formal educational environments designed primarily for functionality, the spaces in the community are designed to make visible the community's utopian vision of an integrated ecological, spiritual, and communal life and to make alternative living demonstrable and experienceable. In this section, I elaborate on how the community's physical, social and cultural environment creates distinctive conditions for learning that align with its goals. While the previous sections examined social relationships and content, this section explores physical environment, spatial organisation and temporal rhythms that influence education.

### 6.8.1 Physical Environment as Pedagogical Space

The physical environment of the community serves as both a classroom of practical demonstration of its core principles and an expression of the curriculum at the Findhorn Foundation. The community's transformation of sandy coastal land into a flourishing green space represents what members describe as "co-creation with nature", which is a foundational practice that emerged from Dorothy Maclean's communication with what she termed as "plant devas" or nature intelligence. As FFB explains, "Even though it started co-creation. .. So that was Dorothy's view... and for me the practical expression is an eco-village where we where we live in harmony and don't and use renewable resources." The gardens function as living laboratories, where members learn through direct engagement, with the environment itself serving as the educator, teaching principles of sustainable living, natural cycles, and ecological interconnection through daily interactions. This physical site serves as a "demonstration site" that validates the community's approach to human-nature relationships and also acts as an educator, teaching principles of co-creation, sustainability, and spiritual-ecological integration in daily life. The physical environment also serves as a reminder of the commitment and a tangible proof of the possibility of alternative ways of living. As FFA said "I think, and many others, that though what we're trying to achieve is valuable for the planet... figuring out how how do you have a settlement that actually enhances the natural kingdoms as opposed to deletes them."

The built environment (Fig. 11-14), from the original caravans to ecologically built houses, and visible eco-friendly measures such as solar panels, composting toilets, rainwater harvesting systems, homes made of recycled whisky barrels and natural building materials, demonstrates alternative possibilities.<sup>51</sup> The community's sensory environment, meaning what visitors and members experience through sight, sound, smell, is visibly distinct, as FFE mentions, "especially when I first came into it, looked so different to anywhere else... the caravans and the people in

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<sup>51</sup> See <https://www.ecovillagefindhorn.com/index.php/building> for more information

colourful *clothes*. And then the big fields of dreams, houses and the buildings had a lot more colour to them." This visual distinctiveness acts as a marking boundary between mainstream and community, maybe implicitly implying that the space is different. Although FFE observed that this demarcation also creates separation, "people would refer to it like the outside world. But I mean, there isn't actually like a real wall or division or barrier between the Eco village and the rest of the world"



Figure 12: Eco-Friendly Structures (Findhorn Foundation)



Figure 13: Harvesting Solar Energy (Findhorn Foundation)





*Figure 14 Natural Sewage Treatment Plant  
(Findhorn Foundation)*



*Figure 15 Whisky Barrell Houses (Findhorn  
Foundation)*



*Figure 16 Sacred Circle Labryinth (Findhorn  
Foundation-Author Photo)*



*Figure 17 Small Sanctuary Findhorn  
Foundation(Author Photo)*



Figure 18 Community Outdoor Gathering Space  
(Author Photo)



Figure 19 Map at the Entrance (Author Photo)

However, this material pedagogical tool also reveals some exclusions. As FFA notes, feeling “remarkably prosperous in my little humble mobile home” suggests a choice between material standards and environmentally conscious living. FFE’s experience of “finding it harder and harder to sustain financially” also hints at the importance of economic capital and the choice of member commitment.

The community also has walking labyrinths, which are meditation spaces, exemplifying how material design is pedagogical. The outdoor sacred circle (Fig. 15), with its white stone labyrinth, is a space for walking meditation and, symbolically, a process of reflection. As members move within the spiral, they are also asked to think about the metaphor of paths and attention. The main Sanctuary is considered the “spiritual heart of the community” (Findhorn Foundation, n.d.), a space for contemplation and meditation, and it employs circular geometry to create an immersive experience. This space was lost during COVID, but a smaller meditation space shows the principles of material and design. (Fig. 16). The outdoor meeting area, again designed in a circular shape, aims to embody an egalitarian vision and serves as a gathering space for members. (Fig. 17) A map at the entrance acts as a visitor guide and, in its presentation, displays different parts of the community and uses field-specific vocabulary (like Eco-homes, Nature Sanctuary, Magic Triangle) to

reinforce its message. The built environment is meant to reinforce the community's vision and practices and also serve as a demonstration for visitors.

There is also an emphasis on non-human elements as FFB describes “when I, when I walk in the forest... I can make connections to a tree or to a rock... I looked at everything and know there is no separation between me and what I see.” demonstrating the educational role of nature. However, this raises questions about how members project their interpretations onto non-human elements.

### 6.8.2 Temporal Rhythms as Implicit Practice.

Beyond the physical space, the community's work organisation, daily cycles, group meditations, activities and events act as temporal structures that both bring people together and act like checkpoints for both spiritual practice and community living. Special events like the Winter Solstice, as FFB shares, “we have a big celebration in winter with the solstice, where a lot, I mean, over 1,000 people participate in this over a period of 3 days”, creating temporal markers. The requirement for daily sanctuary attendance during Peter's time was described as an implicit compulsion and “when you didn't come or over, slept, or so on, it said, there's a door if you don't want to be here” (FFB), showing how it was used as a control mechanism.

The daily routines also seem to have some kind of structure as FFE discusses “how they start the day with a daily meditation”, but “on Mondays, there is like a longer team meditation of 20 minutes with the work team” as well as “daily check-ins with each other” or FFA, aiming for quiet time every morning.

### 6.8.3 Social Environment as a Container

The community's social environment creates what members describe as a supportive yet challenging context for personal growth. As FFE observes, “What I found was that I was experiencing a deep community love around me, and that was what was getting me through”, allowing him to engage with his personal growth while feeling a collective support. Another member FFF explains, “I think there is something in group consciousness that creates a resonance that is different from

what an individual can do... Group practice. creates an energy field... that allows the manifestation of that resonance to be more strongly felt or more quickly achieved." However, this same environment can also create intensity as FFA shares "it still feels like we're a bit of a pressure cooker, and we're a bit of a... there's a bit of an intense energy. and it works on people in different ways" hinting at how the community can be intensive and helpful at the same time. Also FFD notes "the group culture... allows a way of being to be supported, whereas out in the world that way of being is more difficult to come into resonance with" wherein the environment seems to be more than a facilitator and a core requirement for their spiritual development. The downside of this also seems to come off as "a lack of confidence. I think that often happens with people who are here that they feel like they can't make it in the real world" (FFF)

#### 6.8.4 Cultural Integration of Diverse Practices

The community creates what members believe is an environment where diverse knowledge sources converge and cross-pollinate. Although this selective adoption of practices could also function as selective spiritual eclecticism, it raises questions about respectful engagement. As FFA notes, "We don't have a lot of... There's some innovation here, but not a lot. An awful lot of it is early adoption of somebody else's practices... whether it's nonviolent communication, re-evaluation counselling, process-oriented psychology, or psychosynthesis... It's out there, and it comes here quite quickly, and we'll build that into our culture, too." Thus, the community acts as a demonstration of an integration of diverse wisdom traditions, contemporary therapies, and ecological practices. However, they are integrated and tested through the community and show the continued presence of 'bricolage' (Levi-Strauss, 1966). These experiments extend to diverse aspects of life, and initiatives such as collective ownership, the gift economy, and resource sharing hint at an attempt to redefine relationships to material security and abundance.

## 6.9 Conclusion

The above chapter addresses RQ2 on how current members describe their educational experience at the Findhorn Foundation, addressing two sub-questions: what motivates them to join and stay, and how participation shapes their learning. The interviews reveal a complex educational dynamic, demonstrating how the community functions as an integrated field in which spiritual development, community living, and ecological awareness converge through distinctive pedagogical practices. Member learning operates at individual (personal spiritual and skill development), collective (community living and leadership), and social movement levels (contribution to spiritual eco-village ambitions). As a social movement, members interviewed aligned with the founders' frames through narratives of spiritual pioneers, the ecological crisis, and Findhorn as a living demonstration. Members' personal experiences of religious disillusionment, social activism and seekership, and the Experience Week functioning as both an educational initiative and a recruitment mechanism seem to convert potential into commitment. Contemporary members' experience of education seems like an integrated, embodied practice in which spiritual development, community living, and ecological awareness converge through daily participation rather than through formal instruction alone. In using the I-SMLE framework, members as learners could be understood as somewhat active seekers, drawn by spiritual possibilities and prefigurative living, and sustained by emotional investment in community belonging and belief, accessing transpersonal wisdom unavailable through individual practice alone. The educators could be understood as divine guidance experienced through embodied practices, rather than just Eileen's / Dorothy's way, the founders' inspirational legacy and community members serving formal and informal teaching roles through work and mentorship. The educational content primarily centres on three interconnected domains: inner listening (as content and method), community living (as context, curriculum, and outcome), and ecological practices (positioning environmental stewardship as a spiritual expression). Members experience learning through active discovery, reflection and interpretation within a carefully constructed

environment of physical spaces, temporal rhythms and dense social networks. There are, however, overt tensions in the field of power dynamics between equal ideals and informal hierarchies, obscuring structural problems as learning opportunities and capital requirements that determine access to the community, favouring those with sufficient cultural and economic capital.

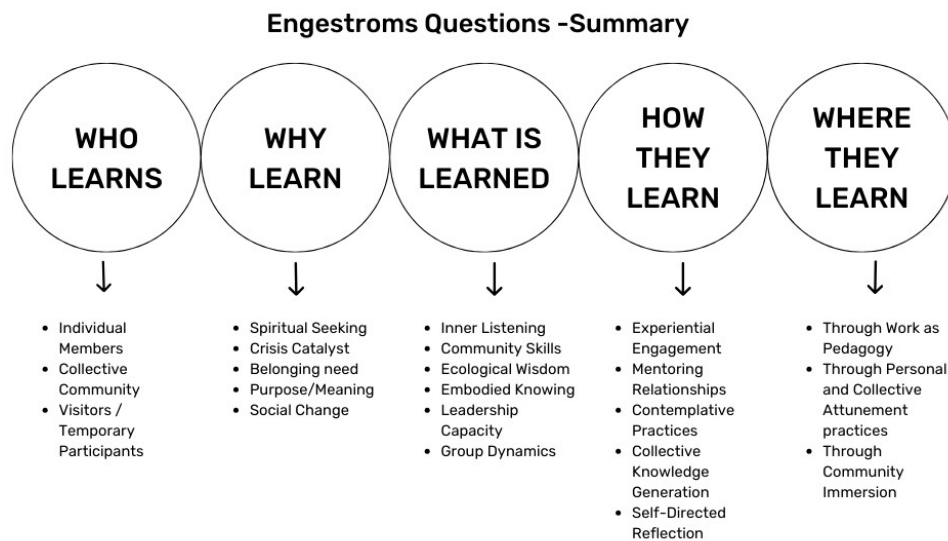


*Figure 20: Summary based on Engeström's Questions (Author Generated)*

The above diagram (Fig.20) summarises the findings based on Engeström's Questions (Section 3.4) in addition to its educational framing in Figure 10: Findhorn Educational Framing Summary (Author Generated). Viewing members' experiences through a utopian lens also illustrates how the community could be understood as a working utopia (Crossley,1999), reiterating and practising their utopian vision as well as how the community performs the function of educating desire (Levitas, 2013) by cultivating a sense of possibility and orientation, along with some demonstrable proof of success.

By synthesising the findings of Chapter 5 with the historical analysis and those of Chapter 6 with the contemporary members' experiences, through the lens of the I-

SMLE, Chapter 7 constructs a comprehensive theory of education for the Findhorn Foundation while exploring how this theory raises broader questions about education and pedagogy.



## 7. Theoretical Insights

### 7.1 Introduction

Chapter 5A traced the founders' journey and how their personal narratives framed and constructed the community and its positioning. (Sections 5.5) The selective retelling of their formative experiences legitimised specific spiritual practices, positioned seekership as desirable and constructed the community as a divinely ordained educational project. In Chapter 5B, I examined how these personal narratives crystallised into educational intentions through early community publications, revealing distinctive conceptions of educators, learners and content. (Sec 5.14) Chapter 6 furthered the discussion through the accounts and interpretations of contemporary members regarding their motivations and educational dimensions of the community, revealing both evolution and continuities in the formalisation of community living as a pedagogical method. (Sec 6.9)

This chapter synthesises historical and contemporary findings to address RQ 3, which asks for the theoretical insights that can be derived from this case study. Using the Integrated Social Movement Learning and Education (I-SMLE), I develop three interconnected contributions.

Sec 7.2 articulates a theory of education that emerges from Chapters 5 and 6 and pulls together the language, ontological and epistemological foundations, and assumptions about human nature and educational goals, based on the criteria set by Scott and Bhaskar (2015) in Section 3.5.1. I discuss how field construction and social movement mechanisms shape what appears as “educational choices”. Section 7.3 extracts broader theoretical insights from the case study organised by the analytical lenses. Under field theory, I examine knowledge transformation and ongoing field reconstruction, and in SML, I discuss prefigurative experimentation and challenges of replication, and in Education theory, I discuss distributed authority, participatory learning and epistemological pluralism. Section 7.4 synthesises these insights into the I-SMLE Nested Contexts model, showing how



seekership, individual learning, pedagogical structures, collective practices and field boundaries operate in an integrated way. Further details in Appendix 3: bridging table

### **Interpretive Position and Methodological Transparency**

This analysis does not claim to reveal Findhorn's "true" educational nature; it represents my interpretation, constructed through particular theoretical and analytical choices that both illuminate certain dimensions while obscuring others. A researcher employing different frameworks, such as organisational development, religious studies, or environmental ethics, might arrive at a different synthesis even with identical data, aligning with critical realism (Bhaskar, 1975), where social phenomena exist independently of our knowledge of them, but our access to them is mediated by theory.

The model, paradoxes and critical insights presented here are interpretive readings and not definitive truths, inviting readers to dialogue, contest and refine through their own analytical frames. Multiple valid readings can co-exist because intentional communities are complex phenomena, and such engagement would advance understanding rather than invalidate this presentation.

## **7.2 Theory of Education -Findhorn Foundation**

Educational theory facilitates sensemaking and creates a common language for dialogue among practitioners and policymakers (Siegel & Daumiller, 2021). To assess Findhorn's educational significance, I examined whether a coherent theory of education could be identified in the community's published works and members' narratives. Using the collective positioning of the community as a social field, a social movement, and an educational space, I discuss how its educational theory emerges through field-construction mechanisms (Bourdieu), functions as movement mobilisation (Benford & Snow; Melucci), and structures pedagogy. Further, could the theory of education also reveal potential utopian dimensions of both critique of

the present and imaginative capacity for the future because of its explicit utopian character.

### 7.2.1 What Field and Social Movement Analysis collectively reveal for Understanding Findhorn's Educational Theory

While Scott and Bhaskar's (2015) framework helps identify the components of an educational theory, it might not fully explain how these components emerged within the Findhorn Foundation from lived community experience, or why these particular aspects are important in the first place. Field Theory and social movement positioning thus help understand how the intentional community chooses particular language, beliefs, and processes to activate its educational process.

Chapter 5 discussed Findhorn's educational vision and community-specific practices, which did not emerge solely from intentional pedagogical design but from dialectical field construction involving the following mechanisms, summarised below. (Section 5.5 and 5.12) Chapter 6 demonstrated how individual members align with and are motivated by the frames set by the founders at the outset and by the community in continuation, and how educational processes enable the field's continuity. Before examining the specific components of Findhorn's educational theory, I briefly recap the seven dialectical mechanisms that suggest how field construction and educational development have been interpreted.

1. **Narratives shaped structures:** The founders' framing of their experiences as spiritual quests established what would be valuable (spiritual capital), who would be authoritative (those with demonstrated spiritual capacities) and what rules would govern (core practices). Without an understanding of field analysis, they appear as pedagogical choices, but using field understanding, they also emerge as strategic constructions that determine capital distribution and legitimacy.
2. **Structures shape practices:** Once established, field structures determined who taught whom, how decisions were made and what behaviours counted as appropriate. Members enacted structures without constantly referring to founder

narratives, due to a well-defined doxa and habitus-generated actions. This explains why the educational theory emphasises embodiment and implicit learning as the field itself operates through tacit reproduction rather than explicit instruction.

3. **Practices reproduced /transformed structures:** Daily practices both maintained existing patterns (members embodying expected habitus) and created transformation possibilities(the 1971 guidance shift from founder-dependent to distributed authority). This dialectical process reveals the theory’s emphasis on “learning by living”, leading to practices that are both pedagogical and field-maintenance mechanisms.

4. **Collective Intention Cultivation:** Field Doxa (divine guidance, interconnected reality, nature spirits) translates to collective intentions where members have some overt joint commitment. Publications and other community knowledge convert and coordinate educational relationships. This explains why education orients towards “planetary evolution” and how individuals learning and living there serve movement goals.

5. **Pedagogical systematisation:** Implicit practices were slowly codified through Experience Week, conferences, workshops, newsletters, and explicit educational philosophy emerges, which articulates the roles of educators, members as learners and methods and processes. Knowledge artefacts, including visitor programs, function both as internal pedagogical tools and external movement identity (demonstrating viability and attracting aligned seekers)

6. **Member alignment and mobilisation:** The pedagogical systematisation, field framing and community artefacts serve as mechanisms for member attraction and alignment of like-minded individuals. Through the Experience Week, visitor programs and workshops, field doxa and practices are introduced. If members commit to longer durations, daily practices, work structures, and community environment, these help embed commitment and enable members to accumulate community-specific capital (vocabulary mastery, mentorship relationships, spiritual progress). This alignment process develops *illusio*, in which members believe that

planetary goals justify their participation and that community challenges are worth pursuing. Assessment through self-evaluation probably works because education here assumes alignment with the field's ideology.

7. **Ongoing Field Sustaining through Education:** Beyond initial mobilisation, educational processes help sustain the field through continuous reproduction mechanisms. Habitus formation occurs through daily ritualised practices, implicit curriculum transmits worldviews, peer mentoring perpetuates hierarchies based on tenure and accumulated field-specific (spiritual) capital, and specialised vocabulary maintains insider/outsider boundaries. The theory's emphasis on 'living education' helps the field to persist whilst also reproducing power inequalities.

The above seven processes become more concrete when examined in terms of the specific components of Findhorn's educational theory. In the following sections, I discuss language, ontological and epistemological assumptions, assumptions about human nature, educational goals, and, finally, coherence and prescriptive power.

