How Sociocracy supports Prosociality
With examples from Narara Ecovillage

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Narara Ecovillage

NEV is a co-operative with approximately 180 adults building an intentional community on the NSW Central Coast

Our Aim*: to nurture a resilient and inclusive intergenerational community that inspires collaboration, innovation and fun; to live with kindness, aware of our interdependence with others and the natural world; and to learn and demonstrate ways to thrive within the earth's ecological capacity, drawing on Indigenous wisdom and fostering regenerative environmental, social and economic practices.*

- Not a spiritual community (each to their own), no charismatic leader, just united around this aim

- The development has been entirely self-funded by members, and mostly volunteer driven.

Timeline

Site of the Village: old horticultural research station on the edge of the suburb of Narara and the Strickland State Forest

- Land purchased in 2012
- Stage 1 subdivision completed 2018
- Currently about 35 homes are occupied (of 43 building blocks), and others under construction.
- There are also 18 'cluster' units that we expect to be occupied this year.

Years of planning & working together on the site meant we had a strong community even before people could move in

What is prosocial behaviour and how do organisations create cultures of mutual trust and collaboration?

Prosocial behavior is defined as **'voluntary behavior intended to benefit another'** (Eisenberg et al., 2006). It is characterized by acts of kindness, compassion, and helping behaviors, which many consider to be one of the finest qualities of human nature.

Implement Prosocial Design Principles (adapted from Lin Ostroms work). Sociocracy is a key implementation approach.

Foster psychological flexibility in all members ie. the ability to stay centred, be open, respond (not react) and focus on the shared goal.

Sociocracy and Prosocial
Writing by Ted Rau, Sociocracy for All

Book: Who Decides who Decides. Chapter 8. Now and Forever. Describes Core Design Principles

Blog: Feb 7, 2018: The Ostrom Principles and Sociocracy

Ostrom's principles of sustainable cooperation

Ostrom observed Economic theory assumes:

- We are all self-interested and that it is irrational to act altruistically.

- This trait invariably results in the tragedy of overuse.

- We must rely upon markets (privatisation) or top-down governmental actions (rules and taxes) to avoid the tragedy.

But Ostrom found that in fact:

- People do manage to cooperate very successfully in complex networks of groups and institutions.

- That, *in supportive contexts, humans quite naturally act altruistically*.
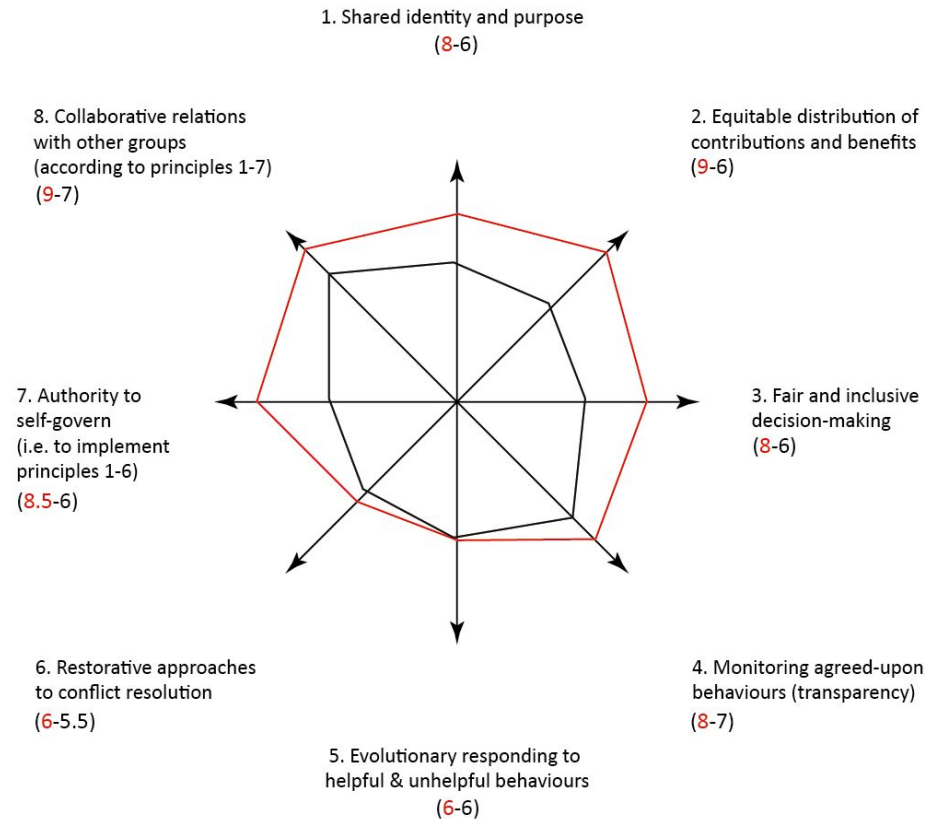
How are common-pool resources managed successfully?

