

Sociocracy Helps Holma Folk Highschool Grow a Sustainable World

By Inge Kuijper



Executive Summary

- [Holma Folkhögskola](#) is a new high school in Sweden providing short courses in fields such as permaculture, transition and sustainability, and a more general high school track based on the same principles.
- The school adopted sociocracy from the beginning and is continuously developing its knowledge and government structure. Challenges were the learning process in parallel with creating a new school, long meetings, and having the Student Assembly function effectively.
- Sociocracy helped create an adaptive environment with an open flow of information, and has offered a good way of structuring an organisation. Guidelines and rules, such as Picture Forming and Proposal Forming have proven to be great methods.

Holma Folkhögskola is a newly established school in Sweden with a focus on sustainability, ecological cultivation, permaculture and the transition to a post-oil society. Its aim is to get people into Transition thinking, and the school is unique in how it embodies their green ideology. This is in fact a high school where all teachers are trained in both permaculture and sociocracy.

And yes, that includes the maths teacher. It is situated in various locations in Lund and other rural locations. The school can easily reach an urban audience for its shorter courses.

From their start in 2015 they adopted sociocracy as their method of governance. I spoke to Andreas Jonsson, the new school principal, and Chris Wegweiser, head teacher of Resilient Entrepreneurship and one of the tutors on the Permaculture Design Course. They shared with me the both benefits and lessons learnt from using sociocracy to govern the school.

What Holma Folkhögskola Offers



Holma Folkhögskola is based on two concepts. First, there are General Courses, this is the high school track. It caters to students who have not finished regular formal education, with diverse backgrounds and challenges. A qualified Social Welfare employee is working full time to help cater to the different needs of the students. Students can receive one or two years of formal education. Depending on the needs of the individual, they can choose a custom program that prepares them for university. In these courses teachers work with students of different ages and abilities.

The second concept is Profile courses. These are the ideological courses such as Permaculture Design Courses, Commercial Organic Growing, and Resilient Entrepreneurship.

On any course, at least once a week there are practical learning activities, where students work on gardening or building projects. And the school follows Scandinavian standards: it is funded by the state, and education is free.

“Together we grow a sustainable world”

Currently a total of about 100 students are enrolled in the various shorter Profile courses combined, and 36 students are in the formal education track. The classes are in Swedish, but the school also attracts international students. The school is experiencing continuous growth in students and courses offered. In the near future the school plans to add a further 4 or 5 courses, and it is looking for a larger building to make space for more students.

The Introduction of Sociocracy

Sociocracy was introduced by Esbjörn Wandt who has been running Organic Growing and Permaculture Courses courses for 20 years. His Permaculture Courses use sociocratic methods to self organise, and disperse responsibility and power to different work groups. In the end of the course, it is more or less independently run by the participants. In the beginning the school received help from Diana Leafe Christian, author [of *Creating a Life Together*](#). She spent two weeks at the school to implement the new structure and facilitate workshops.

Since then, both internal and external sociocracy courses are run regularly to allow anyone who joins the project to be trained on the next upcoming course. Andreas emphasised it is important to have knowledge of sociocracy at all levels of the organisation. Chris joined the school in fall 2016, when the school only in its 2nd semester. Five new staff members joined the one-day Sociocracy 'crash course' before entering into the organisation. He expressed it would be great if there were resources available for a longer introduction course. As the school moves forward, everyone continuous to learn more on how to use sociocracy.

The Circle Structure

Legally, the school is an 'ideological association', or a non-profit. It is owned by its eight member organisations, ranging from Permaculture Sweden to the Biodynamic Association to the Transition network. Each organisation has a representative in the board, as part of the Top Circle. The role of school principal is a necessity in order to receive state funding. (More details on the circle design is described in the Appendix ([<anchor link>](#).)

Andreas mentions it has been challenging for the school to keep the circle structure up to date with the changing domains of each circle. Every circle decides over their unique domain, without

overlapping the domain of another circle. Trying to get the participants circle to function has been a challenge for all. The participants circle includes students of all courses, and once a month they can bring ideas and concerns to the Student Council. Once a month participants, or their representatives, can come to the Student Council. But since people drop out of the circle when they finish their course, it's hard to get continuity. The aim is to find a model in which the participant circle can influence the structural model and path forward. This is a work in progress.