### *7.2.1 A Language as Field Construction*

Findhorn's specialised vocabulary emerged as field establishment was codified. Founders' personal practices became generalised linguistic capital transmissible beyond the founders. The language serves dual functions: internally, it coordinates members' actions and understanding, and externally, it signals a specific field identity. Core terms include Inner listening (Sec 5.11, Sec 6.4.1), co-creation with nature (Sec 5.13, Sec 6.4.3), work as love in action (Sec 5.7), focalisation (Sec 6.5), attunement (Sec 5.4.1), amongst others. The vocabulary is semantically flexible, allowing both inclusivity (multiple interpretations) and exclusivity (requiring cultural capital for participation).

Thus, language arises from field construction, and concepts evolve through the dialectics of practice-narrative-structures rather than through definitional clarity preceding implementation. Specialised vocabulary also functions pedagogically by shaping what and how members learn, epistemologically by legitimising particular forms of knowledge, and sociologically by defining boundaries and field roles. **Thus,**

**educational theories of intentional communities may require attending to language as a part of a field-constructing mechanism and as a direct pedagogical force, simultaneously teaching content (what to value), process (how to know) and identity (who belongs).** Standard approaches to educational aims, methods, and learning outcomes would miss how specialised terminology shapes the educational field, determining who can participate, what knowledge counts, and how legitimacy is established. This specialised language is not unique to Findhorn, and it is a structural feature of bounded social fields where distinctive vocabularies emerge to coordinate action and establish boundaries (Bourdieu,1977). An example is how Auroville uses specialised vocabulary that emerges from Sri Aurobindo's writings, such as Integral Yoga and supramental consciousness, while Twin Oaks uses terms like labour credits and hammock quota, which reframes work and rest within a community context. Thus, each IC uses specific language through which it both constitutes the field and forms and educates its members.

The community's vocabulary also performs a utopian function of verbalising possibilities with terms like attunement, co-creation, making a relationship with knowledge, nature and community thinkable and possible.

#### *7.2.1 B Ontological Foundations: The nature of reality*

The educational theory is grounded in several ontological assumptions about the nature of reality as discussed in Section 5.7. These ontological assumptions (Divine Accessibility, Interconnected Unity and Manifestation of spiritual principles) form the basis of the core principles and the field, as well as the language and spoken narratives of members. They also function pedagogically, meaning they describe reality in ways that structure learning, what counts as knowing, and what purpose education should serve for the community, for instance, legitimising subjective spiritual experiences, and their educational content includes developing capacities for spiritual perception, which is positioned as a skill. The diagnosis (reality is fundamentally connected but not perceived), prognosis (develop spiritual

perception through community), and motivation (serve evolutionary purposes) from a master frame that justifies both individual transformation and collective action.

However, ontological assumptions can also function as a hidden curriculum (Giroux & Penna, 1979), further discussed in Sec 7.4.3, structuring learning and daily life. The assumption that divine access is possible and can be known through multiple ways seems progressive and inclusive, but it also serves as a fundamental conformity that may determine the comfort and belonging members feel within the community. There is a possibility that learners, uncomfortable with the above ontological premise, might either find little value in participation or face marginalisation. Also, although there is an emphasis on experiential discovery over transmission, the somewhat non-negotiable ontological frame could limit what can be genuinely discovered. Whether members who hold other ontological beliefs find space and belonging remains a question for future research. This also reveals blurred boundaries between education and spiritual formation. Biesta (2012) argues that education must aim for subjectification, enabling individuals to become subjects in their own right who can exercise critical judgement. However, the relationship between cultivating specific beliefs and dispositions (characteristic of formation) and enabling independent critical thought (characteristic of subjectification) is ambiguous. Formation processes can themselves be subjectifying when they develop capacities for critical engagement rather than mere compliance (Biesta, 2020). At Findhorn, the emphasis on inner listening and direct experience potentially enables individual agency and judgement, yet this occurs within a field where certain ontological premises structure what counts as valid experience in the first place. Whether such practices enable genuine subjectification or primarily reproduce community worldviews is a matter of interpretation by the members.

**Thus, educational theories of intentional communities may need to examine ontological assumptions as potentially invisible governance structures that naturalise authority, validate knowledge claims and reproduce community boundaries while appearing as neutral descriptions of reality.** Although such invisible governance occurs throughout educational systems and society (Bourdieu

& Passeron, 1977), the explicit ontological commitments don't merely frame educational activities, but also structure work, relationships, and the ways members are subconsciously enacting and embodying these assumptions, revealing how ontological commitments gain their pedagogical force through this total immersion. The assumptions and assertions of the above claims could also be understood as utopian possibilities expanding the members' sense of what is possible, as well as cultivating an orientation for that specific future.

### *7.2.1 C Epistemological Stance: How knowledge is generated and validated*

The Findhorn Foundation's approach to knowledge integrates multiple epistemological traditions to address what the founders and now members perceive as limitations in purely rationalist assumptions about authority, validation, and transmission.

**Revelatory Epistemology:** Findhorn positions knowledge as emerging through direct spiritual communication with divine sources, the intelligence of nature, and inner wisdom. This approach validates subjective spiritual experience as a legitimate source of knowledge alongside other sources. The emphasis on direct experience acknowledges the dimensions of human experience that are often excluded from formal education, such as intuitive knowing, embodied wisdom or contemplative insight. To develop these capacities, members engage in practices like inner listening and attunement.

However, this epistemological approach presents some challenges. Without established verification mechanisms, distinguishing genuine insight from psychological projection or confirmation bias may be difficult. The reliance on internal validation and community verification rather than externally verifiable criteria risks collective self-reinforcement rather than critical knowledge generation. Whether this constitutes a pedagogical strength (enabling forms of knowledge that resist conventional validation) or weakness (lacking error-correction mechanisms) remains contested.

**Experiential Epistemology:** Findhorn grounds knowledge in embodied engagement that is learning through doing, living and direct practice. This aligns with experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), and its emphasis on practical application may address critiques of an overly abstract academic education disconnected from lived experiences. **The community emphasises integration across three dimensions: propositional knowledge (what one knows), practical skills (what one can do), and identity formation (who one is becoming).** However, this approach generates knowledge that is often tacit, context-dependent, and difficult to articulate or transmit to those who do not share or are not open to similar commitments. Without external validation mechanisms, experiential knowledge relies heavily on members' subjective interpretations and may remain valid primarily within the community and allied fields.

**Collective Epistemology:** The assertion that communities can generate distinctive knowledge through collective practices, such as group *attunement*, consensus-based decision-making, and shared work experiences, addresses individualistic biases and offers alternatives to expert-dominated educational models, potentially democratising knowledge construction. This approach values emergence and dialogue over expert transmission. It aligns with some aspects of social constructivist theories (Vygotsky, 1978) and communities of practice (Wegner, 1998), but it also risks mystifying group processes if there are no mechanisms to distinguish collective wisdom from groupthink.

**Epistemological pluralism in Findhorn appears to function as both a pedagogical openness and a field-positioning strategy. It validates tacit context-dependent knowledge within the community and allied fields, whilst simultaneously limiting its broader recognition.** Also, when intentional communities use collective agreement as both a method and a criterion for evaluating knowledge, this may risk making power relations invisible.



### *7.2.1 D Human Nature and Educational Capacity*

Findhorn data show the following assumptions about the learner (Sec. 5.12 and Sec. 6.2): learners have inherent spiritual capacity, relational development (flourishing requires a community context), and diverse gifts (unique talents that contribute to collective welfare). Although what appears as innate spiritual capacity could also be seen as class and social privilege. The community, as context, also serves as a retention mechanism, making it an irreplaceable condition for growth. Although inherent spiritual capacity seems democratic, it reflects an internal deficit in unawakened capacity and may lead learners to internalise self-inadequacy if they struggle with the community and its practices and may even lead them to exit the community. **Thus, assumptions about human nature here may serve as active sorting mechanisms. They position the community for specific learners (introspective, spiritually oriented-Sec 5.12), sustain movement participation illuso(Sec 6.2), and structure pedagogy by defining what members should become. (Sec 7.6)**

### *7.2.1 E Educational Goals and Values: Towards wholeness and Service*

The educational process aims towards several interconnected goals described in Section 5.10: spiritual realisations, unity in community living, universal love and service, ecological consciousness, and inner peace and stability. Members are expected to both learn and demonstrate these qualities. These goals integrate spiritual, social and ecological dimensions towards service rather than personal achievement alone. The goals in intentional communities are thus not merely aspirational but strategic as they define what counts as valuable within the community. However, unlike traditional educational programs or professional training with set exit paths, these goals have no endpoints. They cannot be fully mastered; they can only be engaged with more depth.

This creates paradoxes. When education becomes co-extensive with life itself, members may not be able to compartmentalise learning into designated time or spaces, and daily life becomes curriculum continuously available for reflection,

evaluation and growth. This open-endedness transforms education from a time-bound endeavour to a lifelong project, potentially sustaining member commitment as members engage because the work is never complete. However, goals that resist definitive achievement can create a perpetual gap between aspiration and accomplishment, which may at some point become sources of frustration or fatigue, increasing vulnerability to disillusionment or exit. Whether this represents a strength (sustaining engagement and individual development) or a weakness (exhausting perpetual striving) likely varies across individual members and their life circumstances.

### *7.2.1 F Systemic Coherence and Prescriptive Power*

The above commitments form a mutually reinforcing system that generates both internal coherence and prescriptive power. Once members accept a single element (for instance, that spiritual dimensions are accessible), logical consistency compels acceptance of others (develop the capacity to access, pursue inner listening, participate in collective practices). Thus, the framework's internal consistency makes choices appear necessary rather than optional. However, this same comprehensiveness may also be a risk, as questioning one element could threaten the interconnected threads as a whole. **This systematic coherence could function as integrated cultural capital, signalling internal consistency and sophistication by demonstrating a total system that addresses all dimensions as an achievement, both conceptually and physically, within a community.** Together these goals seem to prescribe total lifestyle with how to spend time (contemplation, community engagement) how to relate (consensus, service orientation) how to feel (peaceful and equanimous), what to value (collective welfare) and who to become (spiritually realised, ecologically conscious) creating what Goffman (2017) termed total institution dynamics where all dimensions of life are organised to serve institutional purposes.

The above section reveals that educational theory in intentional communities operates through mechanisms beyond an educational analysis. What appear as

pedagogical criteria of language, assumptions and goals function as governance, social movement coherence and field sustainability. The framework thus derives power from this integrated positioning, in which elements are connected, thereby validating and self-reinforcing systems.

### 7.3 Theoretical Insights from the Findhorn Case Study.

The I-SMLE framework and the above theory of education interpret how educational processes in intentional communities can be better understood through a multi-theoretical lens. The integrated model first understands ICs as fields which are actively constructed through strategic framing, implicit boundaries and capital requirements. Based on the above, the following section discusses insights for Field Theory, Social Movement Learning and Education.

#### 7.3.1 Field Construction - From Charismatic Authority to Distributed Legitimacy

The founders' narratives can be interpreted as establishing Findhorn as a distinctive social field through strategic framing and alignment (Snow et al., 1986). They position the community as divinely ordained, themselves as spiritually authoritative channels, and learners as pioneers serving evolutionary purposes, setting the boundaries and the insiders/outside of the field and the rules of the game through symbolic capital for the community and its members. While Bourdieu's field theory demonstrates how fields shape education, Findhorn also shows how education not only shapes fields but that field sustainability depends not on preserving founding structures but on transmitting the capacity for field reconstruction. **The Findhorn case suggests ongoing educational dynamics in which field structures shape learning, while educational practices simultaneously reconstruct and sustain the field. This occurs through knowledge transformation and ongoing field reconstruction.** Whether and how these dynamics operate in intentional communities more broadly, across different ideological contexts, organisational

forms, and membership structures, remains an empirical question beyond the scope of this study.

### *Knowledge Transformation*

The founders' personal practices were codified as teachable by being set as core principles (Sec. 5.7.1). This transformation created new forms of knowledge that resembled the original but also fundamentally differed from it. Guidance was no longer dependent on charismatic individuals but embedded in community practices. Weber's (1947) "routinization of charisma" partially explains why charismatic authority must be converted into traditional or rational-legal structures for organisational continuity. Further, Bourdieu's (1986) concept of founders' symbolic capital (embodied, person-specific) was converted into cultural capital for the community (Texts, methods, communal practices), thereby strengthening the field.

**The Findhorn case suggests that sustainability in founder-led communities may depend on adaptation that maintains generative principles while allowing flexibility rather than rigid preservation.** Similar dynamics may occur in broader educational contexts, such as artistic traditions, craft apprenticeships, or even religious communities. The process of knowledge transformation could also be understood through Harvey's (2000) process utopia, where ongoing adaptation was used to attempt the aspirations of inner listening or community living, with not a fixed destination but a guiding direction.

### *Ongoing Field Reconstruction*

At Findhorn, each generation actively reconstructs the educative field rather than simply inheriting established structures. Members learn not only community living skills but also how to sustain the community as an educational space itself. Chapter 5 presented how founding narratives were translated into field structures and pedagogical systems, and Chapter 6 reveals further retranslation as conditions change. Each wave of new members encounters foundational texts through different historical, social, and political contexts, bringing diverse cultural backgrounds and facing different challenges. The reasons for FFA (religious

disillusionment) and FFE (ecological curiosity) for interest in the community stem from very different roots. Rather than passively receiving transmitted knowledge, members actively reinterpret founding principles to address contemporary conditions. This translation process operates dialectically, in which field structures shape members' narratives, while members strategically select, emphasise, or contest structural elements to shape the field. This parallels Giddens' (1984) structuration theory (Chapter 2, Tension 1), which states that structures are both the medium and the outcome of social practices. Consider 'inner listening' as an illustration. Originally, Eileen received guidance through her specific practices. Over time, members democratised this meaning; anyone could practise inner listening and, through various methods (meditation, nature walks, sacred dance), be recognised as equally valid. The practice was simultaneously preserved (inner listening stays central) and transformed (multiple accessible approaches). Had the practice remained rigidly tied to Eileen's method, newer members might have found it inaccessible or alienating, and had it been completely abandoned, a core principle binding the community would have dissolved.

**This Findhorn pattern suggests, though does not prove, that educational sustainability in intentional communities may require transmitting the capacity for ongoing field reconstruction itself, not just specific practices.** Previous scholarship emphasises economic viability (Sargent, 1994), conflict resolution (Zablocki, 1980) or ideological coherence (Kanter, 1972). Educational dynamics deserve similar attention, as communities may face challenges when they either rigidly preserve founding narratives (creating disconnection) or completely abandon them (losing collective identity). **The Findhorn case suggests navigating a middle path which maintains continuity while enabling reinterpretation. The relevance across diverse intentional community contexts requires further research.**

Knowledge transformation and ongoing field reconstruction reveal how Findhorn's educational processes sustain the field itself. Where field theory illuminates structural dynamics, social movement learning theory explains how communities mobilise knowledge and demonstrate alternatives.

### 7.3.2 Social Movement Learning: From Founder Dependent to Collective Prefigurative Experimentation

Social Movement Learning theory examines how movements generate, transmit, and validate knowledge for both the development of participants and the demonstration of social change (Hall & Clover, 2005; Holst, 2002). Where field theory illuminates the formation of the Findhorn Foundation as a field, SML and an understanding of collective learning (Kilgore, 1999) help us understand the dynamic processes through which communities create and mobilise knowledge, and how learners become prefigurative actors and knowledge producers. Social movement learning scholarship emphasises educational practices that reveal oppressive structures and mobilise collective action (Foley, 1999; Hall & Clover, 2005). However, prefigurative intentional movements require participants to go beyond critiquing existing systems to teaching participants to inhabit alternatives and provide learning that occurs through the embodied practice of creating and sustaining alternative social relations in the present. **Intentional communities, thus extending Crossley's (1999) 'working utopia' analogy, can be said to function as sustained pedagogical sites where activists develop capabilities for prefigurative practice through extended immersion and the formation of changed habitus.** They offer sustained duration, enabling learning processes through extended practice within an intentional environment and navigating varying conditions (conflict, governance, mismanagement, personal changes), leading to more permanent doxic beliefs and commitment to the community.

Intentional Communities also offer a holistic approach to activism, rather than single-issue activism. Living in the community is about simultaneously focusing on spiritual development, ecological sustainability, and community living, both conceptually and in practice, affecting daily rituals such as food, energy systems, parenting, economic life management, and self-expression. Thus, every aspect of daily life becomes a learning opportunity in which abstract principles encounter constraints, generating friction between ideals and reality and necessitating

adaptation. **Collectively, this testing generates knowledge for the movement from grounded experiences of success and failure and enables intentional communities to serve as laboratories for prefigurative practice.** However, the challenges of such prefigurative approaches, as identified by della Porta (2020) and Yates (2015), lie in creating isolated enclaves rather than promoting broader transformation or generating sophisticated internal knowledge, but failing to address existing social challenges. The geographical isolation of Findhorn, as well as the capital requirements of access for either workshops or visits, could be seen as barriers, thus limiting who can access the community and for how long they can benefit from prefigurative living rather than just tokenistic participation. The analysis shows that the knowledge generated in the form of texts, newsletters, books, and workshops, however, is codified, where readers, visitors, and observers may acquire conceptual knowledge but not dispositions, and may understand principles rather than practised capabilities. Thus, **the replicability of the field could be said to fail not due to a lack of knowledge but to a lack of supporting environment, like-minded members, and ongoing field construction and navigation. This tentatively suggests that creating alternative spaces may require more than just adopting existing models.** Communities might need to consider strategic field construction, member alignment, and pedagogical structures that can adapt to their particular membership and circumstances.

Thus, ICs are valuable pedagogical resources for activists to engage with through membership, workshops, and exchanges, but they are not blueprints for replication and require context-specific translation. Prefigurative living, until it becomes embedded as habitus, needs sustained engagement and economic, social, and cultural capital.