ELINOR OSTROM
2009 Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences

Nobel medal © ® The Nobel Foundation

Eight Principles for the Governance of Sustainable and Equitable Communities and Organizations

1. Shared identity and purpose - as bounded groups responsible for working together.

2. Equitable distribution of contributions and benefits - ensure a perception by all parts of the organisation that benefits are matched as fairly and equitably as possible to contribution.

3. Fair and inclusive decision-making - processes that include all those impacted by the outcomes of our endeavours.

4. Tracking and reviewing agreed-upon behaviours - visibility of outcomes or efforts made towards outcomes. Transparent record keeping, feedback loops, both material and relational, that allow us to track and learn from the effects of our actions and choices.

5. Graduated responses to helpful and unhelpful behaviours – learning mechanisms such as giving and receiving feedback that allow us to improve in pursuit of our value-directed goals. Feedback loops and evolving best practice.

6. Restorative approaches to conflict resolution - approaches based on restorative justice principles that only retain punitive responses for the most flagrant violations.

7. Authority to self-govern - sufficient local autonomy from other groups to enable choice and internal decisions.

8. Collaborative relations with other groups - that embody principles 1-7 thus enabling the interdependent and sustainable use of resources to be scaled up to larger systems.

Eight Principles for the Governance of
Sustainable and Equitable Communities & Organisations

Red = within group ranking
Black = between group ranking

1. Shared identity and purpose
(8-6)

2. Equitable distribution of
contributions and benefits
(9-6)

8. Collaborative relations
with other groups
(according to principles 1-7)
(9-7)

3. Fair and inclusive
decision-making
(8-6)

7. Authority to
self-govern
(i.e. to implement
principles 1-6)
(8.5-6)

4. Monitoring agreed-upon
behaviours (transparency)
(8-7)

6. Restorative approaches
to conflict resolution
(6-5.5)

5. Evolutionary responding to
helpful & unhelpful behaviours
(6-6)

(Adopted from the work of Elinor Ostrom)

How can we implement the Design Principles?

