

CASA Latina Case Study

Identity and Vision

(adapted from the [GEN website](#))

[Council of Sustainable Settlements in Latin America](#)

The Council of Sustainable Settlements Latin America, CASA Latina, seeks to articulate and strengthen the actions of the Latin American national and regional networks that promote, train, research and disseminate sustainable and regenerative lifestyles.

The CASA formation process began with the Call of the Mountain IV, and the first Ibero-American meeting of ecovillages Colombia, in January 2012. This gathering pulled together ecovillagers, representatives of sustainable settlements and promoters of rural and urban initiatives.

CASA Latina seeks to create and visualize living examples that can inspire the change towards life patterns that rescue and regenerate the ecological, economic and social systems, which we consider vital to guarantee the permanence of the human species on Earth.

Then to Now

This is the story of a sociocratic organization emerging as a network of active groups. As such, CASA Latina demonstrates large-scale sociocratic implementation and leadership on the world stage.

CASA Latina emerged in 2012 from the sixth Call of the Mountain (Colombian Ecovillages and Alternative Communities Gathering) and the First Ibero-American Ecovillage Gathering, which convened sustainable settlements from more than 12 countries in Latin America. It also included the meeting of delegates of the ENA (Ecovillage Network of America, at that time the American regional of GEN - Global Ecovillage Network). CASA emerged from the need to create an organization based in Latin American culture, languages, and the urgency to articulate different approaches to sustainable settlements: ecovillage, permaculture, transition initiatives, native communities, and so on.

Since then CASA Latina is a Latin American region of GEN and ENA, later called ENNA is the North American one. Among the attendees was Diana Leafe Christian, an expert in sociocracy and communities as well as a member of ENA and GEN for many years. She suggested the use of sociocracy in this emerging organization. At that gathering she gave a short introduction to sociocracy. She offered a further training in 2014 to CASA Colombia, one of the groups that constitute CASA Latina. In 2015 Diana Leafe Christian offered an online training to GEN members. The following year, CASA Latina began offering sociocratic training both in person and online to people in Latin America in the Spanish and Portuguese languages based on the material of Diana Leafe Christian.

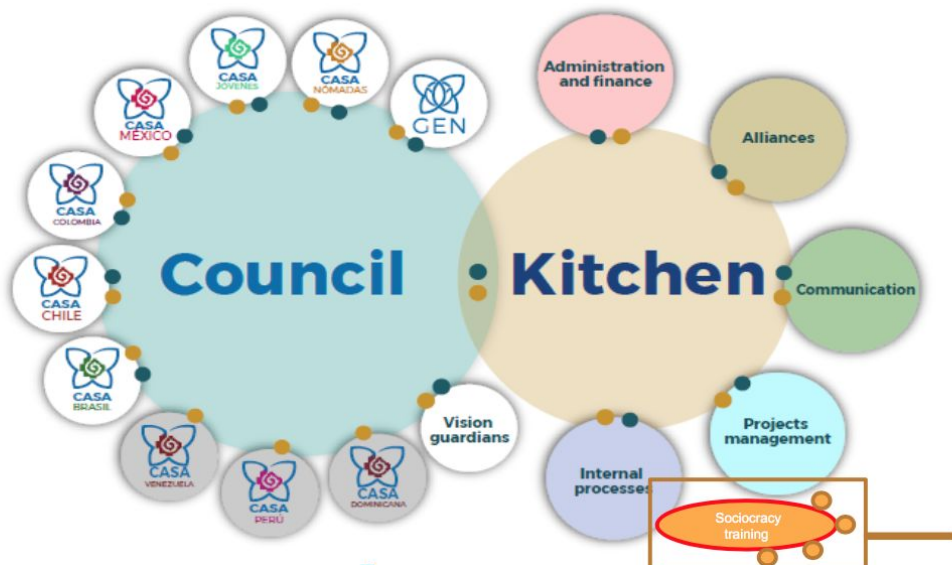
Layers of training developed the understanding of the concepts. In 2017, an alliance formed with an organization (Sociocracia.net) aimed at promoting sociocracy in Spain. In 2018, another alliance was formed with Sociocracy for All. This led to the formation of SoPra : Sociocracia Práctica (Spanish branch of SoFA).