### 7.3.3 Insights for Education: Distributed Authority and Pluralism

#### *Towards Participatory Learning Processes*

Chapters 5 and 6 suggest that Findhorn operates through what Ferrer (2001,2011) terms “participatory epistemology”, in which knowledge co-emerges through

engagement rather than existing for discovery and “from co-creative participation in a dynamic and undetermined mystery or generative power of life, the cosmos, and/or the spirit” (2011, p.1). This overlap between spiritual practice and educational method (members learning through practices like inner listening and attunement that position them as co-creators of knowledge) risks conceptual confusion between what constitutes knowledge, belief, and insight, and what constitutes projection. When members report guidance that aligns with community values, it could indicate genuine spiritual communication, unconscious internalisation of community expectations, or even a projection of desired outcomes, thereby constantly leaving open issues of validation. Whether this constitutes metaphysical truth or a pragmatic organising framework remains contested, yet it offers pedagogical insights.

The community’s approach evidences a ***participatory model, where learners are co-creators of knowledge and multiple perspectives are valued as legitimate sources of insight***. Formal and institutional education falls back to pressures for standardisation, assessment, and measurement of learning (Biesta, 2008), leading to a focus on cognitively oriented models. These models emphasise the development of the mind and intellectual capacity, with a focus on rationale, logic, and the synthesis of knowledge (Ferrer et al., 2005). Contrarily, Findhorn's methods, such as participation, reflection, and community participation, are put forth without concrete expected outcomes, suggest a more somatic, emotional, or creative pathway and exemplify what Ferrer calls the “collaborative participation of all human attributes” (2011, p. 11). This aligns with Heron & Reason's (2008; 1997) conception of experiential knowing, described as knowing “by being present with, by direct face-to-face encounter with, person, place or thing. It is knowing through the immediacy of perceiving, through empathy and resonance. Its product is the quality of the relationship in which it participates, including the quality of being of those in the relationship” (1997, p.280-281). Experiential learning is not without criticism, as Byrne (2016) notes that experience-based knowledge claims confront fundamental questions of whether experience generates belief, or whether prior



beliefs shape experience, or whether beliefs cause particular experiences to occur. However, **validation in such contexts may serve a function different from epistemological verification.** Pires (2008) argues that validation in experiential learning aims to make “implicit knowledge explicit and visible mediated by language” (p. 11), operating as a reflective process that reinforces identity and autonomy rather than establishing truth claims. The effectiveness of such validation lies in its capacity to enable future learning and strengthen self-understanding, and not in meeting external verification standards. However, this closed loop, in which learning validation emerges from community values, risks epistemic closure (Sanchez, 2010), meaning that what counts as successful learning is determined by the same community rather than by external validation criteria, potentially limiting critical evaluation. Without external or explicit standards, accumulated community capital and members' social positions may determine whose experiential knowledge gains validation. Further research on the knowledge gained and skills developed might help identify the effectiveness of this approach.

**The effectiveness of participatory learning is independent of epistemological validity, which may transform individuals without resolving validation questions. However, not having a system to validate knowledge claims creates risks and dependence on implicit capital and power structures, with the field determining which insights are recognised based on accumulated social and cultural capital. Thus, participatory approaches may not automatically produce equity but require ongoing reflexive negotiation.** These equity concerns are compounded when participatory learning operates within a broader framework of epistemological pluralism, in which multiple, potentially conflicting sources of knowledge claim legitimacy.

### *Epistemological Humility -Navigating Epistemological Pluralism*

The founders' original emphasis on intuitive knowing, *inner listening*, or co-creation with nature also establishes what appears to be a multi-source epistemology that challenges conventional distinctions between subjective experience and objective

knowledge. However, if knowledge can emerge through divine guidance, embodied experience, community wisdom and rational analysis, then how are the conflicting knowledge claims justified? Further, if we consider that authority and expertise can be distributed rather than concentrated in experts, and learning emerges through collaborative enquiry rather than through information transfer, this approach also raises questions about epistemic authority and epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007). Drawing on Santos's concept of "ecologies of knowledge" (Santos, 2007; Andreotti et al., 2011) and Findhorn's epistemological approach suggests both possibilities and challenges for educational adaptation.

Findhorn's experiences suggest that epistemological pluralism in education requires more than simply adding alternative content to existing curricula. The community's evolution from founder-dependent to distributed practices illustrates how power dynamics can persist beneath the surface through informal hierarchies, perceived spiritual reputations, or other forms of symbolic capital. This also reflects how educational institutions may perpetuate knowledge hierarchies, even when attempting to be inclusive (Santos, 2007). Thus, epistemological pluralism may require "epistemological humility" that recognises that no single knowledge system can address all educational needs or questions. Epistemological humility recognises that multiple heterogeneous forms of knowledge exist across cultures, all knowledge systems are incomplete, and one can acknowledge that conventional academic understanding, experiential learning, contemplative practices, and community-based wisdom each offer valuable yet partial perspectives on learning and education. From this perspective, **the challenge lies not in choosing between these approaches, but in creating educational environments that can hold multiple ways of knowing in productive tension while maintaining the critical thinking skills necessary to distinguish between transformative insights and wishful thinking** (Andreotti et al., 2011).

The adoption of epistemological pluralism presents challenges of translation and validation. The assumption at Findhorn is that members are primarily self-led and active explorers, which may work well for some intentional communities; however,

in many formal educational institutions that serve diverse populations, this approach can be perceived as exclusionary and unappealing. The epistemological dominance of specific systems as universal and superior creates significant barriers to considering alternative ways of knowing. Often, as Santos (2007) highlights, indigenous knowledge is dismissed if it is too different or too similar. The practices, vocabulary, and rituals that seem entirely at home at Findhorn may elicit jarring responses if attempted to be replicated within educational structures. Thus, aiming for epistemic inclusion may not be enough; it also requires re-examining structures, assessments, and quality validation. For example, how could you standardise a process of assessing learning that emerged through embodied experience without losing its essence? **Thus, genuine epistemological pluralism demands structural redesign and constant critical vigilance against both epistemic violence (the dismissal of alternative knowledge) and appropriation (extracting practices without honouring their origins), while recognising that power dynamics do reassert themselves through new mechanisms.**

#### 7.3.4 Synthesis

The above insights across field theory, social movement scholarship and educational theory converge on a finding that **educational theory in intentional communities operates through triple functionality, positioning fields, mobilising movements and structuring pedagogy through unified mechanisms.** However, presenting these insights abstractly obscures how they actually operate in integrated practice. When a Findhorn member, for instance, practices “attunement” before shared work, they are simultaneously enacting ontological assumptions (divine accessibility), employing epistemological methods (collective knowing), performing movement identity (demonstrating prefigurative alternatives), and navigating field constraints (the required cultural capital for participation). The theoretical insights above describe discrete mechanisms, but members experience them as an integrated whole. The following section develops a synthetic framework, the I-SMLE Nested Contexts model, that demonstrates how the theoretical dynamics identified above operate concurrently across multiple scales in members' lived experience. This

framework serves as both validation (showing these mechanisms actually function) of theoretical claims and extension (revealing dynamics visible through integrated analysis)

## 7.4 The I-SMLE Framework -Nested Contexts: An Integrated Model

As mentioned above, members navigate their lived dynamics within ICs as an integrated whole. The I-SMLE Nested Contexts synthesises theoretical insights into an operational model that shows how they may function concurrently in practice, while acknowledging that this is a heuristic representation and not an empirical generalisation. The I-SMLE integration reveals Findhorn's educational dynamics operating across three nested scales, moving from personal/inner to interpersonal/educational to collective/social, with seekership/intentionality providing internal drive and field boundaries at the periphery, constraining. Apart from validating and interpreting Findhorn's I-SMLE configuration, it illustrates how

the analytical dimensions can be simultaneously engaged. (Fig. 21)

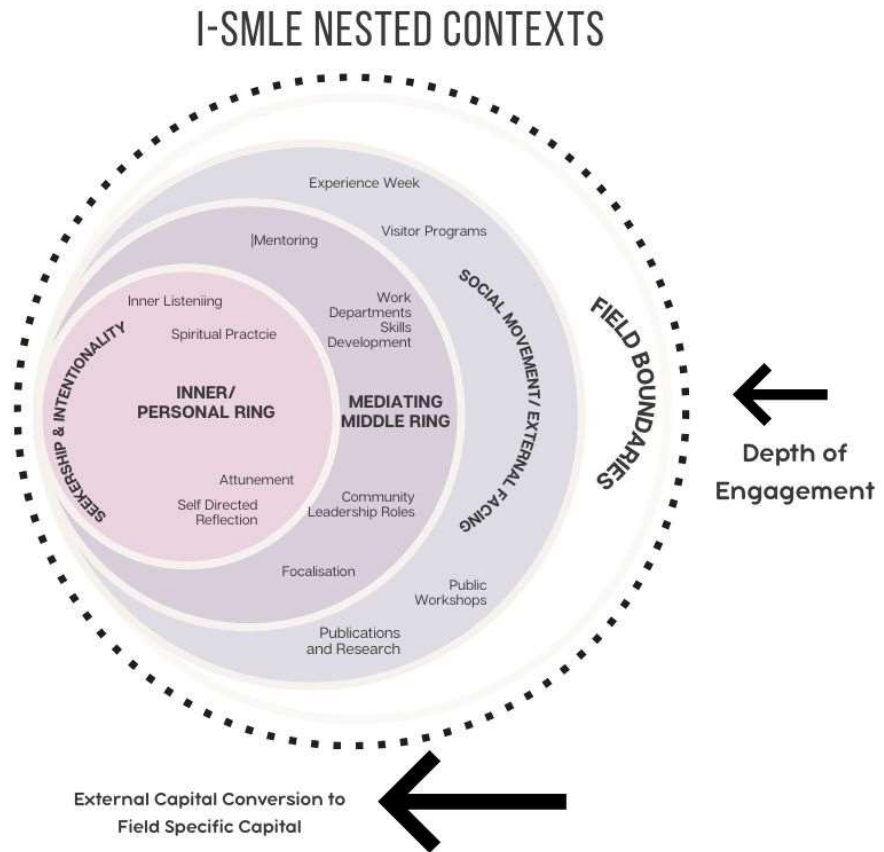


Figure 21: I-SMLE Nested Contexts (Author Generated)

#### 7.4.1 Seekership and Individual Intentionality- The Integrating Central Core

At the model's centre, seekership and members' intent serve as the organising drive, with members arriving with either "pre-existing needs or deep inner longing" (Chapter 6). This internal commitment determines the length and depth of engagement. Seekership activates social movement participation as members join because they are seeking alternatives, direct learning engagement as they use their internal authority to determine learning paths and also who and what resources they will utilise and it is also used to navigate field boundaries and determine whether to buy into the *illusio* of the field and strategise by building field-specific

capital. Although this interpretive work continues throughout membership, it may become less visible as trust, routines and social bonds may make ongoing evaluation feel unnecessary.

Thus, seekership can be understood as the catalyst and fuel that determines members' paths and trajectories within the community, and whether they exit, engage, or commit to it. Thus, ICs don't just create dispositions but also select for them, making structural barriers appear as developmental readiness. Seekership serves as the central force that transforms everything outward into resources that serve the learner. Thus, individual autonomy can sustain collective coherence as everyone shares a seeking orientation within the same field, even if specific beliefs diverge. Doctrinal pluralism can coexist within the community identity as members relate through shared practices rather than agreement about ultimate reality, making seekership a procedural glue. Seekership, however, is not a stable life position and can fluctuate, which may explain why some members leave after a while, some come back, and some settle into a community rhythm without necessarily being very active seekers, but for other social and personal reasons.

#### 7.4.2 Individual Learning as the Inner /Personal Dimension: Practices and Spiritual Development

The inner dimension emphasises the learning aspect of I-SMLE, encompassing personal practices that enable direct experiential transformation (for Findhorn - *inner listening*, divine guidance, and embodied knowing, *attunement*, and discernment). This ring foregrounds individual learning as the primary I-SMLE dimension while educational, social movement, and field dimensions remain operative. Members learn to develop capacity and commitment to direct experiential knowing through sustained spiritual practice, substantial autonomy and self-direction, fluency in spiritual or community-specific vocabulary, and self-trust. Learning in this dimension could be understood as largely self-directed and interpretive of all experiences and their meanings for one's own life. Educational relationships here position sources like nature and spirit as primary authorities,

bodily wisdom and nature intelligence, but this pedagogical innovation itself constitutes an educational organisation of relations. The educational structures operate implicitly through community design and rituals rather than instruction. This dimension also bases personal realisations as a demonstration of alternatives or prefigurative praxis, spiritual practices constitute core curriculum content, and spiritual capital operates as currency. Personal practice also contributes to the movement's wisdom and feeds back into the collective through sharing, workshops, publications, and other media.

#### 7.4.3 Educational Interactions as Middle Dimension: Pedagogical Structures

The middle dimension foregrounds the explicit educational organisation of I-SMLE, encompassing mentoring relationships, focalisation roles, progressive skills development, ecological literacy and community leadership. This ring corresponds to the more traditional pedagogical relationships, where experienced members serve as resources rather than authorities, with temporary, expertise-based roles emerging from the context rather than formal positions. The middle ring requires sustained participation, commitment, and a willingness to take on responsibilities, as well as the relational capacity to engage with the community and its functioning.

Members develop individual competencies and learn through action and demonstration, building both practical and relational skills. This ring integrates with social movements through visible skill development, such as work departments, focusing workshops, and visitor programs, which contribute to movement building, its sustainability, and the generation and transfer of movement knowledge beyond its boundaries. For example, a permaculture workshop may demonstrate to visitors what Findhorn members mean and do for ecology. Thus, pedagogical structures provide relational contexts for self-development, and the cultural capital of tenure converts to the symbolic capital of influence and recognition.

#### 7.4.4 Social Movement Dimension as Outer Ring: Community / Collective Practices

The outer ring emphasises the social movement dimension of the I-SMLE, encompassing multiple entry points, such as Experience Week, public workshops, work department vacancies, visitor programs, or short-term exposure. This ring aligns with social movement learning theory's focus on cognitive praxis, articulating movement principles, collective identity formation, and the communication and demonstration of alternatives through lived practice or prefigurative politics. All interviewed members entered through this ring, typically via the experience week. The outer ring serves as the movement's public face, attracting diverse participants through accessible framing that emphasises ecological sustainability, community living, or spiritual exploration. Collective practices in this ring generate social movement learning outcomes and demonstrate community identity through shared experiences and curated offerings. This ring also integrates with other dimensions, as collective practices provide initial exposure to the possibilities of learning, and structured programs systematically introduce educational content and methods, reflecting pedagogical intentionality and designed learning. The facilitators provide support and structure for modelling community rituals, practices and behaviours, enabling participants to experience and experiment safely. The requirement for field-specific capital, such as openness to spiritual terms, awareness of the Findhorn Foundation and its workshops, and the ability to afford them, influences visitors. At the same time, existing members who can facilitate these workshops are also selected based on their training and accumulated reputational capital within the community, which could constitute an invisible hierarchy.

#### 7.4.5 Field Dynamics to Set Field Boundaries: Capital, Habitus and Illusio

The outermost boundary represents field dynamics and operates through markers and implicit requirements determining who can access and sustain participation. This boundary affects all the dimensions and influences the entire intentional



community. Capital requirements affect participation in the field (Economic, cultural, social and temporal capital). Most importantly, it may require psychological capital, including self-direction without external validation, tolerance for ambiguity, and resilience to navigate community dynamics. The *habitus*, or embodied dispositions and practices, maintains field coherence through speech patterns, such as using words like “guidance,” “holding space,” “let us attune to,” or even through physical comportment, like sitting in circles, closing eyes, or using specific metaphors like light and energy. Further, emotional vulnerability and spiritual language, such as conflicts and temporal rhythms like attunement pauses, sacred dance, and seasonal celebrations, all contribute to the building of the *habitus* through members' engagement. The *habitus* transmission could also be understood as the hidden curriculum alongside explicit content, acquired only over time as one lives in the community.

*Illusio*, or the investment in the community and participation that sustains commitment despite challenges, was set by the founders and current members, with a focus on ecological appeal, communal connections, and the community's spiritual ethos. This *illusio* diversity enables field coherence despite ontological pluralism. Thus, field coherence sustains collective action towards movement goals, while capital requirements determine who can access the community and its environment. Nevertheless, aligning new and existing members with the well-established narrative and demonstrating its value among existing members becomes a tool for communicating it to newcomers and visitors.

Field boundaries are prevalent at every scale; economic precarity may undermine learning or capacity for engagement. In contrast, social and cultural capital may determine the depth and quality of engagement across the community and its functions. Members' and their commitment's intentions and field influences may shape individual trajectories differently. However, seekership may not be able to overcome all constraints, and structural barriers may undermine participation (as seen in the FFEs case, where economic precarity led to an exit decision).

### *Permeable Boundaries and Variable Trajectories*

Unlike hierarchical progression models requiring completion of prior stages (Maslow,1943) or communities of practice that assume movement from periphery to centre, the I-SMLE nested contexts show the multiple dimensions in which existing members operate simultaneously. To illustrate, FFA is personally practising at inner levels, functionally serving as a community leader in the community operations department, whilst also contributing to the outer ring as a workshop facilitator, showing an integration of social movement service, education facilitation, and self-learning as co-occurring.

Thus, these dimensions are inseparable: movement goals motivate seekership, seekership directs learning, learning occurs through educational structures, and these structures operate within field constraints, while field boundaries maintain the social movement and its coherence. Critically, members can sustain participation at any scale without this constituting failed commitment or incomplete development.