Please consider:
- *The relevance of the principle*
- *The level of awareness of the principle*
- *How well it is being implemented*
- *How each principle can be implemented more effectively*
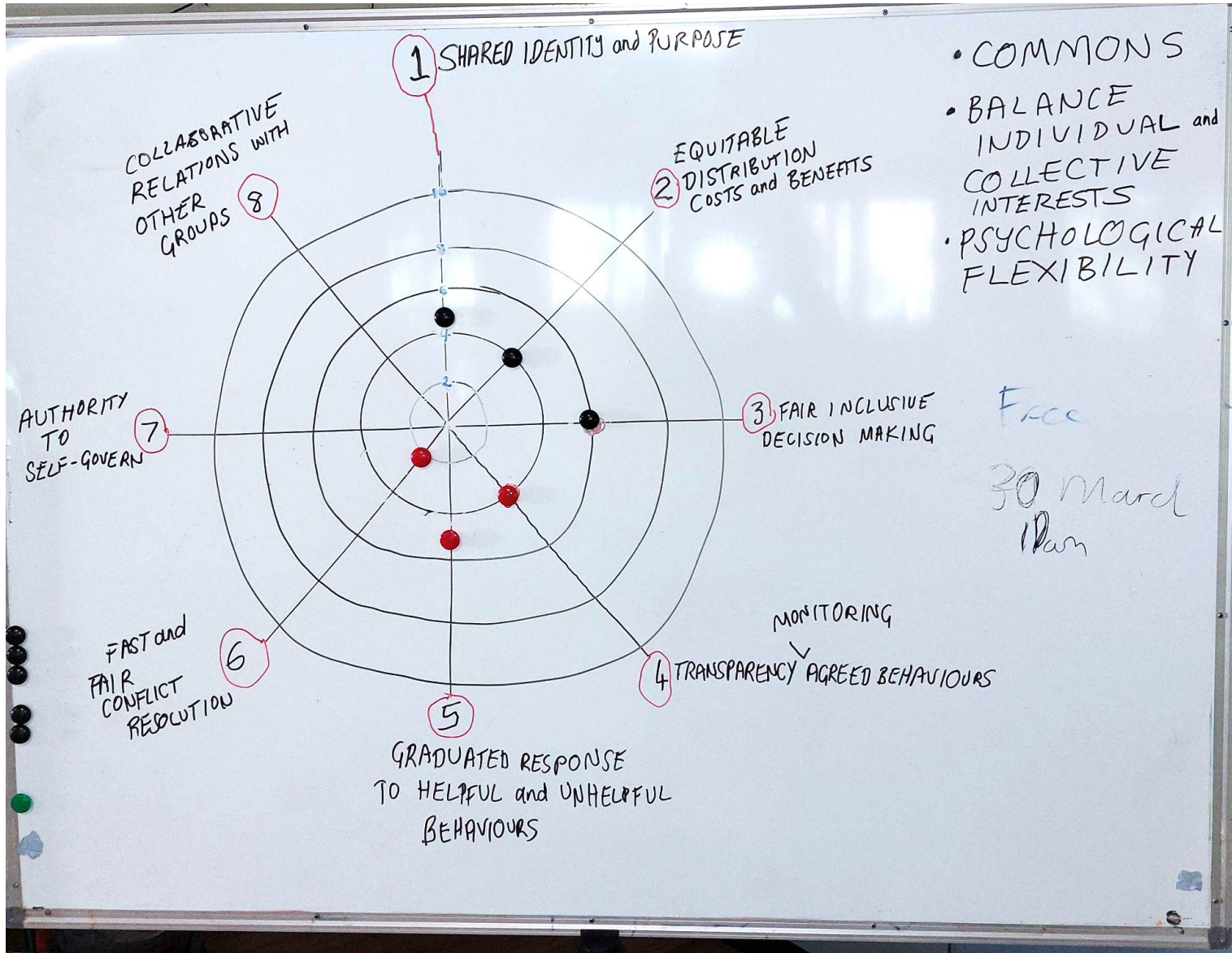
CDP 1: Shared Identity and Purpose
Example of implementation: Volunteer work at Narara Ecovillage

Genuine empowerment in the context of shared purpose means people know their energy can make a difference in an area that is important to them.
This is enormously motivating, and will help build a resilient and strong community in an uncertain future.
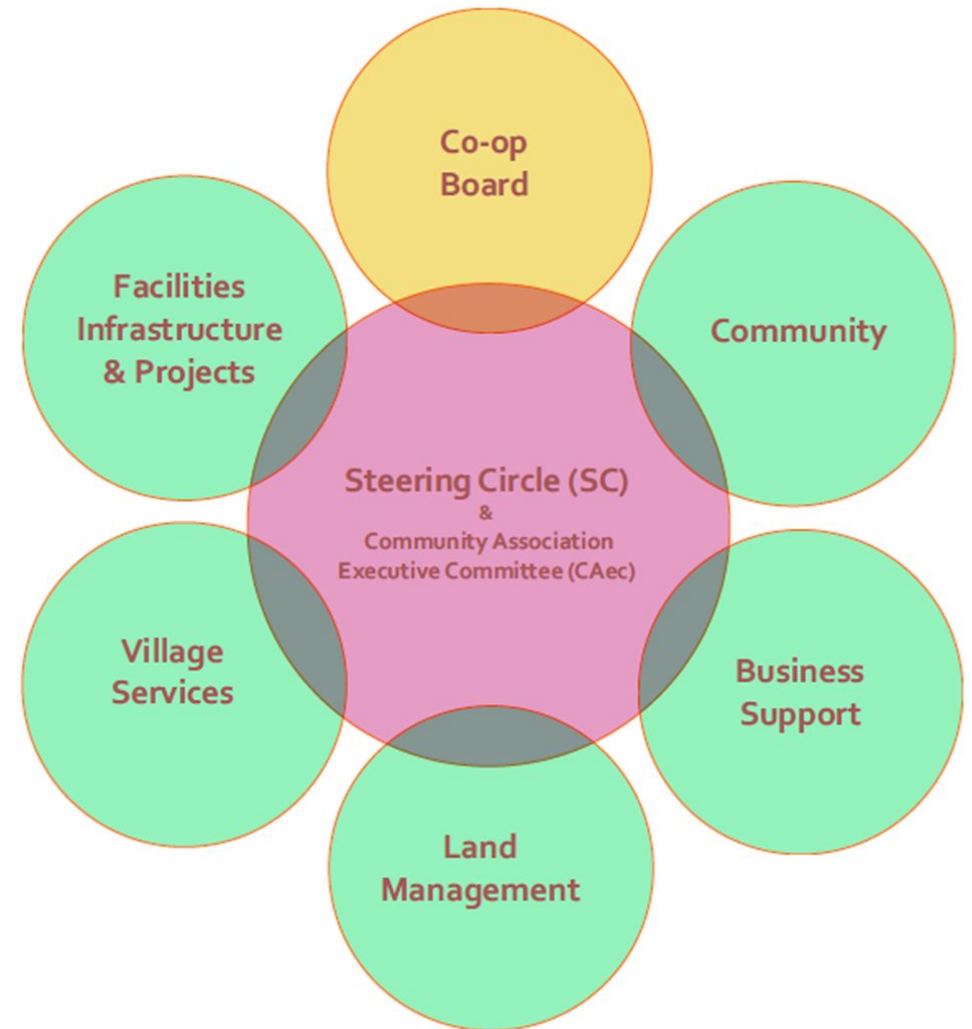
CDP 7: Authority to Self-govern