Implementation

Through all of this emergent growth and rich connections with sociocracy, the main focus of the organization has been to bring together the ecovillages and sustainable settlements of Latin America. To this end there is a council structure with circles for each of the countries and their own CASA's. The operational side part of the organization is called "The Kitchen." The kitchen is comprised of the operational circles, working for the fulfillment of the mission, vision and objectives of the organization. The objectives include the need to train members in sociocracy to ensure the most appropriate implementation of sociocracy. As of this case study, these trainings have been the only product and source of income for CASA Latina. They have been able to provide four online iterations as well as 13 in-person workshops across five Latin American countries. Most of the six trainers of CASA Latina trainings were trained directly by Diana Leafe. When asked about implementation, Yuluka offered: "It was hard, long; and we haven't finished yet. It has been good that the circles exist, have good purposes and have operational leaders and representatives in place."

Information is shared through monthly meetings in the kitchen and in the council. The information passes from each circle to the other in an active way. Google drive also holds all of the minutes from one group to another and are open to anyone in the organization. Everyone reports on how they are moving forward on their action plan--what has happened and what still needs to happen and then they move on to problem-solving and further rounds of action.

Organizational Structure



(source: Beatriz Arjona, "Bringing Sociocracy to Latin America" presented at the International Sociocracy online Conference, May 1, 2018)

Sociocracy training circle

The trainings offered by CASA Latina are in collaboration with Gaia U Latina and incorporate their interactive, online learning platform as well as the influence of Diana Leafe Christian and their global allies in sociocracy.



(source: Beatriz Arjona, "Bringing Sociocracy to Latin America"
presented at the International Sociocracy online Conference, May 1, 2018)

Tatiana Monroy



Yuluka Kankurua



Andrés Liévano



Javiera Carrión



Beatriz Arjona



Francisca Escobar



The on-line trainers (source: Beatriz Arjona, "Bringing Sociocracy to Latin America"
presented at the International Sociocracy online Conference, May 1, 2018)

Up to now CASA Latina's trainings have been only been on the subject of sociocracy. Further trainings including NVC and Transition Initiatives are in the design phase. They will both start in the fall of 2018. These initiatives are inspired by sociocracy training methodology, organizational administrative experiences, and the success of the technological platform and alliance with Gaia U Latina. As of June 2018, their first NVC training is planned as following:

Release date: August 2018 / biweekly frequency

Structure of the Training: (8 sessions of 2 hours each, sessions recur every 15 days) The course in a first phase of 4 modules seeks to expand Casa Latina's repertoire of communication to strengthen its relational fabric inwards and outwards. This will generally share the basic components of the NVC. In a second phase of 4 modules, NVC will be applied to practical needs in CASA Latina that the participants identify. The idea is to continue building individual and group competencies to be able to communicate well in service of life.