### *Illustration -Navigating Nested Contexts -Over Time*

A new visitor enters through a public program (outer ring) that requires minimal commitment (though they may have personal reasons) and will receive formalised support. If engagement deepens, they may take progressive steps, such as living in the community and experiencing it firsthand. If seekership further aligns, they may take on progressive responsibilities, develop relationships over time, and develop commitment to the community and its ways of working. Over time, they may develop spiritual practices that require sustained self-direction and go on to become workshop leaders or volunteers to guide new members. The same member may also be practising inner-focused practices during a specific part of the day, facilitating community work during the day, and leading workshops for visitors in the afternoon. Thus, all dimensions of experience operate concurrently rather than sequentially. This is elaborated in Table 8 on the next page.

| The I-SMLE Nested Contexts for Findhorn |                                                                             |                                                                                    |                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Seekership and Intentionality</b>    |                                                                             |                                                                                    | <b>Field Boundaries and Influence</b>                                       |
| <b>Dimension</b>                        | <b>Inner Context</b>                                                        | <b>Middle Context</b>                                                              | <b>Outer Context</b>                                                        |
| <b>I-SMLE Focus</b>                     | Individual Learning                                                         | Educational Organization                                                           | Social Movement Learning                                                    |
| <b>Primary Practices</b>                | Inner listening<br>Divine guidance<br>Embodied knowing<br>Nature attunement | Focalisation<br>Mentorship<br>Progressive responsibility<br>Leadership development | Experience Week<br>Public workshops<br>Visitor programs<br>Community events |
| <b>Primary Epistemology</b>             | Revelatory & Experiential                                                   | Relational                                                                         | Collective                                                                  |
| <b>Authority Source</b>                 | Internal<br>(divine, body, nature)                                          | Temporary task expertise                                                           | Collective practices                                                        |
| <b>Entry Requirements</b>               | Deep commitment,<br>Spiritual vocabulary,                                   | Sustained participation<br>Relational capacity<br>Community vocabulary             | Minimal commitment<br>Basic openness<br>Economic capacity                   |

|                                        |                                                       |                                                                         |                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                        | Self-trust despite uncertainty                        |                                                                         |                                                                                                      |
| <b>Support Provided</b>                | Minimal (self-directed)                               | Moderate (mentorship)                                                   | High (structured programs)                                                                           |
| <b>Capital Operating</b>               | Spiritual (perceived advancement, recognised insight) | Cultural (community knowledge, tenure) converts to Symbolic (influence) | Economic (program fees) + Social (peer validation)                                                   |
| <b>Educational Goal</b>                | Spiritual realisation & direct knowing                | Skill development & community capacity                                  | Movement identity & cognitive praxis                                                                 |
| <b>Validation Mechanism</b>            | Self-assessment + spiritual confirmation              | Peer recognition + functional competence                                | Social recognition + collective experience                                                           |
| <b>Example Member Activities</b>       | Meditation, Guidance seeking<br>Self-Formation        | Focalising Departments, Mentoring newcomers, leading workshops          | Attending Experience Week<br>Participating in other workshops<br>Living in a community as a newcomer |
| <b>Integration with Other Contexts</b> | Spiritual practices inform                            | Pedagogical structures enable learning                                  | Entry point for deeper engagement                                                                    |

|  |                                                   |                                     |                             |
|--|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
|  | community service.                                | Skill development sustains movement | Public face of the movement |
|  | Personal realisation demonstrates movement goals. |                                     |                             |

Table 8: The Nested Contexts at a Glance

### *I-SMLE and Utopian Impulse*

The nested contexts model can also be read as an organisation of the utopian impulse, with seekership being an individual's orientation towards a not-yet-realised possibility and successive rings showing how it is collectively organised, sustained and directed and the boundaries representing structural conditions that constrain or enable utopian aspirations. Thus, the community's educational significance perhaps lies in the skills of navigating the tensions between aspirational vision and social realities within which it operates and the knowledge and skills that are built through that process. Further seekership thus becomes not only participation within the community but a possibility of inhabiting that desired future.

### *Theoretical Transferability and Scope*

The I-SMLE nested contexts model's adaptable applicability primarily extends to contexts sharing Findhorn's configuration of voluntary participation in transformation-oriented communities, where members usually arrive with pre-existing seekership and substantial capital sustains their engagement. The model may illuminate similar contexts, such as spiritual communities and ecovillages, but would require testing across different configurations. The changes might happen in the inner ring, where the practices that are essential to that field may change, for

e.g. If it is a faith based community then the inner dimensions might focus on strengthening the practice of the faith, and the middle and outer rings will have different ways of how that plays out and field boundaries might be determined by different indicators but the premise might still remain.

For example, a Zen-based Buddhist Centre

**The Centre** - Intentionality towards commitment to Awakening, Dharma practice

**Inner Ring** - Advanced Meditation, Intensive retreats

**Middle Ring** - Teaching Assistant, Retreat Support

**Outer Ring** - Introductory Workshops, Beginner Retreats

**Field Requirements** - Cultural Capital (Buddhist concepts), Temporal Capital (Practice Time)

So the questions that alternative contexts could focus on are

- What organising principles or practices do we hold?
- What capital matters most in our settings and what requirements define the field?
- What sustains the *illusio* to continue commitment to the field?
- What practices constitute each context?

The model would require adaptations to apply to conventional educational systems, professional training, or competence-oriented contexts, or within populations lacking the capital for voluntary pursuits. The structure of formal education, with very defined entry requirements, formalised credentialing, set authority, and external validation requirements, may not allow for a flexible, learner-intentionality-focused model, creating fundamental constraints that intentional communities or alternative contexts do not face.

## 7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has synthesised the historical and contemporary findings from Chapters 5 and 6 to develop theoretical insights about education within the Findhorn Foundation, through the application of I-SMLE and the significant contributions that emerge from that analysis.

The analysis reveals how educational processes in intentional communities operate simultaneously across multiple dimensions that cannot be separated. The Findhorn Foundation functions as a distinctive social field with its own rules and forms of capital, a social movement oriented towards demonstrating alternatives and an educational space where learning is embedded in daily life. The nested contexts model visualises this integration, showing how members navigate between individual practice, pedagogical relationships, and collective movement participation not sequentially but concurrently.

The chapter then proposes the outline for a theory of education for the Findhorn Foundation, identifying its ontological foundations in participatory knowing, its epistemological stance that privileges experiential and collective knowledge generation, and its pedagogical approach that dissolves the boundaries between education and life. The theory reveals both innovation and contradictions: distributed spiritual authority democratises access to knowledge but potentially obscures power relations. The experiential epistemology validates embodied learning while creating challenges of validation, and the emphasis on individual seekership enables personalisation but risks isolation from collective critique. These tensions are not weaknesses but inherent features of the community that require navigation. The nested context model offers a transferable analytical tool for understanding how educational engagement could be interpreted to accommodate different goals. By positioning seekership or learner intentionality at the centre, with progressively deeper rings representing inner practice, pedagogical interactions, and movement participation, all bound by the field dynamics of habitus, capital, and *illuso*, the model illuminates how intentional communities create permeable yet

coherent educational environments. While developed based on data from Findhorn, the model's structure can be adapted to analyse other contexts in which voluntary participation, transformative intent, and collective purpose intersect. Critically, the analysis avoids romanticising intentional communities as unproblematic alternatives by recognising barriers, whether implicit or explicit, capital requirements that shape access and participation, as well as implicit power dynamics that play out.

The theoretical insights perhaps also demonstrate the explicitly utopian character of education. Field construction establishes the social infrastructure, SML generates and disseminates the knowledge and skills, and educational theory reveals the pedagogical structures of translation, and the nested contexts model shows how individual utopian aspiration, collective pedagogical practice, movement participation and field membership operate simultaneously in those who choose to inhabit a working utopia. The analysis also reveals that working utopias could be simultaneously educationally innovative and socially reproductive, perhaps transformative for some members and exclusionary for others.

These theoretical contributions lay the foundation for the dissertation's final chapter, which examines the insights this case study can offer for educational theory and practice beyond alternative communities.

## 8. Conclusion

### 8.1 Introduction

What is the educational significance of intentional communities? This question, which opened this dissertation, has led to an engagement with the Findhorn Foundation as a case study of a community explicitly self-described as an educational project, and, over the last six decades, as a demonstration site. Through historical analysis (Chapter 5) addressing RQ1, How founders' vision translated into community practices, contemporary member experiences (Chapter 6) addressing



RQ2, How members experience educational participation and theoretical synthesis RQ3 (Chapter 7), the interconnected research questions were answered. Before presenting concluding reflections, this chapter articulates the broader educational significance of intentional communities.

Intentional Communities like Findhorn matter for education because they function simultaneously as **alternative education models, pedagogical laboratories and critical mirrors** that challenge assumptions about learning, knowledge and development. Its explicit educational intentions as a 'centre of light' for 'demonstrating alternative ways of living and learning' (Caddy, 1991) made visible the mechanisms through which educative societies could function by considering how they construct legitimacy, transmit knowledge, socialise newcomers, navigate authority, and sustain coherence over time. The comparison between the founders' frames and contemporary interpretations also shows evolution, continuity, and reinterpretation. As both an intentional community and an internationally recognised ecovillage, Findhorn also embodies the tensions inherent in education between individual development and collective coherence, between openness and boundary maintenance, between egalitarian ideals and inevitable hierarchies, and between experiential knowing and validation.

The case demonstrates that education need not be separated from daily life, confined to expert-led instruction, or oriented towards more than economic productivity. By embedding learning within community living and pursuing self-development (Sec 5.7, 6.4-6.8, 7.2) rather than formal credentials, the possibilities of education for self-awareness and growth become visible. The case reveals how intentional communities like Findhorn may validate marginalised ways of knowing, **often excluded from formal education**, demonstrating that multiple pathways to wisdom can co-exist. (Sec 5.11, 6.4.1, 7.3) offering what Santos (2007) terms "ecologies of knowledge" where different systems are recognised as partial yet valuable. Moreover, they **could serve as sites of sustained pedagogical experimentation unavailable in conventional education**, as evidenced by Findhorn's 60-year evolution and iterative refinement of educational practices

grounded in lived experience. The codification and demonstration of these practices through publications, workshops and broader networks contribute to broader educational discourse. As **prefigurative spaces, intentional communities may extend social movement learning theory through years-long immersion in alternative social relations (Sec. 7.3). Members don't just advocate for or study sustainability; they** embody it through collective governance and tacit knowledge of integrated living. (Sections 6.4.3, 6.8) cultivating not just environmental awareness but ecological consciousness through lived practice (Sec. 6.4.3)

However, the analysis also reveals how intentional **communities could reproduce inequalities** through implicit capital requirements that determine who can access and sustain participation. (Sec 6.2,7.4) The analysis reveals that distributed spiritual authority can democratise access to knowledge, while also obscuring power relations. Experiential epistemology validates embodied learning while creating challenges of quality and accountability. Individual intentionality and seekership provide personalisation in learning, but everyone can be at risk of collective bias. Finally, voluntary participation does not always come without barriers to access, including economic or capital requirements. These are not failures specific to the Findhorn Foundation, but rather inherent tensions in alternative educational arrangements that merit scholarly attention. Informal hierarchies persist beneath aspirational ideals, showing how alternative contexts reproduce power in different ways rather than eliminate it. Intentional communities also **operate within clear boundaries and serve specific populations** with particular needs and resources requiring substantial privilege for access. Thus **methods cannot be scaled or transplanted into other alternative spaces** without tacit knowledge, contextual field creation and member mobilisation in a coherent and consistent way. **Yet they expand educational imagination** and make visible how **learning can be more integrated** rather than fragmented, and how **educational aims can serve both individual growth and collective development.**

This concluding chapter moves beyond the case's specificity to consider the broader significance of understanding intentional communities as educative societies. It

presents findings across the three research questions, articulating the contributions of this research and the tensions and contradictions revealed by the case, and discusses implications for educational theory, intentional communities, and social movement scholarship, as well as field formation and maintenance.

## 8.2 Synthesis of Findings: Answering the Research Questions

This research pursued three interconnected questions about the educational significance of the Findhorn Foundation. They progressed from how founders' ideas became embedded in community structures, that is, field establishment, to how members experience and describe educational insights and motivations, which encompass the social movement aspirations and educational dimensions, as well as the theoretical insights deduced from the above. While each question was answered in detail in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, this section summarises the findings across the questions.

### RQ 1: How did the founders' vision and educational aspirations translate into the community's practices and its field establishment?

#### **Through strategic framing and field construction mechanisms (Chapter 5A & 5B)**

The founders actions in my interpretation contributed to constructing a distinctive social and educational field through narrative framing(positioning Findhorn as divinely ordained), showing empirical validation (thriving gardens as evidence) capital accumulation (publications, media coverage, influential visitors building legitimacy) and pedagogical codification(translating personal practices into transmittable universal methods) This framing both legitimised the founders' authority as spiritually tuned channels and positioned them as preparers of conditions for others to realise spirituality, rather than teachers or spiritual gurus. Membership criteria and the field's doxa structured assumptions and practices within the community. These founding narratives also embedded particular

dispositions as desirable. The translation from personal narratives to institutional structures became explicit through publications, recorded guidance, community documents, and structured visitor programs, transforming founder-dependent practices into accessible techniques. Critically, this field construction also established implicit capital requirements that shaped who could participate and on what terms.

Thus, the founders' ideas translated into daily life not through direct replication but through the establishment of a social field with its own logic. The narratives provided legitimacy, strategic framing attracted relevant members, and the codification of practices enabled transmission, while capital requirements shaped participation. The educational positioning that emerged was -- divine as the ultimate educator, founders as preparers, community as a living classroom, and members as co-creators provided a baseline framework for understanding learning as embedded in daily life. This framework established possibilities and constraints that current members continue to navigate, adapt to, and sometimes contest. The founders' field construction can also be understood as the founding of a working utopia (Crossley,1999) where translation of individual utopian aspirations to institutional structures occurs.

## R.Q. 2: How do members describe their experience of educational participation at Findhorn Foundation?

Through continuity with founding principles alongside significant evolution in interpretation and practice.

Members describe the community as educational, but articulate this significance through varied frames, such as spiritual and personal growth, ecological and community living competencies, or contributing to a better world. This multiplicity suggests the field's flexibility, which can accommodate varied interpretations while still maintaining coherence. The founding principles persist, and Inner Listening remains a core practice, though it is understood more expansively than in the founders' accounts, as accessing intuition, connecting with bodily wisdom, tuning

into group energy, or aligning with values. The practice endures, but the softening of the specificity has created space for secular seekers. The founding principle of demonstration continues to motivate participation, as members articulate it as modelling sustainable living, creating alternative social arrangements, and living their values rather than explicit divine purposes. Members discuss participation in daily life as pedagogical and informal mentoring relationships, without structures or peer learning, through shared experimentation and living, and the community itself as a teacher, providing immediate feedback on interpersonal dynamics. This absence can be understood both appreciatively, as democratising access and validating individual experiential knowledge, and critically, given the possibilities of inconsistency and the implicit curricula that suggest both opportunities and problems that remain unresolved. Members' descriptions reveal learning across multiple dimensions. While some accounts focused on shifting worldviews, identities, and ways of thinking, others explored the importance of experiential learning. Significantly, education was described as occurring through daily interactions and life tasks, rather than any structural process, again emphasising the possibilities of a distinct residential process of learning unavailable to limited-time programs or non-residential contexts.

Members' experiences also reflect the characteristic dynamic of working utopias for those who can access and sustain participation. Critically, members' accounts also describe challenges such as financial sustainability, the difficulty of time and lifestyle commitments, and frame many of these challenges as spiritual lessons rather than structural constraints. The educational significance lies in the members' descriptive accounts of self-development, skill building, relational competencies, and collective knowledge generation. Nevertheless, this significance exists alongside unresolved tensions around authority, validation, inclusion, and the risks associated with experiential epistemologies. The community interpretation can be understood as the sustained coherence of an alternative educational space, with the reproduction of certain exclusions and power dynamics that are inevitable in social fields.

### R.Q. 3: What theoretical insights (if any) emerge about education from studying the practices of the Findhorn Foundation?

Intentional communities can be understood as operating simultaneously across three dimensions: social fields with boundaries, positions, valued capital, and shared *illusio*. Field maintenance seems to occur through socialisation, external legitimacy, and the transmission of *habitus*. (Sec 7.3) As social movements and sites of prefigurative politics, where members collectively generate knowledge through practice, transmit it through participation, and demonstrate alternatives, education serves social movement goals of developing capacities for systemic change while attracting aligned seekers. (Sec. 7.3) As educational spaces, learning is embedded in collective living without institutional frameworks, credentials or separation from daily life. (Sec 7.2). The Nested Contexts model (Fig. 21) visualises how these dimensions integrate with seekership/intentionality driving engagement, individual practices, and spiritual development, and social movement participation, mediated by educational processes and relationships, and field boundaries, which provide structure and access. Members navigate dimensions in an integrated manner, simultaneously practising individually, serving as educators or learners and contributing to movement goals with varied levels of engagement and trajectories.

Fields are sustained by transmitting capacity for ongoing reconstruction, and educational processes maintain both field coherence and enable adaptive evolution. Extended immersion in alternative spaces develops embodied capacities accessible through collective engagement that are unavailable in shorter engagements. (Sec 7.3)

## Integration - The Interconnection of Research Questions

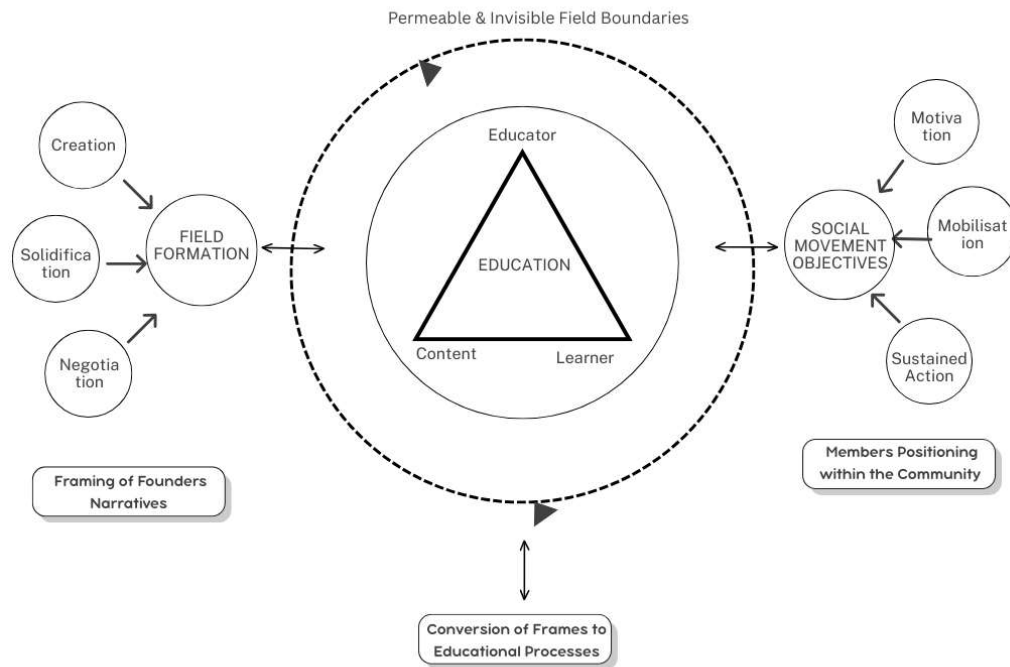


Figure 22: I-SMLE: An Integrated Perspective (Author Generated)

The research questions could be understood as answering inseparable dimensions of a unified phenomenon, though alternative interpretations remain possible. My reading suggests that the founders' strategic framing (RQ1) established a social and educational field that contemporary members (RQ2) continue to navigate, with some principles persisting. In contrast, others evolve significantly, suggesting a theoretical understanding (RQ3) of how educative societies can establish, maintain, and adapt coherence in the face of inherent tensions, also visually represented in Figure 22. This interpretation emphasises continuity and successful transmission through the reading but does not account for intentional communities that fail for many reasons, including authoritarian leadership, financial mismanagement, or a lack of resources.