Growing Pains

Chris explains there are colleagues who are not so enthralled with Sociocracy. There have been a lot of long meetings, and they weren't always efficient. The General Circle had lengthy meetings weekly, which took a lot of energy. This has now changed to meetings every third week. There was also unclarity on the various steps in sociocracy, and doubts whether they were doing it right. It is a good method but not the quickest method, and meeting issues were not always resolved. There have been a lot of misunderstandings on what sociocracy is., but it has improved over time. Chris shares that as a result of limited time and resources, which comes with starting up a new school, it is not possible to hire an external Sociocracy expert, or dedicate a week to Sociocracy training instead of a day. This would have many benefits. Though there has been no training yet on Non Violent Communication (NVC), both Andreas and Chris recognise its importance and, in retrospect, feel it would have aided in a number of situations.

Benefits of Sociocracy

Starting a fast-growing new school whilst implementing sociocracy has been an interesting combination. Learning sociocracy as a school, growing the teacher team, and developing innovative courses, means it change is constantly happening. For Andreas, sociocracy is the future. He believes sociocracy makes an organisation resilient, and adaptive. It promotes an open flow of information, and allows everyone to take part. Chris mentions how sociocracy allows for delegation. Because every circle has their own domain, and delegates in the General Circle, there is no need to have everyone involved in decision making, yet there is room for everyone's ideas. Chris sees sociocracy as a good way of structuring an organisation, as it offers are good guidelines and rules, such as Picture Forming and Proposal Forming. It can also be complicated, since there is a lot to remember. Which steps to take to reach consent, how to deal with objections, and so on. The approach "good enough for now" has been especially helpful. With so much new staff and new courses being founded on different campuses, it helps

to move forward. Then they can they celebrate decisions, then test them, and that fits them well. The focus on feedback loops and testing ideas through policy review dates has also benefited the school.

What's Waiting in The Future

Chris has observed a growing number of people reaching out due to a healthy curiosity about sociocracy. He recognises that sociocracy is blossoming, and anticipates significantly greater adoption over the next 5 years by various organisations and communities. Andreas also sees that growth is happening, even though he sees that reshaping an entire organisation is a big undertaking. At Holma Folkhögskola they perceive that Sociocracy is the future: resilient and adaptive, with an open flow of information.

With thanks to:



Andreas Jonsson

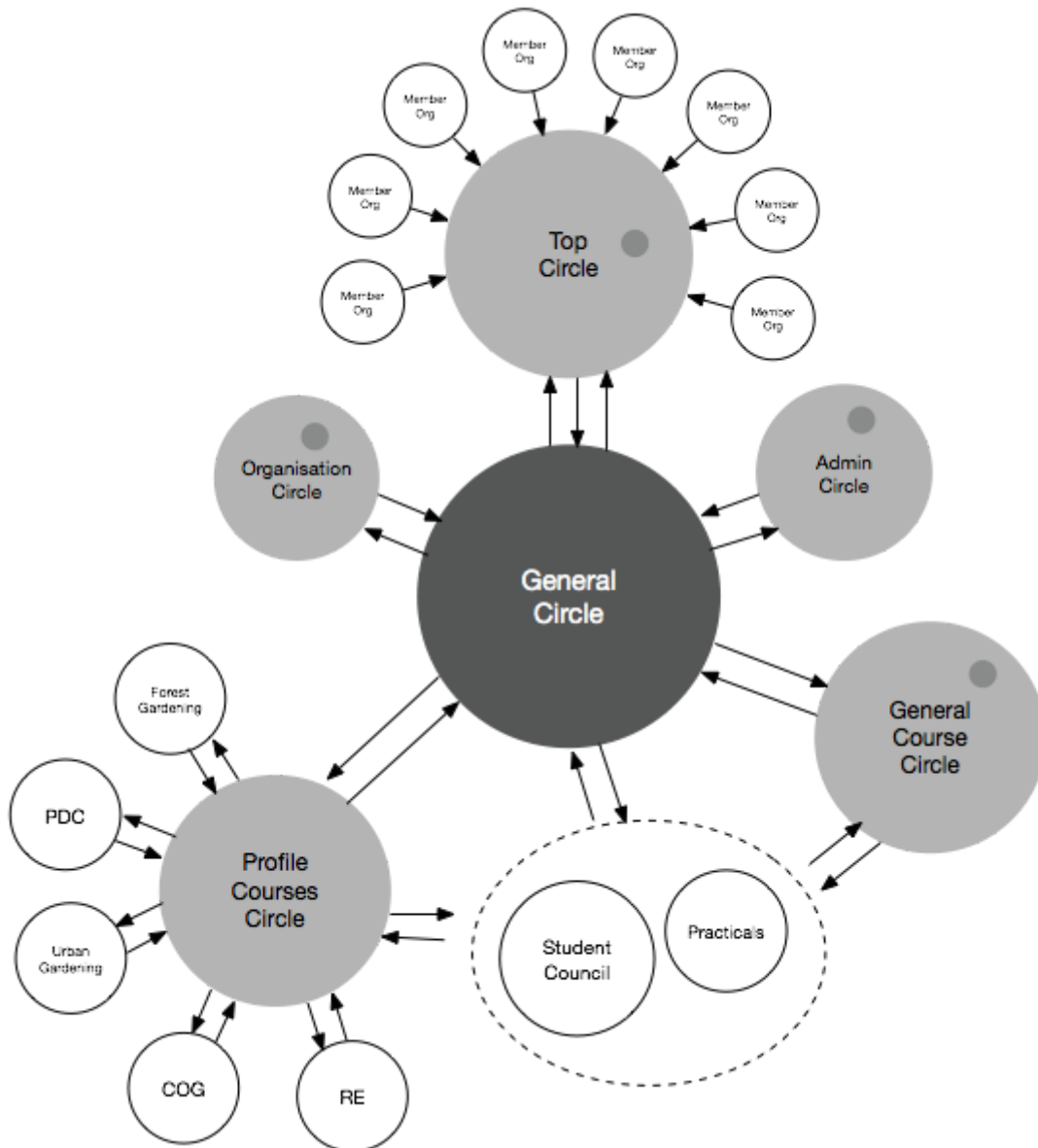
Andreas is teacher of the PDC and starting in his role as the new school principal officially in 2018. This role is planned to develop into be a shared role between Andreas and the current principal Hugo.



Chris Wegweiser

Chris is head teacher of Resilient Entrepreneurship and one of the teacher on the Permaculture Design Course. Formerly teacher at Uppsala University.

Appendix: Circle Structure Holma Folkhögskola



The Top Circle (11 members)

Domain: Vision, mission, policy, which is then delegated to General Circle. For example decisions on the new location for the school.

Admin (3 members)

Domain: finance

Members are the administrator, accountant and the principal

Double link to the Top Circle through the accountant and principal.

Organisation (3 members)

Domain: Keeping track of all new developments as the school is expanding

Delegate from Profile and General course circle & principal

Two members from the Top Circle can attend meetings of this circle if necessary.

The principal is part of this circle and brings expert knowledge on regulations and state funding demands.

General Circle (everyone)

Everyone from connected circles generally join these meetings. However with the growth of the school this will change to maintain its efficiency.

Profile course circle

Domain: All matters related to the Profile courses which are; Forest Gardening, Permaculture Design Course, Urban Gardening, Commercial Organic Growing, and Resilient Entrepreneurship. The Permaculture Design Course and Commercial Organic Growing are Distance Learning courses, and they have a delegate in the circle.

General course circle

Domain: All matters related to the General Course track.

Practicals

Domain: The practical building and gardening projects

A separate course circle where students from General courses meet students and teachers from Profile courses. In this way it also helps to integrate the groups.

Student Council

Domain: All matters relevant to students of General and Profile courses.

Each different course has their own elected student representative in the Student Council.

All participants

Once a month participants or their representative can come to the Student Council.

Principal

The principal is in many circles and often acts as the delegate / leader of those circles in the General Circle. Andreas will join the current principal in 2018 and this will become a split role.