Example of implementation: Using sociocratic organisational structure.

A board and 5 teams, each responsible for their part of the village aim:
- Community
- Business Support
- Land
- Facilities, Infrastructure & Projects
- Village services

Each group:
- operates as a circle
- has an area of authority
- is double-linked to the Steering Circle

Distributed power: our organisation structure

CDP 2: Equitable distribution of costs and benefits

Example of implementation: Adjusting member financial contributions to the Cooperative commons.

CDP 3 Equitable distribution of contributions and benefits:

When the Ecovillage was first set up financial Contributions to the commons was linked to Lot ownership. However what has evolved is that some lots have households of one adult and some have households of 6 adults.

Challenge/ critical factor: Some single person households thought that is was unfair (and in some cases, unaffordable). Many members agreed but change is difficult….. The decision one year ago was to have a 'compromise model' whereby 70% of contribution remained paid by Lot and the other 30% by the number of adults in the household. This was implemented to be reviewed in a year.

CDP 4 Tracking and reviewing agreed upon behaviours

Example of implementation: Review at the one-year point of member contributions

Domain: The 70:30/stay as is Review circle will:

Review the success or failure of the membership contribution model trial

Recommend whether the model should be **implemented more permanently** from next financial year, and whether **any tweaks** should be made to the model

Identify any **actions required to support implementation**, and

Report findings from points 1-3 above to Legal and Finance by **15 May.**

The 70:30 Review circle will **provide the opportunity for all members to contribute** to the review, should they choose to do so.

The 'parent circle' for this review is Legal and Finance.

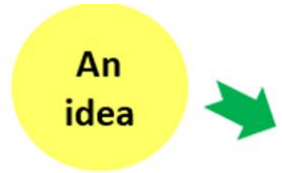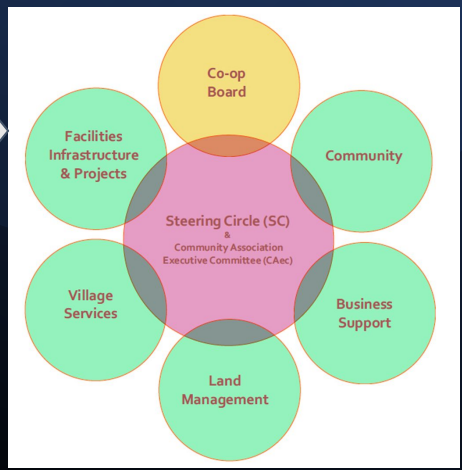**CDP 3:** Fair and inclusive decision making
Example of implementation: Use of sociocratic decision making processes

Equivalence: All voices are heard.
- **We make decisions in circles**
- **Circles have facilitators & use rounds**
- **Requires both willingness to listen and willingness to speak**
- In large groups it takes special courage and persistence to speak out

CDPs 1, 3, 4: Shared identity and purpose
Fair and inclusive decision making
Tracking and reviewing agreed upon behaviours.

Example of implementation: Use of sociocratic proposal forming process.

CDP 4 Tracking and reviewing agreed upon behaviours

Example of implementation: Use of record keeping and information sharing which is accessible by all members.