The usage of the I-SMLE framework enabled this integrated analysis, without which crucial dimensions would have remained invisible. Intentional communities could thus be interpreted as multidimensional educational phenomena that are not merely residential arrangements with incidental educational byproducts, but rather constructed fields in which social movement activism and pedagogical practice intertwine continuously. At the same time, by foregrounding field construction, social movement learning, the analysis privileges certain dynamics (strategic framing, collective knowledge and seekership) while potentially obscuring others (psychological manipulation, economic exploitation or cultural appropriation).

What remains consistent across interpretations is members describing a space where learning, activism, and daily living are interwoven through mechanisms unavailable in conventional educational settings, and an existence of 60 years with its specific practices influencing broader conversations in ecological living. Three possible conclusions emerge:

1. Success interpretation: The case demonstrates that education can function through participatory learning, distributed authority and offer alternatives.
2. Failure interpretation: The community reproduces exclusions differently rather than transcending them, and educational innovation masks capital barriers, power dynamics and ideological closure, making them cautionary tales rather than aspirational models.
3. Complexity Interpretation: ICs simultaneously enable and constrain, innovate and reproduce, liberate and exclude. Their educational significance lies not in being better than mainstream education but in revealing education's inescapable tensions around authority, validation, inclusion and purpose through different configurations.

I personally adopt the third interpretation that ICs as educative spaces are inherently paradoxical, in which founding principles both persist and transform, authority is democratised and obscured, marginalised ways of



knowing are validated yet, up to a limit, seekership both enables personalisation and transfers responsibility for structural failures onto individual spiritual development.

## 8.3 Theoretical Contributions

This research makes four primary theoretical contributions that extend educational theory, intentional movement scholarship and social movement learning.

### 8.3.1 The I-SMLE Framework: Integrating Multiple Theoretical Perspectives on Education in Intentional Communities

The Integrated Social Movement Learning and Education (I-SMLE) framework constitutes a primary theoretical contribution by providing a systematic integration tool of field theory (Bourdieu), social movement learning (Kilgore, Hall, Holst) and educational theory to analyse how intentional communities function as distinctive social fields, social movements oriented towards demonstrating alternatives and educational spaces embedding learning in collective life. While scholars have separately applied these theoretical perspectives to various phenomena (Kanter, 1972; Zablocki, 1980; Sargisson, 2007; Brown, 2002; Dawson, 2013; Lockyer & Veteto, 2013; Meijering et al., 2007; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004). Studies combining multiple frameworks (Litfin, 2014; Kunze & Avalino, 2015) integrate political ecology with sustainability studies or anthropology with environmental concerns, but education remains peripheral rather than central to the analysis, and I did not come across any systematic integration among field construction, movement learning, and pedagogical practice. The recognition that intentional communities operate across multiple dimensions positions them differently from other research that viewed them through a sociological lens (Kanter, 1972; Sargisson, 2007), as social movements (Melucci, 1989; Fians, 2022), or primarily as an alternative educational context (Misiaszek, 2020).

The Development and application of the I-SMLE framework integrates three theoretical domains that typically operate independently in academic analysis. This

integration proved essential for capturing the educational complexity. Educational theory would have provided partial insight into the case's pedagogical dimensions. However, as discussed in Section 7.2, integration created a more nuanced understanding of the community. Thus, the framework's synthesis of these perspectives through the central educational triangle embedded within field analysis and social movement context created an analytical capacity that enhances the sum of individual theoretical approaches.

### *Educational Dynamics and Field Establishment*

The I-SMLE framework's attention to the establishment of fields through founders' narratives revealed how educational communities could be consciously created. Similarly, the framework's integration of habitus and learning processes revealed how community practices function simultaneously as educational methods and socialisation processes. The daily practice of attunement serves multiple educational functions, including skill development, group alignment, and the transmission of community culture. Finally, the attention to *illusio* suggests that educational motivation and members' commitment to remain in the community are sustained not only by personal benefits but also by a shared belief in contributing to larger social transformation goals.

### *Framework Flexibility*

The framework proved sufficiently flexible to account for community evolution and adaptation, explaining both founders' perspectives and contemporary members' experiences, and demonstrating the capacity to address educational development over time. The framework's multi-level analysis—individual learning, collective learning, and field dynamics—helped provide an analysis of how the same educational activities operated with multiple aims. Additionally, the framework's approach offers a model for studying education within alternative contexts that resist conventional analysis approaches.

### *Framework Transferability*

The framework's utility extends beyond Findhorn to other contexts, such as spiritual communities, ecovillages, cooperative living arrangements, or alternative learning communities. Researchers can apply the I-SMLE framework to examine how such spaces establish fields with distinctive logics, generate and transmit knowledge as social movements, and embed learning in collective practice. The framework provides analytical vocabulary and a conceptual structure, but specific contexts may manifest different models and processes.

### **8.3.2 The Nested Contexts Model: Mapping Educational Engagement in Voluntary Communities.**

The Nested Contexts Model (Fig. 21) offers an interpretation of visualising how educational engagement operates across different levels of participation in such communities. The model positions learner intentionality at the centre, with progressively expanding rings representing inner practice, pedagogical relationships and movement participation, which are bound by field dynamics that determine access and engagement possibilities. This conceptualisation also makes space for members who may visit or participate in small workshops and engage only at the collective educational level, without significant capital investment, versus committed members within the community who operate at all levels simultaneously, with a commitment and investment. This understanding reveals the different stages and capital requirements that exist at varying levels, as well as how educational design and organisation can be managed to meet objectives.

However, the model privileges “choice” while naturalising barriers. By positioning seekership at the centre, the framework risks implying that depth of engagement reflects individual motivation rather than structural constraints. The reality of who can access inner rings depends heavily on available capital. The model also depicts static rings rather than dynamic relations. While the visualisation shows different levels of participation, it does not reveal how members in the inner rings shape what members in the outer rings see and learn, how practices are transmitted,

which interpretations hold weight, and whose voices are amplified and carry implicit authority. The model's centre also assumes agency that may not exist uniformly. Positioning learner motivation as an organising principle masks how communities may actively shape what counts as appropriate seeking. Members whose intentions don't align with community norms (seeking social connections over spiritual development, economic stability over ecological purity) may experience subtle or explicit pressures or exit. The model cannot distinguish between genuine voluntary participation or ideological conformity. I also recognise that the model in some ways risks reproducing neoliberal logic of positioning educational outcomes as individual responsibility, so if members were struggling to deepen engagement, the model might suggest insufficient motivation rather than inadequate support, but I believe that every member has varying engagement chaotic trajectories, and the model cannot represent temporal changes, conflicting positionalities and friction between stated intentions and enacted practices that characterise community life. The model visualises educational dimensions because this is the focus of this dissertation, even though the members themselves may not experience community life in this manner. Thus, its value lies in showing the interconnections between field construction, movement participation, and pedagogical practice, helping to think about intentional communities not necessarily as members experience them.

### 8.3.3 Theorising Learning as Embedded in Living: Dissolving the Educational Process-Life boundary

While there has been a critique of the artificial separation between education and life, concepts like lifelong learning and informal learning acknowledge education beyond formal spaces (Jarvis, 2009). This research presents both a case for and a critical interrogation of integrating learning into daily life in a sustained residential context. In this case, work functions as the primary pedagogical method, where gardening teaches both ecological relationships and spiritual attunement, as well as horticultural skills. Kitchen work integrates food preparation skills with lessons on nutrition, care, and an approach to mundane tasks. Community living helps

individuals navigate communication, relationships, and conflict management, whereas managing the community sharpens governance, decision-making, and leadership skills, all of which are pervaded by specific spiritual practices within physical community spaces, temporal rhythms, and social structures designed to support learning. However, this integration also raises concerns about whether dissolving the boundaries between educational processes and life constitutes a problematic erasure and, as Goffman (1968) noted, a totalising institutional dynamic. (Sec 7.2)

Member accounts suggest this integration is achieved through participation rather than simulation, driven by motivation, immediate feedback, and responsibility sustained over time, rather than as separate chunks, enabling the deepening of skills and the development of an embodied habitus. While apprenticeships and residencies also share some of these characteristics, Findhorn members are not learning discrete professional skills but organising life domains. This learning, embedded in living, however, could be understood as operating through a different logic. Where learning outcomes, assessments, and content cannot be predetermined because individual learning and learning outcomes are based on what learners engage with and how they choose to interpret their experiences within organic, emergent situations. These differences are not merely practical but epistemological and ontological, fundamentally reflecting different understandings of what learning is, its purpose and how it takes place. This totalising pedagogy may also create problems as members cannot escape being perpetual learners subject to constant evaluation. While Findhorn lacks doors and formal surveillance, could this integration of learning with living create dynamics in which members' competence in dishwashing, emotional responses to criticism, or depth in spiritual practice all become assessable performance? This may dissolve not just education-life boundaries but also public-private distinctions. An example of this is the Synanon Community in California, which positioned all interactions as meaningful, integrating therapy with daily living through "The Game," a confrontational group process for self-awareness. The community was deemed a cult and shut down, and what began

as therapeutic integration became systematic thought reform (Ofshe, 1980; Janzen, 2001)

Education at the Findhorn Foundation aims not merely at individual development or social adaptation but at demonstrating alternative social arrangements that can inspire broader cultural transformation, positioning the community as both a learning laboratory and a social movement. This transformative orientation distinguishes the educational approach from both conventional education (which typically aims at adapting to existing social arrangements) and radical education (which often emphasises critique without positive demonstration). However, this integration also makes educational failure invisible or impossible to diagnose. If learning is whatever members experience through living, how can the community fail educationally? If members leave due to financial constraints, they are said to be self-exits; if conflicts escalate, members learn about their triggers or mismanagement is seen as a spiritual quest. It is possible that such unfalsifiable frameworks cannot distinguish between successful education and rationalised dysfunction.

The community's educational practices aim to embody rather than merely advocate for alternative possibilities. This proposition contributes to understanding how education can function as a social change strategy through prefigurative politics, which demonstrate desired changes in action. It illustrates how intentional communities can serve broader social movement goals while also prioritising individual development. Yet, this analysis also reveals risks of spiritual labelling within unfair conditions, hidden curricula, and power dynamics that influence engagement and outcomes for individuals, as well as a lack of uniformity in what different members learn. The implications extend to questions about experiential learning and the need for sustained, authentic participation rather than just individual instances. It also raises questions about ideas of purpose, contribution, and collective knowledge generation, and how aligning with these principles may lead to more engagement rather than just skill development. The prefigurative claims also require scrutiny, as there is a risk of romanticising what could also be

understood as privileged withdrawal. Geographic isolation, economic self-sufficiency requirements, and intensive focus on internal community dynamics in a country where most basic expenses like healthcare and education can be met enable detachment from broader societal engagement that prefigurative politics ostensibly addresses. Members describe “not being part of the problem”, but prefiguration in isolated enclaves may do little to challenge dominant systems. As della Porta (2020) and Yates (2015) argue, prefigurative spaces risk becoming ends in themselves rather than means to broader change. Carette and King (2005) share that contemporary spirituality itself is a commodity available to a select population. Thus, alternatively, Findhorn can be understood as how a particular population (educated, economically secure, spiritually oriented) creates conditions that serve their specific interests under the banner of broader transformation. Pedagogically, it shows extended educational experimentation as a privilege available to those with means.

Thus, what can be claimed (with caveats) is that Findhorn demonstrates that sustained residential contexts may enable forms of learning, embodied habit formation, tacit knowledge development, and integrated competencies across domains that time-bound conventional institutional education may struggle to cultivate. The integration reveals possibilities for how education might function when conventional constraints (credentials, standardised curricula, cognitive ways of knowing) are suspended. These same features create risks of totalising environments, disguised ideological incorporation, structural problems reframed as individual responsibility, hidden power systems and exclusions. These strengths and weaknesses are inseparable, what enables depth also enables control and what creates integration also obscures power.

Whether and if institutional education wants to realise these ideas remains debatable, but the analysis offers an alternative viewpoint. The learning as living model depends on voluntary commitment, shared ideological framework and members willingness to accept community authority, conditions that cannot and should not be replicated in institutional education serving diverse populations.

### 8.3.4 Critical Reflections on Some Failed ICs and Connections

The risks above are not merely theoretical; they stem from documented failures of intentional communities. Rajneeshpuram (1981-1985) was established in Oregon, integrating spiritual practice with work, but its charismatic leader was later implicated in criminal activities, and the community dissolved after his exit. Osho (Bhagwan Rajneesh) embodied spiritual capital, charisma and members followed his teachings. However, unlike Findhorn's 1971 guidance shift, Osho never routinised charisma (Weber, 1947), and his successor, Ma Sheela, could not claim authority (Carter, 1990). On the other hand, Jim Jones of Peoples Temple/Jonestown (1974-1978) positioned himself as a manifestation of the divine and required total submission, with himself as the only legitimate authority. In California, the field had boundaries (Peoples Temple membership), but shifting to Guyana brought a total boundary, where members were physically, socially, and informationally blocked. Joining required surrender of assets, thereby creating economic dependence with social ties severed (Hall, 1987). In 1978, 918 people died in a mass murder-suicide, creating a catastrophic field collapse. Conversely, the history of Findhorn shows the field's structuring and routinisation, likely avoiding the pitfalls of charismatic leadership. Even practices that initially originated with the founders were presented as accessible and universal, increasing the likelihood of sustaining the field.

## 8.4 Implication for Educational Tensions and Educative Community

### 8.4.1 The Individual/ Collective Tension

Chapter 2 identified the tension between education for individualism and collectivism, and debates about how education serves both, or whether they should prioritise personal fulfilment, economic productivity, social cohesion, or cultural transmission (Biesta, 2010; Giroux, 2010). The Findhorn case study reveals an educational possibility that does not view personal growth and community development as separate priorities, but as an integrated individual-collective



development through unified practices. The empirical evidence reveals how individual development and collective community are intertwined. Whether inner listening for self-development or collective alignment, it serves both. Even daily tasks become opportunities for skill development and community service, where members build their skills in practical tasks, communication, and leadership. However, this integration requires accepting community definitions of “individual development” which can become a framework for justifying sacrifice, ideological incorporation or rationalising systemic issues. This integration also relies on shared ontological assumptions that are not actually shared. It may seem like members whose inner guidance aligns with community priorities may gain validation, and those whose guidance suggests criticism or departure are subtly pressured. Thus, this integration could be performative. Thus, rather than integration, it navigates irreducible tensions between individual and collective, sometimes successfully, often messily and always incompletely, but are probably a lot more vocal and able to address those tensions more overtly. Whilst working utopias like Findhorn could also be seen as attempting to resolve the individual collective tension through practical social arrangements, making individual development and collective flourishing experientially inseparable, the limited success of this (although real for some members) may be harmful or illusory for others, suggesting that the tension is not resolvable but requires ongoing political negotiation.

#### 8.4.2 Continuity / Change Tension

The community preserves core principles while adapting their interpretation across generations, maintaining a recognisable identity and yet remaining responsive to changing contexts and membership. Thus, continuity is served through knowledge transmission, but regular review and integration of varied perspectives also help bring about changes in the community and its understanding of its role, aligning it with broader conversations, priorities, and political movements. Critically, the continuity narrative serves institutional interests by legitimising current practices and capitalising on reputational capital. The balance between continuity and change

reflects power dynamics and gatekeeping by established members, which is often the case (Metcalf, 2004). Also, is continuity an achievement or a selection effect where those who experience discontinuity are filtered out, and maybe interpreted that intentional communities manage continuity/change tensions by retaining those who experience current arrangements as balanced and losing those who do not. Also, in the process of adaptation, there is a loss. Listening to God becomes accessible knowledge within, but loses its Protestant mystical roots, its Rosicrucian-influenced manifestation, or even Sheena Govan's contributions. Thus, specific traditions are displaced for institutional survival

#### 8.4.3 Education with Utopian Potential: From Theory to Practice

Chapter 2 positions education with utopian potential, drawing on scholars like Webb (2013) and Harvey (2000) with forward-looking visions of human possibility. The Findhorn case study exemplifies how intentional community development can translate utopian educational thought into practical application. The research demonstrates a “process utopia” (Harvey, 2000), meaning it is an ongoing process of experimentation rather than a fixed blueprint. The community’s 60-year evolution demonstrates how utopian educational visions are sustained and refined through continuous practice and reflection. The findings also reveal ways in which utopian educational ideals can be operationalised through Prefigurative, Practical, and Adaptive Living, in which community members seem to embody the concept of prefigurative politics (Fians, 2022) by demonstrating desired educational and social arrangements rather than merely advocating them. However, this framing obscures failures and casualties. This case has spoken to members who found value, and we still do not have enough evidence about the experiments that failed and their impact, about the members who left disillusioned or were rejected, or about the structural problems that persist despite six decades. The failed ICs also suggest that features of learning-as-living, charismatic leadership, and fields with total control can have catastrophic results. Findhorn seems to have avoided worst-case scenarios but can still be vulnerable to inherent dangers. In a contrary read, Findhorn can be seen as demonstrating that Utopian visions require extraordinary privilege to

attempt, and implementation inevitably may compromise on ideals. Sustained ideals usually require isolation, but the isolation can become totalising. Thus, the educational significance of Findhorn shifts from showing what's possible to revealing what attempting alternatives require, cost and exclude.

### 8.5 An Educative Community or a Totalising Institution?

The findings build on the concept of “educative community,” in which educational processes permeate everyday interactions beyond formal institutions. The Findhorn Foundation exemplifies this by deliberately creating educational environments that shape members' knowledge, values and practices through both explicit and implicit means. The data reveal how the community's physical spaces, social structures, and cultural practices function pedagogically through intention, design, and field management. Unlike Clarke's original conception, which focused on the formation of national citizenry, Findhorn demonstrates how intentional communities can create alternative educational microcosms that negotiate competing values, purposes, and their complexities. Educative societies can embody utopian aspirations, yet as discussed above, face challenges of accessibility, accountability and validation. Clarke's vision thus requires not only physical architecture but redesign of social and cultural architecture as well.