Using structure to create the right containers

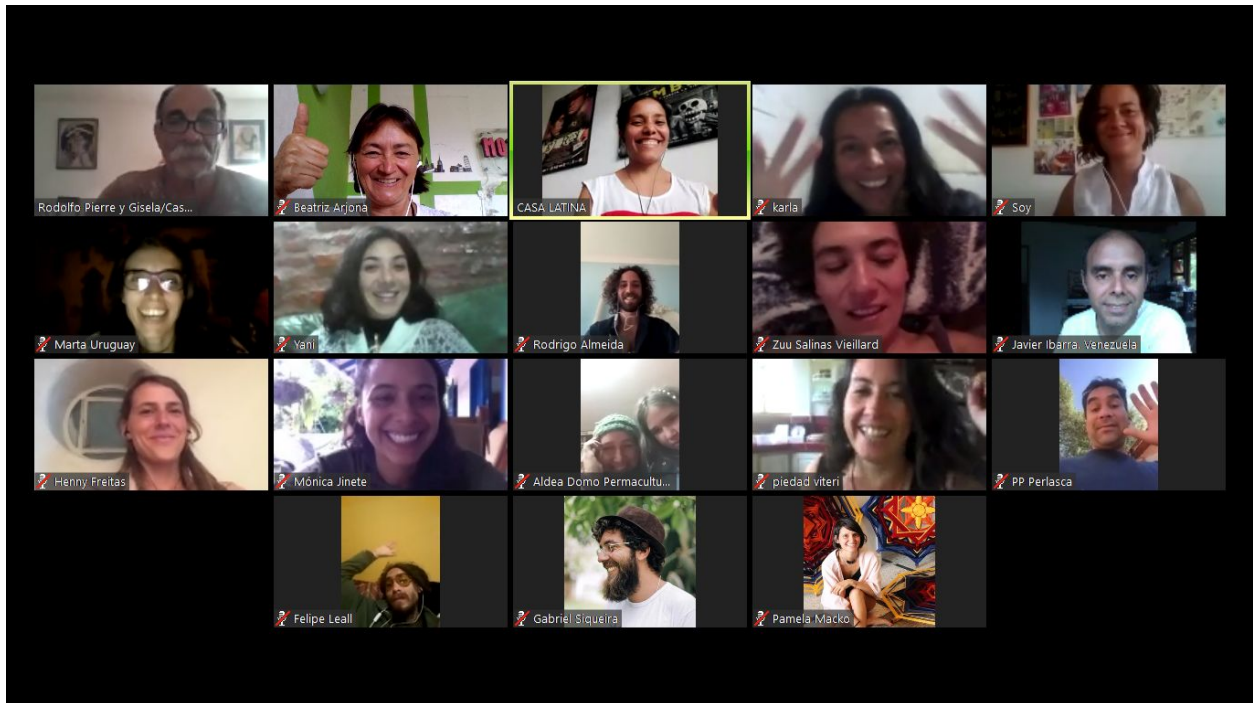
One important insight is that the implementation of sociocracy prevents conflict from arising in the first place. Yuluka agreed that sociocracy helps to prevent conflict resolution, but from her perspective: *"Resolving conflicts is not a matter for sociocracy it is for personal growth and maybe NVC."* This conflict prevention through good process is very important to the success and attraction of sociocracy. CASA Latina has also taken steps to help people process emotion. Beatriz Arjona responded to a question about the importance of conflict resolution like this:

"Indeed. Not only with conflict resolution--but further conflict prevention, and this is more important. This is really evident--and when they arise, NVC is a better tool for resolving it. There are now online sessions that hold space for people to talk about emotional issues that arise. These are facilitated by the NVC trainer and the inner process operational leader. They release emotions and try to resolve it in the easiest way possible. There are places in the agenda to manage and resolve emotion, confusion, and conflict."

The group is spreading this practice, but they are also walking their talk. Throughout the organization some of their members have a practice and training in Nonviolent Communication, and they utilize it as a matter of course in their training and operations. These Empathy Circles are open to all CASA Latina members after their registration and are free. Their notice includes this language about the purpose: "To have an empathic space every month in which we can be with us and be present with what is alive in each one, it can be something that worries you, or that you are celebrating, or that you want to process."



Every circle within CASA Latina meets monthly online and seems to effectively use technology to support their work: “internet, zoom, google drive, and whats app are excellent tools to cross even the continental distances” Beatriz shared. Then there are continental in-person gatherings (ECCO) every two years. In 2015 the gathering was in Colombia; and in 2017 it was in Brazil.



This image shows a zoom meeting of CASA Latina on 5 June 2018 with representatives from: República Dominicana, Colombia, Chile, Venezuela, Uruguay, Argentina, México, Brasil, Ecuador, Youth CASA and nomadics.