On the other hand, the case study also cautions against the dangers of turning educative communities into totalising institutions. (Goffman, 2017) Multiple educational influences prevent a single institution, and individuals can encounter multiple perspectives. Findhorn has one overarching ideological frame that may lead to echo chamber dynamics, and if all educators, content, and context reinforce the same worldview, it may easily slip into indoctrination rather than education. Findhorn's education operates through field structures that are probably far less transparent and accountable, so educative communities could automatically obscure power by deciding the curriculum, method and aims. Thus, educational societies or communities, as a concept, embody profound risks alongside possibilities, and, beyond the social and cultural architecture, they require

democratic accountability that allows multiple competing educational influences, transparent governance, external validation beyond the community's self-assessment, protection of dissent, and equitable access. The research thus suggests that educative communities differ fundamentally from educative communities in three ways: 1) voluntary membership creates self-selection that Clarke's national vision assumed away, 2) residential intensity enables deeper socialisation but risks totalisation, 3) explicit intentionality makes educational processes visible but also controllable. Thus, scaling educative principles from communities to societies requires mechanisms that Clarke (1948) did not address, i.e., democratic accountability, exit options and competing educational influences.

The tension between educative community and totalising institution is also a tension of utopianism. When a utopian community's educational framework cannot acknowledge institutional failure or if all experience becomes curriculum or growth opportunities, the community risks what Jameson (2005) suggests as a closed utopian system that contains rather than enables transformation. The Findhorn case study reveals the risk and the tensions between utopian aspiration and utopian closure that utopian projects must navigate.

## 8.6 Implications for Intentional Communities

Forster (2008) argued for closer collaboration between academia and intentional communities. This case study further presents a compelling argument for taking educational organisations, field formation, and framing of intentionality more seriously to sustain commitment and provide a rationale and method for members to commit to and continue their participation in the community. It demonstrates how education serves as a fundamental mechanism through which intentional communities establish and maintain coherence, socialise newcomers, and create a habitus to fulfil their purpose.

The I-SMLE framework provides an integrative tool for analysing the dimensions of different intentional communities and how they can utilise strategic framing and educational methods to build their collective ethos, establish field boundaries, and

maintain shared investment in the community, thereby generating collective knowledge and achieving movement goals. A temporal comparison would also be helpful, allowing communities to track the founding vision and its transformation over time, as well as the factors that enable and constrain participation. The research suggests that community sustainability depends significantly on successful educational processes, such as the capacity to transmit core knowledge and practices while remaining responsive to changing contexts and membership.

The Nested Contexts visualisation can also be further personalised based on each community's examination of the inner practices they need, the educational processes that support them, and the ways they can use collective action to attract new members. The model can help reveal entry points, capital requirements at various levels, and barriers to participation, offering a practical tool for community development. Furthermore, for intentional communities, making educational intentions and practices explicit can help articulate tacit and hidden knowledge, design more effective ways of teaching and learning, and also provide a language for attracting members.

## 8.7 Implications for Social Movement Learning Theory and Practice

While social movement scholarship focuses on learning within movements, campaigns, and organisations, intentional communities offer a distinctive learning environment that provides a study of alternative living arrangements, dimensions of learning resulting from sustained immersion and commitment, as well as the embodiment of an alternative vision rather than just advocating for one. This research illustrates how prefigurative living serves as a goal of education and operates differently from merely fostering critical consciousness in classrooms. The collective knowledge generated by the community through its various artefacts, like rituals, workshops, books, and visitor orientations, becomes codified knowledge that is transmitted and creates collective wisdom of possibilities. An area of further research could be the longitudinal generation of knowledge and its impact

compared to the shorter-term social movements, as well as the differences in their organisation and execution.

The research highlights the importance of intentionality and frame alignment, showing how movements can effectively communicate their purpose and target audience from the outset. The study also demonstrates how movements can establish structures for newcomer orientation, utilise documentation, and cultivate habitus to enhance the fields of action and collective coherence. Investing in educational organisation can thus enhance both movement sustainability and member development. Furthermore, movement learning occurs at multiple levels simultaneously, whether it is individual transformation, collective capacity development, or movement knowledge generation. It is helpful to attend to all three levels and design and provide support for different levels of engagement. Thus, this research extends social movement learning theory by proposing that movements function not only as sites where learning occurs (Hall & Clover, 2005) but also as educators that deliberately construct learning environments. The I-SMLE reveals three under-theorised mechanisms: 1) strategic framing as curriculum design, 2) field construction as pedagogical infrastructure, and 3) habitus cultivation as a long-term educational outcome.

## 8.8 Research Limitations and Reflexivity

This section presents the methodological constraints, theoretical boundaries and my positionality that shaped this study's findings and its interpretation.

### 8.8.1 Theoretical Tensions and Limitations of the I-SMLE

The I-SMLE and the case study methodology, while enabling rich insight, operate under significant constraints that I would like to acknowledge to establish boundaries for knowledge claims. The limitations of the theoretical tensions within the framework, the methodological constraints of the case study approach, and the epistemic boundaries of case analysis are elaborated below.

The analytical strength of integrating field theory, social movement learning, and educational theory is also its primary vulnerability. Where field theory (Bourdieu, 1977) focuses on structure and suggests that social practices reproduce relatively stable patterns through habitus and capital distribution within constraints, social movement learning theory (Hall & Clover, 2005; Kilgore, 1999) emphasises creative knowledge generation and the transformative potential of agency. Educational theory draws on both systematic knowledge transmission and learner creativity (Biesta, 2010). Thus, the theoretical pluralism enables what della Porta terms “analytical eclecticism”, where traditions are combined to address phenomena that resist single theory explanations. However, as Sil and Katzenstein (2010) acknowledge, eclecticism risks incoherence when constituent theories make contradictory claims or rest on incompatible assumptions about social reality. The I-SMLE attempts to treat these tensions as revealing genuine complexity rather than analytical failures, and whether it offers a multi-theoretical analysis or a bricolage remains a matter of contestation.

The second limitation is the bounded applicability of intentional communities as specific phenomena, positioning them as simultaneous fields, educational spaces, and social movements. Thus, their utility for conventional educational contexts, informal learning contexts without field boundaries, or social movements without explicit educational emphasis remains a point of interpretation. In my view, even mainstream or informal environments do have field constraints, maybe lesser defined or intentionally framed, and all social movements will have elements of education. Also, as of now, the frameworks' empirical dependency and theoretical abstraction remain untested in intentional communities with different configurations, like co-housing communes or co-operatives. The framework's contribution thus resides in demonstrating how multi-theoretical integration can proceed systematically rather than claiming what such integration invariably reveals.

### 8.8.2 Methodological Constraints of the Case Study

The case study approach, while enabling contextual depth, also involves several constraints affecting knowledge claims. The temporal snapshots of founders' texts and contemporary members reveal endpoints, while obscuring the evolving structures of the intervening period and potentially hiding messy details. As Eisenhardt (1989) notes, case studies excel at capturing complexity but struggle with longitudinal data. Thus, patterns identified at Findhorn may or may not characterise other intentional communities, structures or populations. This research provides transferable theoretical tools, such as the I-SMLE framework. Still, empirical findings and claims are presented based on my interpretation, theoretical orientation, and as probabilities rather than universal claims. This provides avenues for further research on different communities to determine if the tools have value and where they could be further developed. Also, the analytical focus on educational dimensions, while justified in light of the research questions, means that other aspects of community life like economic sustainability, ecological practices, spiritual interpretations and organisational dynamics have not received much attention, constraining the breadth of community understanding.

Survivorship bias is also a constraint as the members interviewed represent committed long-term participants who found sufficient value to remain and misses out on the excluded, disillusioned or otherwise disagreed participants, which may have created a systematic bias towards positive accounts and overestimation of educational value while underestimating barriers, exclusions or harmful dynamics. This reliance also presents epistemological challenges, as claims about learning, process, and relations rest entirely on self-reported experiences and retrospective sense-making, thus being phenomenologically rich but empirically poorly validated. Additionally, my fieldwork was limited to a brief immersion in a separate venue, rather than the community, which constrained direct observations of community dynamics and reliance on members' self-reports. The historical analysis is also dependent on published material, which presents a curated version of community history, obscuring the challenges, conflicts or alternate views. Thus, future research



on centring marginalised voices and views may produce different findings about power, inclusion and educational dynamics.

### 8.8.3 Epistemic Boundaries and Knowledge Claims

These theoretical and methodological constraints also establish boundaries for legitimate knowledge claims. This study offers insight into how the Findhorn Foundation has framed its educational approach, how members narrate their experiences, and how the community operates as a distinctive field, providing theoretical insights from this particular stance. It cannot claim causal explanations for why educational approaches succeed or fail, provide empirical validation of the educational effectiveness of the Findhorn Foundation, demonstrate generalisability for all intentional communities, or offer any prescriptive recommendations for replicating the Findhorn model. The analysis provides what Lincoln & Guba (1985) would term as transferability, where readers may need to assess relevance to their own contexts rather than assuming findings apply universally. As Flyvbjerg (2006) states, case studies provide exemplars that enable analogical reasoning, and this case illuminates the possibilities and problems associated with a specific configuration of the community, inviting readers to consider which insights transfer to their own circumstances versus those that remain context-dependent.

This does not detract from the value of this study. The analysis reveals how one long-established community constructs and enacts educational theory, highlighting mechanisms, tensions, and possibilities that theoretical abstraction alone could not generate, while acknowledging that another community may have its own configuration and tensions.

My own positionality and background in alternative education and intentional communities may have created a more sympathetic reading and participation in the experience week, whilst providing access may have also risked immersion. As Pillow (2003) argues, reflexivity needs not just acknowledgement but also an understanding of how it shaped my study. The I-SMLE framework itself reflects my

theoretical preference for integration over a single approach, my commitment to maintaining critical distance from both celebratory and dismissive stances and my positioning of education as fundamentally political. Different researchers with varying commitments may construct different analytical frameworks and derive distinct insights from the same data. My outsider status as a non-member researcher has also shaped access and interpretation, given my limited understanding of community life and its practices. This understanding was again informed through member accounts and documents, which, although they enable critical distance, reveal only certain aspects while obscuring others.

Additionally, this research provides a snapshot of a community at a specific point in time, albeit a limited one. Communities are continuously evolving, growing, changing, and adapting. Future research might benefit from members having a more longitudinal study that tracks both community development and members' learning trajectories.

Despite all of the above limitations, I believe that this research offers valuable insights about education within intentional communities and limitations constrain the scope and validity and help clarify boundaries and identify directions for future research and most importantly, position this work as a contribution to ongoing conversations seeking to invite and build upon and extend analysis. In the final sections, I discuss the directions for future research and provide my concluding remarks.

## 8.9 Directions for future research

This research opens up multiple pathways for future scholarship that would extend or refine the findings while also addressing the limitations identified above. This section outlines some directions across domains, offering suggestions to encourage further scholarly dialogue and the extension of contributions in the field.

### 8.9.1 Comparative Studies across different configurations

While this case study was based on one specific community with its own history, culture, and social configuration, comparative research across more such communities or even multiple communities with different geographies, purposes, or living arrangements would help extend the conversation.

A **secular versus spiritual orientation** would identify whether spiritual framing constitutes a necessary condition for educational coherence or what mechanisms secular communities employ to build commonality. How do communities without transcendental purposes establish fields, either in an ecological framing or a political action framing, to discuss whether general principles apply regardless of ideological framing? For example, a secular ecovillage may not emphasise spirituality, but rather ecological awareness as its primary purpose.

**Urban versus rural** location and its effects on accessibility, demographic composition, and engagement with broader society, as well as the maintenance and impact of field boundaries, which are influenced by location, and whether location can alter the level and composition of participants and their commitments. For example, a community like Auroville in rural India versus Kufunda village in Zimbabwe.

**Founding purpose and its impact** on pedagogical practices and priorities, and whether they would approach learning, rituals and assessment of said objectives differently. A comparative study may reveal how the variety of funding purposes manifests differently. To illustrate, Freetown Christiania, as an anarchist community, could provide a fascinating contrast to an Amish community.

The **cultural and linguistic context** significantly influences the available research, and there is a notable Anglo-Western bias. Comparing it to communities in different contexts, such as Japan, the Middle East, or Latin America, and examining its impact on educational dynamics could contribute to a much broader understanding of elements not fully highlighted within this research.

Overall, refining the I-SMLE framework further, identifying its boundaries and impacts, and adapting it to outliers would help build scholarship on the educational significance of intentional communities.

### 8.9.2 Longitudinal Studies for Member and Community Development

This research was a temporal snapshot from an outsider's view. Still, a longitudinal study on the impact, effectiveness, evolution, and challenges faced by members and communities would provide a richer understanding of education and its purpose, as well as a means to measure outcomes over time.

**Community-level longitudinal research** over time can document the slow growth and evolution, as well as the changes in educational dynamics and organisation within that time period, and the real-time construction of field and building coherence, while also creating filters and boundaries for participation. Questions include adapting educational processes to growth and purpose, assessing the educational impact on members' commitment and community sustainability, and, from a broader perspective, the effect of shifting social conversations on the educational nature and purpose of the community.

**Individual-level longitudinal research** may follow cohorts of members from entry to various stages of development, determining learning trajectories and more concrete, observable outcomes that retrospective interviews do not adequately capture. Questions include how members' understanding and engagement evolve, the impact of educational processes on this change, and the long-term impacts on personal, social, and collective transformation, as well as critiques from members who have left such configurations and the challenges identified in their journeys. It might also be interesting to follow the trajectories of those who window-shop across various communities, often engaging through workshops and short stays but

not actively committing to any one community, and to explore the reasons and impact of such spiritual tourism.

### 8.9.3 Critical Studies: Power, Marginalisation and Intersectionality

While this research addressed power, exclusion, and hidden capital, the analysis was relatively abstract in nature. **Centring marginalised voices**, views, and examining the intersectionality and challenges of race, gender, class, and other axes of difference would provide a more nuanced understanding of power and its impact. Research that incorporates indigenous views of community ecology, the privilege of spiritual access, and the causes of hidden barriers to inclusion would bring a relevant counterpoint. Again, **exclusion from varied lenses like gender, disability, class, race, sexuality** all bring in a necessary counterview of understanding the performativity of inclusion with spaces such as intentional communities and how choices, engagement and lived realities are impacted.

**Methodologically**, this research employed a case study approach, where participants served as data providers, as opposed to **participatory action research**, which involves members becoming co-researchers, shifting the emphasis and understanding of the community. Additionally, **ethnographic studies** would illuminate aspects that this research cannot, whereas further **theoretical and conceptual research** on framing and language, and their impact on broader social movements, would provide a different lens to capture the complexity. A **philosophical understanding** of other spiritual traditions and their influence on people's lived experiences in community can provide valuable insights into the interpretation and evolution of thought.

**Practical research** focusing on community development and understanding ambitions, visions and **designing educational** organisation to support that could include building or formalising the whole educational infrastructure ground up, which would impact the way the I-SMLE gaps and contradictions can be brought to light. **Interventions and impact assessments**, along with an intervention design featuring pilots and feedback, can help communities develop sustainable

community practices while generating collective, transferable knowledge. Additionally, **comparative research between the best practices** of different communities and working insights from a community of active practitioners would enhance the transferability and practicality of the tools and framework.

## 8.10 Conclusion

My dissertation began with a question about the educational significance of intentional communities: whether they socialise members into predetermined ways of being or enable the emergence of autonomous subjects who author their own lives. After this theoretical and empirical investigation and critical reflection, I believe the educational significance of intentional communities lies in their audacity to imagine education otherwise and within the tensions of attempting to do both socialisation and subjectification and in their collective impulse present a case for hope (Webb,2024).

I began this research with Fred Clarkes provocation of ‘educative societies’ and a questioning stance about utopian dimensions of education, where learning is not only within walls, but when learning and community are part of collective ambitions and intentionality. The Findhorn Foundation represents more than an alternative experiment; it embodies a radical educational possibility: that learning does not need the boundaries of classrooms, credentialled authority, or sophisticated institutional infrastructure. It can happen in a rural Scottish village when people come together with a desire and a will to make it work.

This research does reveal that such integration is neither innocent nor straightforward. The community is an educational achievement and also an exclusionary structure, a democratising force and a reproducer of privilege, a space of genuine transformation and a site of hidden power. These contradictions are inherent tensions of any educational project that takes the complexity of human becoming seriously. The inspiring journey of members who have spent decades seeking answers and improving their understanding of self and others who found in Findhorn not easy answers but a community willing to hold space for difficult

questions. These are not stories of enlightened beings but accounts of people choosing to live in ways that challenge dominant cultural scripts about success, individualism, and what makes life meaningful.

Nevertheless, this research has also made visible the substantial capital required to access such education, whether it is economic, cultural, or temporal. Seekership as a life choice is a luxury available to the privileged, and the same practices that democratise authority can obscure how influence operates. Thus, Findhorn's or any such community's educational innovations coexist with its reproduction of privilege in ways that would give pause to anyone tempted to romanticise it.

#### *And Yet, And Yet*

In a world where education is increasingly driven by market logic, learning is often reduced to credential acquisition, and standardisation is masked as equity; spaces like Findhorn matter. Not as perfect places to imitate but as provocations to imagine differently. They demonstrate that experiential knowing can be systematically cultivated. Individual development and collective flourishing need not be opposed, and education can aim towards wholeness rather than just productivity. Communities can function as pedagogues, and daily life can become curriculum.

The I-SMLE Framework developed in this research provides a tool for understanding how such communities establish fields through strategic framing, how they generate and transmit knowledge as social movements and how they embed learning and educational organisation. But beyond analytical utility, it provides an invitation to take seriously the educational potential and organisation of alternative spaces and to identify what mainstream education can learn from such marginal spaces.

Fred Clarke's vision of educative societies remains both necessary and elusive. Necessary to help navigate crises like ecological collapse, social fragmentation and community incohesion, which need citizens who can co-operate, collaborate and create possible solutions. Elusive because creating environments where educational

processes permeate daily life requires resources, commitment and political will that remains scarce. Thus, communities like the Findhorn Foundation do not provide replicable blueprints, but rather provide evidence that such societies are possible, albeit imperfect. They show us what education could look like if it were freed from institutional constraints, but also remind us that all educational arrangements create their own forms of power and exclusion.

This dissertation has been my attempt to understand the experiment that began at Caravan Bay Park and spanned six decades of educational execution, adaptation, and community building, honouring both its achievements and limitations while learning from its insights and acknowledging its boundaries. If I have succeeded, readers will come away not with simple answers, but with enriched questions about where and how education can occur, who gets to define its purpose, and what becomes possible when we imagine learning as inseparable from living. The founders positioned it as a centre of light, and I position it as a space where education is taken as a collective project, where people have dared to organise their lives around learning about themselves, the environment and the world. And such daring by itself matters. Education, as argued in Chapter 2, is a necessary utopia, reaching towards futures not yet realised, and intentional communities remind us that utopias need not remain imaginary but can be built, inhabited and refined through daily practice. Even if they are imperfect, exclusive or contradictory, they will also be generative, transformative and essential. Thus, the educational significance lies not in what they have achieved but in what they continue to attempt.



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## Appendix 1 -Themes and Codes-Publications Data (Chapter 5)

Table 9: Themes and Codes Publication Data

| I-SMLE Component                | Category                   | Description                                                                                                     | Total Codes |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| FRAMES/CUSTODIANSHIP OF FIELD   |                            |                                                                                                                 |             |
| Educator (Founders as Channels) | Preparing the Educators    | Founders' training, spiritual preparation and positioning as channels of divine guidance for the community      | 11          |
| Educator (Intentions)           | Intentions of the Educator | Founders' explicit purposes and goals in establishing Findhorn as spiritual-educational community               | 1           |
| Educator (Authority & Role)     | Founders role in Findhorn  | Peter, Eileen, Dorothy's specific functions in establishing field boundaries, practices and spiritual authority | 7           |
| Field Vision                    | Aims of Founders           | Founders' overarching goals:                                                                                    | 12          |

| <b>I-SMLE Component</b>             | <b>Category</b>               | <b>Description</b>                                                                                  | <b>Total Codes</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
|                                     |                               | creating "centre of light," demonstrating new way of living, spiritual transformation               |                    |
| Field Vision                        | Beliefs about findhorn        | Founders' framing of Findhorn's divine purpose, uniqueness and role in planetary transformation     | 24                 |
| KNOWLEDGE GENERATION & TRANSMISSION |                               |                                                                                                     |                    |
| Content (Core Knowledge)            | Faith in God (Beliefs)        | Foundational ontological assumptions: divine presence, accessibility of guidance, unity with source | 18                 |
| Content (Core Practice)             | Inner Voice & Inner Listening | Founders' teachings on accessing divine guidance—primary method and content of spiritual education  | 23                 |
| Content (Values & Principles)       | Beliefs About Love            | Universal love, seeing perfection in all, radiating love and light as                               | 15                 |

| <b>I-SMLE Component</b>       | <b>Category</b>              | <b>Description</b>                                                                                                  | <b>Total Codes</b> |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
|                               |                              | essential educational content                                                                                       |                    |
| Content (Values & Principles) | Beliefs About Happiness      | Teachings on joy, living in present moment, freedom from material attachment                                        | 7                  |
| Pedagogical Methods           | Ways of teaching             | Founders' approach: teaching by example, demonstration rather than instruction, embodied wisdom                     | 4                  |
| Learning Processes            | Ways of growing              | Founders' vision for spiritual development: openness to change, personal responsibility, progressive transformation | 12                 |
| <b>TOOLS FOR LEARNERS</b>     |                              |                                                                                                                     |                    |
| Content (Educational Aims)    | Aims of Education - Findhorn | Spiritual transformation, inner peace, unity consciousness, seeing perfection—what learners should achieve          | 21                 |



| I-SMLE Component                                                                                                                                                                                 | Category                          | Description                                                                                 | Total Codes |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Content (Community Curriculum)                                                                                                                                                                   | Lessons for the Community         | Founders' teachings on group living, harmony, cooperation and collective spiritual practice | 30          |
| Content (Practical Guidance)                                                                                                                                                                     | How to live your life             | Specific instructions on daily practice, work as love in action, surrender to divine will   | 3           |
| DESIGN, PRACTICES & ENVIRONMENT                                                                                                                                                                  |                                   |                                                                                             |             |
| <i>Integrated throughout—founders established physical space (caravan park, gardens), temporal rhythms (daily guidance, attunement), and social structures (community as demonstration site)</i> |                                   |                                                                                             |             |
| ILLUSIO MAINTENANCE                                                                                                                                                                              |                                   |                                                                                             |             |
| Learner (Ideal Characteristics)                                                                                                                                                                  | Who is the Student                | Founders' framing of who belongs: spiritually receptive, committed, called by divine plan   | 14          |
| Learner (Required Dispositions)                                                                                                                                                                  | Beliefs about Seekers at Findhorn | Expectations for members: pioneers, dedicated souls, wholehearted                           | 14          |

| I-SMLE Component             | Category                                  | Description                                                                             | Total Codes |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
|                              |                                           | commitment to spiritual path                                                            |             |
| Learner (Identity Formation) | Beliefs people must have about themselves | Founders' teachings on self-concept: divine nature, perfection, inseparability from God | 11          |

## Appendix 2- Themes and Codes -Interview Data (Chapter 6)

Table 10 Themes and Codes-Interview Data

| I-SMLE Component                     | Category                                       | Description                                                                                                                 | Total Codes |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>FRAMES/CUSTODIANSHIP OF FIELD</b> |                                                |                                                                                                                             |             |
| Educator (Founders & Authority)      | Opinions about Founders and their role         | Members' perspectives on Peter, Eileen, Dorothy and their continuing influence as educators and channels of divine guidance | 22          |
| Educator (Formation)                 | Parental and Other Influences while growing up | Family backgrounds, religious upbringing and childhood experiences shaping founders' capacity as spiritual educators        | 44          |
| Educator (Formation)                 | Parental and Other Influences while growing up | Early dissatisfaction with conventional paths and seeking alternative spiritualities that prepared founders as teachers     | 28          |
| Educator (Formation)                 | Parental and Other Influences while growing up | Specific teachers, mentors (Sheena Govan, etc.) and spiritual traditions that trained founders to                           | 19          |

|                                                |                                     |                                                                                                                      |    |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
|                                                |                                     | establish educational field                                                                                          |    |
| <b>KNOWLEDGE GENERATION &amp; TRANSMISSION</b> |                                     |                                                                                                                      |    |
| Pedagogical Methods                            | Workshops and Trainings at Findhorn | Formal educational programs, Experience Week, and skill-building opportunities where knowledge is transmitted        | 28 |
| Learning Processes                             | How they learn                      | Member processes of learning through doing, reflection, inner listening and experiential participation               | 30 |
| Educator-Learner Relationship                  | Role of mentors                     | Guidance relationships, focalizers, and experienced members supporting newcomers' development through apprenticeship | 4  |
| Learning Outcomes                              | Learnings at being in Findhorn      | Personal transformation, spiritual growth and practical insights members gain as learners in the community           | 44 |
| <b>TOOLS FOR LEARNERS</b>                      |                                     |                                                                                                                      |    |

|                           |                                              |                                                                                                             |    |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Content (Practices)       | Daily Life at Findhorn - Rituals & Practices | Morning meditations, attunement sessions, work as spiritual practice—the daily curriculum of community life | 23 |
| Content (Method)          | Focalising                                   | Practice of holding group intention and shared decision-making that learners must master                    | 2  |
| Content (Core Practice)   | Inner Listening by members                   | Individual practices of accessing divine guidance—primary skill/content learners must develop               | 51 |
| Content (World/Knowledge) | What is Spirituality?                        | Diverse understandings of divine connection that constitute the knowledge domain learners explore           | 20 |
| Content (World/Knowledge) | What the world needs                         | Community's vision for planetary transformation—the broader purpose/content orienting learning              | 16 |
| Content (Epistemology)    | Bricolage                                    | Creative synthesis of multiple traditions—the method by which                                               | 2  |

|                                            |                           |                                                                                                                  |    |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
|                                            |                           | content is created and validated                                                                                 |    |
| <b>DESIGN, PRACTICES &amp; ENVIRONMENT</b> |                           |                                                                                                                  |    |
| Learning Environment                       | Life at Findhorn          | Overall experience of communal living and work departments—the container where educator-learner-content converge | 36 |
| Learning Environment                       | Idea of Community         | Understanding of collective living and group consciousness—the social structure enabling learning                | 32 |
| Learning Environment                       | Idea of Community         | Physical environment, gardens, eco-village structures—the material spaces where learning occurs                  | 39 |
| Environment (Tensions)                     | Challenges of Findhorn    | Difficulties in community dynamics that become learning content and test educator-learner relationships          | 54 |
| <b>ILLUSIO MAINTENANCE</b>                 |                           |                                                                                                                  |    |
| Learner (Commitment)                       | Motivations of staying on | Reasons members remain as learners despite challenges:                                                           | 29 |

|                           |                            |                                                                                              |   |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
|                           |                            | belonging, purpose, spiritual growth                                                         |   |
| Learner (Integration)     | Opinions about new members | Perspectives on how new learners integrate, their commitment and changing characteristics    | 6 |
| Learner (Characteristics) | Demographic Info           | Age, nationality, education, professional backgrounds—who the learners are socioeconomically | 8 |

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TOTAL NUMBER OF CODES: 537

TOTAL NUMBER OF THEMES: 21



## Appendix 3: bridging table

*Connecting Empirical Findings (Chapters 5-6) to Theoretical Insights (Chapter 7)*

This table demonstrates how the theoretical analysis in Chapter 7 builds directly upon the empirical evidence presented in Chapters 5A, 5B, and 6. It serves as a reference guide showing the connections between historical documentation, contemporary experiences, and theoretical interpretation.

### Field Dynamics

| EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION (Ch 5-6)                                                                                                                                          | THEORETICAL INSIGHT (Ch 7)                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ch 5A: Peter's 'inner knowing manifestation' experiences<br>Ch 5A: Eileen's guidance as community authority<br>Ch 5A: Dorothy's nature communication                   | → Field establishment through founders' distinctive spiritual capital                                                                                        |
| Ch 5A: Sheena Govan's mentorship & eventual separation<br>Ch 5A: 'Establishing autonomy and originality'                                                               | → Strategic boundary-making: separating from previous influences to establish field autonomy                                                                 |
| Ch 5B: October 1971 guidance - 'develop your own inner listening'<br>Ch 5B: Peter 'started to loosen the reins and distribute leadership'                              | → Routinisation of charisma: from founder-dependent authority to institutionalised practices accessible to all members                                       |
| Ch 6: Contemporary members discuss 'inner listening' with diverse interpretations<br>Ch 6: Members describe embodied practices allowing for varied spiritual paths     | → Fieldisation: maintaining coherence despite changing membership through adaptable practices and common ground rather than doctrinal rigidity               |
| Ch 5A: 'Community as divinely ordained'<br>Ch 5B: Members as 'pioneers and explorers into the new'<br>Ch 6: Contemporary motivations (ecological, communal, spiritual) | → Illusio of the field: what motivates sustained participation despite challenges; Evolution from explicit divine purpose to diverse but aligned motivations |

|                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ch 5B: Experience Week structure<br>Ch 5B: Membership criteria & staged entry (Introductory → Full Member)                      | → Systematic socialisation mechanisms (Kanter, 1972) are essential for screening and field reproduction                        |
| Ch 6: Long-term residents' influence<br>Ch 6: Economic precarity as an access barrier<br>Ch 6: 'Privilege of economic security' | → Informal hierarchies: social capital through tenure converts to influence; structural barriers determine who can participate |

## Social Movement Learning

| <b>EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION (Ch 5-6)</b>                                                                                                    | <b>THEORETICAL INSIGHT (Ch 7)</b>                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ch 5A: Eileen's diaries as foundational texts<br>Ch 5A: 'Stories about how they are living'<br>Ch 5B: Publications & guidance texts     | → Knowledge generation through 'cognitive praxis' (Eyerman & Jamison): articulating movement principles and social project                     |
| Ch 5A: Origin stories of founders' journeys<br>Ch 5B: 'Centre of Light' framing<br>Ch 5B: 'Pioneers' and 'dedicated souls'              | → Collective identity formation (Melucci, 1996): answering 'who we are' and 'what we stand for'                                                |
| Ch 5A: Diverse expertise contributions (art, sacred dance, music, permaculture)<br>Ch 5B: 'Spiritual identity umbrella'                 | → Learning through social action (Foley, 1999): members contribute skills within a spiritual identity framework                                |
| Ch 5B: Documentation of decisions & experiments<br>Ch 5B: Reflections creating 'collective content'                                     | → Systematisation of learning: creating transmittable collective knowledge                                                                     |
| Ch 6: Post-COVID restructuring (2024)<br>Ch 6: 'Questioning, reflection, adaptation'<br>Ch 6: Ambitions to 'stay relevant and evolving' | → Learning organisation (Senge, 1990): questioning and adaptation as fabric of community practice                                              |
| Ch 6: Survivorship bias concerns<br>Ch 6: Validation through continued membership                                                       | → Epistemological challenge: pragmatic validity vs. delayed consequences and ambiguity; experiential validation drives continued participation |

## Educational Relationships: From Prescribed Practices to Epistemological Pluralism

### EDUCATOR CONCEPTION

| <b>EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION (Ch 5-6)</b>                                                                                                                  | <b>THEORETICAL INSIGHT (Ch 7)</b>                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ch 5A: Eileen as 'channel' for divine guidance<br>Ch 5A: Dorothy's nature communication<br>Ch 5B: 'Divine guidance as ultimate educator'              | → Authority diversification: from founders as channels to distributed spiritual authority accessible to all                      |
| Ch 5B: October 1971 shift - 'develop your own inner listening'<br>Ch 6: Contemporary 'diverse pathways' (embodiment, creative expression, attunement) | → From prescribed guidance to personalised pathways responsive to learners' needs and capacities                                 |
| Ch 5B: Nature as teacher (co-creation principle)<br>Ch 5B: Body as wisdom source<br>Ch 6: 'Collective as knowledge generator'                         | → Multiple educator sources: divine, nature, body, collective, experienced members                                               |
| Ch 6: 'Horizontal accountability'<br>Ch 6: Authority from 'expertise and service'                                                                     | → Fluid authority: emerges from momentary expertise rather than permanent position; potential to obscure structural inequalities |

### EDUCAND POSITIONING

| <b>EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION (Ch 5-6)</b>                                                               | <b>THEORETICAL INSIGHT (Ch 7)</b>                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ch 5B: 'Fully dedicated souls' & 'pioneers'<br>Ch 5B: Members as 'divinely selected'               | → From divine selection to self-directed seeking: learners choose participation based on alignment with community values   |
| Ch 5B: Spiritual homogeneity expected<br>Ch 6: Diverse motivations (ecological, healing, activism) | → Motivational diversity: ecological considerations, personal healing, social activism; risk of diluting movement identity |

|                                                   |                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ch 6: Learners as 'self-directed seekers'         | → Self-direction as a requirement: quality of experience depends on initiative and relationship-building |
| Ch 6: 'Personal bonds over institutional process' |                                                                                                          |

## CONTENT RECONCEPTUALISATION

| <b>EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION (Ch 5-6)</b>                                                             | <b>THEORETICAL INSIGHT (Ch 7)</b>                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ch 5B: Focus on 'spiritual transformation'                                                       | → From individual development techniques to diverse curriculum: collective dimensions, group consciousness, community as knowledge producer, relational capacity |
| Ch 5B: Founders' practices (inner listening, attunement, work as love)                           |                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Ch 6: Contemporary curriculum includes 'relationships, leadership as social function'            |                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Ch 6: 'Community living generates distinctive knowledge unavailable through individual practice' | → Embodied collective learning: knowledge emerges through participation, co-occurs with individual development                                                   |

## ENVIRONMENT AS PEDAGOGUE

| <b>EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION (Ch 5-6)</b>         | <b>THEORETICAL INSIGHT (Ch 7)</b>                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ch 5B: Garden as 'pilot project'             | → Physical environment as tangible curriculum: immersion rather than abstraction                                     |
| Ch 5B: Ecological infrastructure             |                                                                                                                      |
| Ch 6: 'Living practices as curriculum'       |                                                                                                                      |
| Ch 6: Social environment as 'container'      | → Social environment creates conditions for growth through interpersonal patterns, deep relationships, and conflicts |
| Ch 6: 'Encourages and challenges'            |                                                                                                                      |
| Ch 6: Deep relationships alongside conflicts |                                                                                                                      |
| Ch 5A: Spiritual bricolage tradition         | → Cultural environment: diverse 'isms' create learning opportunities; risk of superficiality and appropriation       |
| Ch 6: Adaptation of diverse traditions       |                                                                                                                      |
| Ch 6: 'Practices unlikely found elsewhere'   |                                                                                                                      |

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## THEORY OF EDUCATION

### Ontological Foundations: Participatory Ontology

| <b>EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION (Ch 5-6)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>THEORETICAL INSIGHT (Ch 7)</b>                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Ch 5A: Peter's 'intuitive knowing beyond words'</p> <p>Ch 5A: Eileen's 'inner listening' practice</p> <p>Ch 5A: Dorothy's 'co-creation with nature'</p> <p>Ch 5B: 'Accessibility of divine guidance through specific practices'</p> | <p>→ Participatory ontology (Ferrer, 2001): reality co-emerges through conscious participation; challenges dualistic separation between knower and known</p>                        |
| <p>Ch 5A: Multiple pathways (Eileen's voice, Dorothy's images, Peter's intuition)</p> <p>Ch 6: 'Somatic, emotional, creative pathways'</p>                                                                                             | <p>→ Distributed spiritual authority: knowledge accessible through rational, somatic, and spiritual dimensions (Ferrer's 'collaborative participation of all human attributes')</p> |
| <p>Ch 5A: Eileen's shift from hearing God to 'everyone can access divine guidance'</p> <p>Ch 6: 'Individual inner knowing' &amp; 'community wisdom' as sources</p>                                                                     | <p>→ Distributed spiritual enquiry: learning emerges through interaction of divine guidance, community wisdom, and individual inner knowing</p>                                     |