Working at different scales

CASA Latina is sophisticated and working at a continental scale which bridges between the global and the national or local. The Global Ecovillage Network has a long history and an active network. Currently, Beatriz Arjona serves as the Vice-President of GEN. She shared that “*GEN has adopt some insight from sociocracy, is inspired in sociocracy, but is not a sociocracy organization. We got an online training with Diana Leafe, we have a sociocracy implementation team on the board (I am part of this team), It has gotten limited success but some effort has been made.*”

The members of CASA Latina are the national CASAs. The consolidated ones are: México, Colombia, Brazil and Chile. The emerging CASAs are: República Dominicana, Uruguay, Ecuador and Venezuela. Youth CASA and Nomad CASA are groups of interest. Some of the groups are implementing sociocracy as well as CASA Latina. They are: Brazil, México, and Republica Dominicana. Because each country implements sociocracy in their own way, CASA Latina did not have details on their process. This seems appropriate as a way to distribute power and accountability. It’s not always a one-way street however, as CASA Colombia pioneered the implementation of sociocracy in CASA Latina. Last year there was a

significant structural change and the new leadership of CASA Colombia moved away from sociocratic governance.



An example of a national CASA sociocratic structure: CASA México (source: Beatriz Arjona, “Bringing Sociocracy to Latin America” presented at the International Sociocracy online Conference, May 1, 2018)

Getting better

When asked what could be better, Beatriz Arjona shared her own personal opinion:

“We could improve our feedback loops which would improve the organization and how sociocracy evolves in the organization. We could also be more active in learning more sociocracy. Some facilitators are very active and study and practice, but many others involved are not actively engaged in study, and this keeps the group from evolving and going more into it.”

Yuluka Kankuraa seems to agree that it would be more helpful for participants to deepen their understanding of sociocracy and what it offers as well as for feedback loops to improve. From a perspective of emergent, or iterative, design, feedback is critical to long-term success and adaptation as is continuing to develop understanding. This differential in developing understanding seems likely to occur on most organizations implementing sociocracy.

Learning from experience is also important. When asked about what might be done differently, Yuluka shared that she might not have stepped into roles she was selected for, but that in consenting to serve in these roles she was offered opportunities she did not anticipate. Learning about roles and understanding them well is a way of pushing your own growing edge while also supporting the needs of the circle. With opportunity for feedback and reflection in place, the participants in the organization seem likely to build trust and become more effective over time.

Advice to groups wanting to implement sociocracy

From Beatriz Arjona: *“Learn, study, create a study group. Take the risk and start. Evaluate regularly what is going well and what could be going better. Interact with another organization to see what they’ve done and how they’ve improved. Use this to improve faster and more efficiently than other groups. Just move forward. And don’t be afraid to start and make mistakes. Tell yourself you have enough information: safe enough to try, and good enough for now.”*

From Yuluka Kankurua: *“Trust the purpose, the team and the collective intelligence.”*

The future

When looking to the future and the impact of sociocracy, I asked whether the broad scale of CASA Latina’s work and the implementation of sociocracy seemed like it was having an impact and helping to shift the culture. Beatriz replied: *“Many sustainable communities already know sociocratic systems thanks to CASA Latina. They are moving forward with this. This is a way that the culture is changing. Our goal is not to have a sociocratic Latin America—it is to have a more sustainable and resilient Latin America. That has an aspect that sociocracy serves.”* Yuluka shared the beautiful vision for how sociocracy connects people: *“we are all equals that sit in circles to make transparent agreements for a common purpose. Life is so easy if we can trust, love what we do, and share it with others that are just another you.”*

Considering the complexity of the network CASA Latina represents and its connections to both the established Global Ecovillage Network and emerging national organizations, we can see how sociocracy scales up and down easily and maintains practices which nourish and honor the contributions of those involved. The challenges of implementation seem to be similar no matter the size or group. With experienced leadership and a means to expand the understanding and practice of sociocracy among the growing organization, there is a lot of reason to celebrate this network and its accomplishments.

Resources

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Website: <https://redcasalatina.org>

- Presentation offered on May 1, 2018 at the International Online Sociocracy Conference: <https://goo.gl/N9B6Mr>
- The Conference itself: <http://www.sociocracyforall.org/conference/>
- VMA: <https://goo.gl/EeWVXM>