### Epistemological Stance: Knowledge Systems

| <b>EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION (Ch 5-6)</b>                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>THEORETICAL INSIGHT (Ch 7)</b>                                                                                                                     |
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| <p>Ch 5A: Eileen's inner voice as 'God speaking'</p> <p>Ch 5A: Dorothy's nature spirits communication</p> <p>Ch 5A: Peter's manifestation through faith</p> <p>Ch 5B: 'Inner knowing' as primary method</p> | <p>→ Multi-source epistemology: knowledge emerges through divine guidance, embodied experience, community wisdom, rational analysis</p>               |
| <p>Ch 5B: 'Inner knowing' emphasised repeatedly</p> <p>Ch 6: 'Everyone can access divine guidance'</p> <p>Ch 6: Diverse interpretations by members</p>                                                      | <p>→ Epistemic authority challenge: How are conflicting knowledge claims adjudicated when all can access divine guidance?</p>                         |
| <p>Ch 5A: Eileen's guidance validated by Sheena</p> <p>Ch 5A: The community accepted Eileen's authority</p> <p>Ch 6: Contemporary peer validation</p> <p>Ch 6: 'Social validation drives participation'</p> | <p>→ Validation mechanisms: Initially founder-centred, evolved to peer and community validation; risk of groupthink vs. genuine collective wisdom</p> |
| <p>Ch 5B: 'Community living generates knowledge unavailable through individual practice'</p>                                                                                                                | <p>→ Individual vs. collective knowledge: Both personal development and collective wisdom</p>                                                         |

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| Ch 6: 'Individual self-development occurs within and through collective engagement' | generation co-occur through unified practices (paradoxical relationship)                                                                                                |
| Ch 5B: 'Knowledge validity based on participatory engagement'                       | → Experiential epistemology (Heron & Reason, 1997): knowing through 'being present, direct encounter, empathy and resonance'                                            |
| Ch 5B: Focalisation - leadership through progressive responsibility                 |                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Ch 6: 'Learning through doing'                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Ch 6: 'When members report guidance aligning with community values'                 | → Validation problem: Is it spiritual communication, unconscious internalisation, or projection? Closed loop of community-defined effectiveness risks epistemic closure |
| Ch 6: Overlap of practice and content                                               |                                                                                                                                                                         |

## Language and Educational Framework

| <b>EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION (Ch 5-6)</b>                                          | <b>THEORETICAL INSIGHT (Ch 7)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ch 5A: Eileen's practice of 'be still and know that I am God'                 | → Inner Listening: Evolved from Eileen's receiving divine messages to diverse contemporary approaches (embodied awareness, intuitive knowing); linguistic flexibility offers inclusivity but challenges conceptual clarity                                         |
| Ch 5B: 'Access the knowledge that lives within you'                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Ch 6: 'Inner listening interpreted diversely'                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Ch 6: Embodied awareness, intuitive knowing                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Ch 5A: Dorothy choosing 'Deva' as a culturally neutral term                   | → Co-creation with Nature: Evolved from literal nature spirit communication to ecological sensitivity and sustainable practices; bridges environmental stewardship as spiritual practice; risks romanticising nature while avoiding environmental justice          |
| Ch 5B: 'Nature as teacher and partner'                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Ch 6: 'Ecological sensitivity, sustainable practices, non-human intelligence' |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Ch 5A: Peter's 'work as love in action'                                       | → Work as Love in Action: Peter's principle spiritualizing daily tasks evolved into a pedagogical model; community activities as primary learning experiences; integrates skill acquisition with character development; risks enabling exploitation as 'spiritual' |
| Ch 5B: 'Spiritualizing daily tasks'                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Ch 6: 'Learning leadership through mundane tasks'                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Ch 6: 'Gardening as contemplative practice'                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Ch 5B: Focalisation as temporary leadership                                   | → Focalisation: Distributed leadership model where temporary authority emerges through                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Ch 6: 'Authority emerges through service'                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

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| Ch 6: Informal hierarchies despite egalitarian aims                                                                            | service; suggests egalitarian ambitions but informal hierarchies exist                                                                                                                      |
| Ch 5B: 'Attunement before meetings'<br>Ch 6: 'Shared experience reinforcing culture'<br>Ch 6: 'Induction into community ethos' | → Attunement: Collective spiritual preparation functioning as an educational method, community building, and field maintenance; serves as a socialisation tool for new and existing members |

### Pedagogical Approaches: Learning Through Being

| <b>EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION (Ch 5-6)</b>                                                                                                                                    | <b>THEORETICAL INSIGHT (Ch 7)</b>                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ch 5A: Founders 'living their principles'<br>Ch 5B: 'Work is Love in Action'<br>Ch 6: 'Community life as primary learning'<br>Ch 6: Daily tasks as learning experiences | → Learning by Living and Doing: Education through authentic community life rather than simulated activities; dissolves education-life boundaries; risk of hidden curriculum |
| Ch 5A: Peter embodying faith & manifestation<br>Ch 5A: Eileen demonstrating inner listening<br>Ch 6: Members observe and participate                                    | → Teaching by Example: Primary method is embodying desired qualities; learning through observation and participation rather than explanation and analysis                   |
| Ch 5B: Experience Week as orientation<br>Ch 5B: Focalisation roles emerging from service<br>Ch 6: 'From visitor to member to focaliser'                                 | → Progressive Responsibility: Informal apprenticeship-like structure; systematic progression from simple to complex; temporary, expertise-based roles                       |
| Ch 5B: 'Daily meditation and attunement'<br>Ch 5B: Recording and reflecting on guidance<br>Ch 6: 'Contemplative practices as essential skills'                          | → Integration of Experience, Reflection, and Guidance: Learning through application and reflective integration; self-reflection as an assessment tool                       |

### Curriculum and Content: Holistic Development

| <b>EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION (Ch 5-6)</b>                                                                                                                         | <b>THEORETICAL INSIGHT (Ch 7)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                |
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| Ch 5A: Eileen's daily meditation practice<br>Ch 5A: Dorothy's attunement to nature<br>Ch 5B: Inner listening as 'central process by which community evolves' | → Spiritual Development Curriculum: Core content includes developing inner listening, trusting inner knowing, integrating spiritual practice with daily life; non-standardised, adaptable to individual pathways |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
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| Ch 6: Contemplative practices, meditation, attunement                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Ch 5B: Shared decision-making structures<br>Ch 5B: Focalisation and distributed leadership<br>Ch 6: 'Learning leadership, group dynamics through mundane tasks'<br>Ch 6: Navigating ambiguity in community | → Community Living Skills: Understanding group dynamics, communication arts, leadership development through progressive responsibility and mentorship; acquired through practice not simulations                          |
| Ch 5A: Dorothy's garden as co-creation<br>Ch 5B: 'Ecological infrastructure, sustainable systems'<br>Ch 6: Permaculture, renewable energy<br>Ch 6: 'Lower environmental footprint'                         | → Ecological Literacy: Practical and philosophical understanding of human-environment dynamics; recognising the natural world as a teacher and learning partner; living in respect of that understanding                  |
| Ch 5A: Founders' exposure to global wisdom<br>Ch 6: UN connections, ecovillage networks<br>Ch 6: 'FIC, ecovillage networks engagement'                                                                     | → Global Perspective: Understanding global challenges, social movements, intentional community networks; situating local learning within the planetary transformation context                                             |
| Ch 5A: Founders' texts as foundation<br>Ch 5B: Diverse traditions encouraged<br>Ch 6: 'Individuals find what resonates'<br>Ch 6: Personal interpretation required                                          | → Comprehensive, Integrated Curriculum: Domains do not exist independently but integrate; incorporates founders' teachings, diverse traditions, and contemporary wisdom; requires personal interpretation and application |

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## NESTED CONTEXTS MODEL

### Seekership as Integrating Core

| EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION (Ch 5-6)                                                                                                                                                                                         | THEORETICAL INSIGHT (Ch 7)                                                                                                                                         |
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| Ch 5A: Peter's search for truth through ologies and isms'<br>Ch 5A: Dorothy's quest for satisfactory answers about life'<br>Ch 5B: 'Seekers of personal transformation'<br>Ch 6: Members describe 'spiritual seeking' | → Seekership as Organising Principle: members arrive with 'pre-existing needs or deep inner longing'; internal commitment determines engagement depth and duration |



|                                                 |                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ch 5B: 'Develop your own inner listening'       | → Seekership Activates Learning: uses internal authority to determine learning paths, resources, and practices |
| Ch 6: 'Members determine their own paths'       |                                                                                                                |
| Ch 6: Individual autonomy in choosing resources |                                                                                                                |

### Individual Learning (Inner Ring): Practices & Spiritual Development

| <b>EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION (Ch 5-6)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>THEORETICAL INSIGHT (Ch 7)</b>                                                                                                                                            |
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| Ch 5A: Eileen's daily meditation practice<br>Ch 5A: Dorothy's attunement to nature<br>Ch 5B: 'Inner listening as core practice'<br>Ch 6: 'Sustained spiritual practice'<br>Ch 6: 'Daily meditation and contemplation' | → Inner Ring Practices: Spiritual practices enabling direct experiential transformation; inner listening, divine guidance, embodied knowing, attunement, discernment         |
| Ch 5A: 'God is within'<br>Ch 5B: 'Body as wisdom source'<br>Ch 6: 'Bodily wisdom, nature intelligence'                                                                                                                | → Revelatory & Experiential Epistemology: Knowledge emerges through direct participation; non-human sources as primary educational authorities                               |
| Ch 5B: 'Spiritual capital operates as currency'<br>Ch 6: 'Fluency in spiritual vocabulary'<br>Ch 6: 'Self-trust and self-direction'                                                                                   | → Requirements: Deep commitment to sustained spiritual practice, substantial autonomy, self-direction, spiritual/community vocabulary, self-trust                            |
| Ch 5B: 'Spiritual realisation demonstrates alternatives'<br>Ch 6: 'Spiritual practices constitute curriculum'                                                                                                         | → Goal: Personal spiritual realisation as demonstration of alternative possibilities (prefigurative praxis); spiritual practices are both a pedagogical approach and content |

### Educational Interactions (Middle Ring): Pedagogical Structures

| <b>EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION (Ch 5-6)</b>                                                                                                                                                              | <b>THEORETICAL INSIGHT (Ch 7)</b>                                                                                                                |
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| Ch 5A: Sheena as mentor to founders<br>Ch 5B: Focalisation roles established<br>Ch 6: 'Experienced members as resources'<br>Ch 6: 'Mentoring relationships'<br>Ch 6: 'Progressive responsibility' | → Middle Ring Structures: Mentoring relationships, focalisation roles, progressive skills development, ecological literacy, community leadership |

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| <p>Ch 5B: 'Focalisers make decisions with community'</p> <p>Ch 6: 'Temporary, expertise-based roles'</p> <p>Ch 6: 'Horizontal accountability'</p>                 | <p>→ Pedagogical Relationships: Experienced members as resources, not authorities; temporary roles emerging from context, not formal positions</p>                                            |
| <p>Ch 5B: Membership progression (Introductory → Full)</p> <p>Ch 6: 'Taking on community responsibilities'</p> <p>Ch 6: 'Engaging with community functioning'</p> | <p>→ Requirements: Sustained participation with moderate commitment, willingness to take responsibility, relational capacity to engage with the community</p>                                 |
| <p>Ch 5B: 'Skill development contributes to movement building'</p> <p>Ch 6: 'Cultural capital of tenure converts to influence'</p>                                | <p>→ Integration: Skills development contributes to movement sustainability; pedagogical structures provide relational contexts for self-development; tenure converts to symbolic capital</p> |

### Social Movement (Outer Ring): Community/Collective Practices

| <b>EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION (Ch 5-6)</b>                                                                                                                                                   | <b>THEORETICAL INSIGHT (Ch 7)</b>                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Ch 5B: Experience Week as orientation</p> <p>Ch 6: 'Public workshops, visitor programs'</p> <p>Ch 6: 'Short-term exposure'</p> <p>Ch 6: 'All members entered through this ring'</p> | <p>→ Outer Ring Entry Points: Experience Week, public workshops, work department vacancies, visitor programs, short-term exposure</p>              |
| <p>Ch 5A: BBC program &amp; Man Alive documentary</p> <p>Ch 5B: Publications, newsletters</p> <p>Ch 6: 'Curated offerings for visitors'</p>                                            | <p>→ Movement Communication: Publicity, internal networks, stories legitimize field and attract participants</p>                                   |
| <p>Ch 5B: Experience Week introduces 'core practices, community history, norms'</p> <p>Ch 6: 'Screening mechanism' (Kanter, 1972)</p>                                                  | <p>→ Socialisation Function: Structured socialisation transmits norms, builds commitment, screens newcomers (essential for community survival)</p> |
| <p>Ch 5B: 'Ecological sustainability, community living, spiritual exploration'</p> <p>Ch 6: 'Diverse motivations for entry'</p>                                                        | <p>→ Accessible Framing: Diverse entry points (ecological, communal, spiritual) attract participants through accessible language</p>               |

|                                             |                                                                                                         |
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| Ch 5B: 'Minimum commitment, high support'   | → Requirements: Minimal commitment, basic openness, sufficient economic capital for relocation and fees |
| Ch 6: 'Basic openness and economic capital' |                                                                                                         |

### Field Dynamics (Boundary): Capital, Habitus, Illusio

| <b>EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION (Ch 5-6)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>THEORETICAL INSIGHT (Ch 7)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ch 5A: Founders relocated to Scotland<br>Ch 5B: Membership fees required<br>Ch 6: 'Economic precarity as barrier'<br>Ch 6: 'Privilege of economic security'                                                                                          | → Economic Capital: Sufficient for relocation to Scotland, program fees, and financial precarity                                                                                                                                                         |
| Ch 5A: Founders' bricolage of traditions<br>Ch 5B: 'Openness to diverse wisdom sources'<br>Ch 6: 'Community-specific vocabulary'                                                                                                                     | → Cultural Capital: Comfort with alternative spiritual frameworks, ecological ideologies, community-specific vocabulary and norms                                                                                                                        |
| Ch 5A: BBC connections, network building<br>Ch 5B: UN relationships, ecovillage networks<br>Ch 6: 'FIC, Global Ecovillage Network'                                                                                                                   | → Social Capital: Access to the community's existence, peer groups validating alternative choices, networks providing legitimacy                                                                                                                         |
| Ch 5B: 'Life flexibility allows participation'<br>Ch 6: 'Obligations allow for relocation'                                                                                                                                                           | → Temporal Capital: Life flexibility to allow geographic relocation and sustained community engagement                                                                                                                                                   |
| Ch 6: 'Self-direction without external validation'<br>Ch 6: 'Tolerance for ambiguity'<br>Ch 6: 'Resilience to navigate dynamics'                                                                                                                     | → Psychological Capital: Self-direction without external validation, tolerance for ambiguity, resilience to navigate community dynamics and interpersonal challenges                                                                                     |
| Ch 5A: Founders' vocabulary ('guidance,' 'light,' 'attunement')<br>Ch 5B: 'Specific language and vocabulary'<br>Ch 6: 'Holding space,' 'let us attune'<br>Ch 6: 'Sitting in circles, attunement pauses'<br>Ch 6: Sacred dance, seasonal celebrations | → Habitus (Embodied Dispositions): Speech patterns (guidance, holding space, attune), physical comportment (circles, eyes closed), emotional vulnerability and spiritual language, temporal rhythms (attunement, seasonal celebrations), conflict frames |
| Ch 5A: 'Divinely ordained community'                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | → Illusio (Investment Sustaining Commitment): Founders framed as divinely ordained with                                                                                                                                                                  |

|                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ch 5B: 'Demonstrating alternatives, fulfilling divine purpose'   | fulfilling purpose and demonstrating alternatives; contemporary members maintain through ecological appeal, spiritual ethos, communal connections; illusio diversity enables field coherence despite pluralism |
| Ch 6: 'Ecological appeal, communal connections, spiritual ethos' |                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

## Permeable Boundaries and Variable Trajectories

| EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION (Ch 5-6)                                                                                                                                              | THEORETICAL INSIGHT (Ch 7)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
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| Ch 6: 'Workshop facilitator while personally practising and managing community work'<br><br>Ch 6: 'Morning meditation, afternoon community work, evening workshop leading' | → Concurrent Dimensions: Members operate across multiple dimensions simultaneously (practising inner dimension, facilitating middle ring, leading outer ring); dimensions are inseparable and co-occurring                                                                                     |
| Ch 5B: Visitor → Introductory → Full Member<br><br>Ch 6: 'Progressive engagement over time'<br><br>Ch 6: 'From visitor to focaliser to workshop leader'                    | → Sequential Trajectory: New visitor enters outer ring with minimal commitment; if engagement deepens, takes progressive steps; sustained participation, responsibilities, relationships; potential movement to inner practices over time; eventually may lead workshops or mentor new members |
| Ch 6: 'Varying engagement with different aspects'<br><br>Ch 6: 'Some focus on ecology, others on spirituality'                                                             | → Variable Commitment: Not all members follow linear progression; some engage deeply with specific dimensions (ecology vs. spirituality); tension between collective and individual intentions is productive rather than problematic                                                           |

## KEY EMPIRICAL PATTERNS ACROSS CHAPTERS

### CONTINUITY PATTERNS

- Inner listening remains core from Eileen's 1962 practice to 2024 members
- Co-creation with nature continues from Dorothy's devas to contemporary permaculture
- Work as spiritual practice sustained from Peter's management to the current community tasks
- Emphasis on personal transformation as community purpose spans all periods

### EVOLUTION PATTERNS

- Authority: From Eileen's exclusive guidance → everyone develops inner listening (1971)
- Leadership: From founder-centred → distributed through focalisation (1972+)
- Vocabulary: From 'God' → 'divine' → 'inner wisdom' (increasingly inclusive/vague)

- Entry: From divinely selected pioneers → self-directed seekers with diverse motivations
- Legitimacy: From charismatic founders → institutionalized practices and external recognition

## TENSION PATTERNS

- Egalitarianism vs. informal hierarchies based on tenure/spiritual capital
- Universal spiritual access vs. cultural/economic barriers to participation
- Individual autonomy vs. community expectations and subtle conformity pressures
- Divine validation vs. practical power dynamics and narrative construction
- Inclusive spiritual pluralism vs. specific vocabulary and habitus requirements

## CONTRADICTIONS EVIDENT IN EMPIRICAL DATA

- 'Non-hierarchical' yet long-term residents hold disproportionate influence
  - 'Accessible to all' yet requires substantial economic, cultural, and temporal capital
  - 'Diverse pathways' yet shared vocabulary and practices create insider/outsider boundaries
  - 'Community-generated knowledge' yet founders' texts maintain privileged status
  - 'Living demonstration' yet geographic isolation and homogeneity limit transferability
-