Transparency: open communication

Infrastructure, Time, Willingness

Reporting across the organisation - everybody can easily discover who is on what groups, and what they're talking about, their budgets etc

- Members' wiki- collaborative online workspace - eg all meeting notes are visible
- Monthly short written reports from many circles
- Monthly financial reports
- Weekly e-newsletter
- Slack (an app) with lots of channels (eg requests, work to do, appreciations)
- Oral reports & Q&A at monthly members meeting

| Dashboard | Calendars ▾ | Village Hub ▾ | Management ▾ | Reports ▾ | Governance ▾ | Entities/Businesses ▾ | Projects ▾ | Interest ▾ |

Narara Ecovillage

Welcome to the wiki!

It's our internal communication resource. We trust you will enjoy being informed, debating and communicating with your fellow members in all forums, including the wiki. Read more...

CDP 5: Graduated responses to helpful and unhelpful behaviours

Example of implementation: <u>Proposed </u>training in giving and receiving feedback.

Workshop 2: Whole-hearted Communication

- Learn and practice giving and receiving caring feedback to unhelpful behaviours. Gain confidence in having difficult conversations. Feedback is key to continuous improvement in a sociocratic governance system and we hope that it will become a normal part of village life.

- *We already use the 'appreciations' channel on Slack for positive feedback, open to all members.*
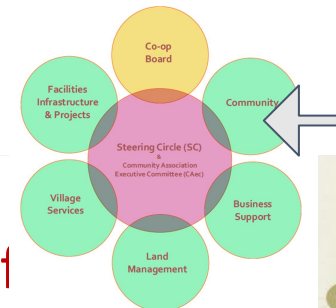
CDP 6: Restorative approaches to conflict resolution.
Example of implementation: This is a <u>draft</u> of a Conflict Resolution Process f
the Ecovillage.
Support offered by Collaboration Circle. Note: Escalation to the Board is a <u>final step</u>.

Step 1: Ask the Collaboration Circle for a 'Communications Facilitator' to be a sounding board.
This step is to allow an individual to be heard, to 'vent' if needed and gain personal insight and understanding into what is going on. A Communications Facilitator is a fellow member who has well developed listening skills and is willing to provide a listening ear and be a confidante.

Step 2: Ask the Collaboration Circle for a 'Communications Facilitator' to help with communication between two parties.
Those parties could be individuals, a circle, a working group. The 'Communications Facilitator' will assist the parties to hear each other and appreciate the different perspectives whilst seeking common ground and resolution.

Step 3: Ask the Collaboration Circle for the services of an 'Internal Mediator' in addition to the 'Communications Facilitator'.
The internal Mediators are qualified Mediators and will require payment.
Or opt for external mediation if the parties prefer

Step 4: The matter is referred to the Board to be dealt with according to the Community Management Statement

Enhancing psychological flexibility at Narara Ecovillage.

Proposed Workshops 2023.

Workshop 1: Authentic Relating. Being self- aware and less reactive helps us to show up authentically. Increase your ability to honour yourself whilst honouring the perspective of others. Respond rather than react when triggered.

Workshop 2: Whole-hearted Communication. Learn and practice giving and receiving caring feedback. Gain confidence in having difficult conversations. Feedback is key to continuous improvement in a sociocratic governance system and we hope that it will become a normal part of village life.

Workshop 3: Sharing the Commons. Creating Collaborative Culture. In any group the needs of the individual need to be balanced with the needs of the group.

Learn about the principles that enable a group to function sustainably and reflect on how these principles are implemented at Narara ecovillage.

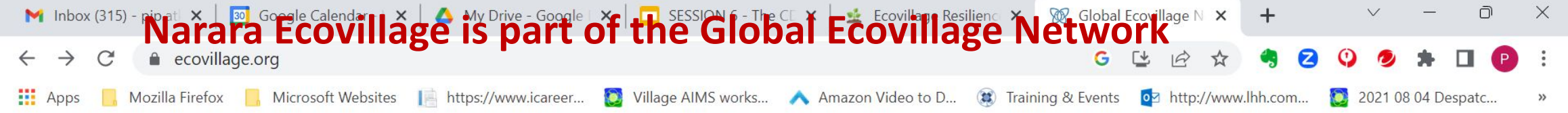Use a tool that maps shared interest and complements sociocratic decision making.

Community Forums to build understanding and cohesion
A chance to participate in an exploration of any issue that is 'live' for the group that turns up on the day.

No preparation, no agenda, just a safe, informal, friendly facilitated space to share views and move closer towards cohesion.

Bring lunch to share

CDP8: Collaborative Relationships with other groups. Example of implementation: Narara Ecovillage is part of the Global Ecovillage Network
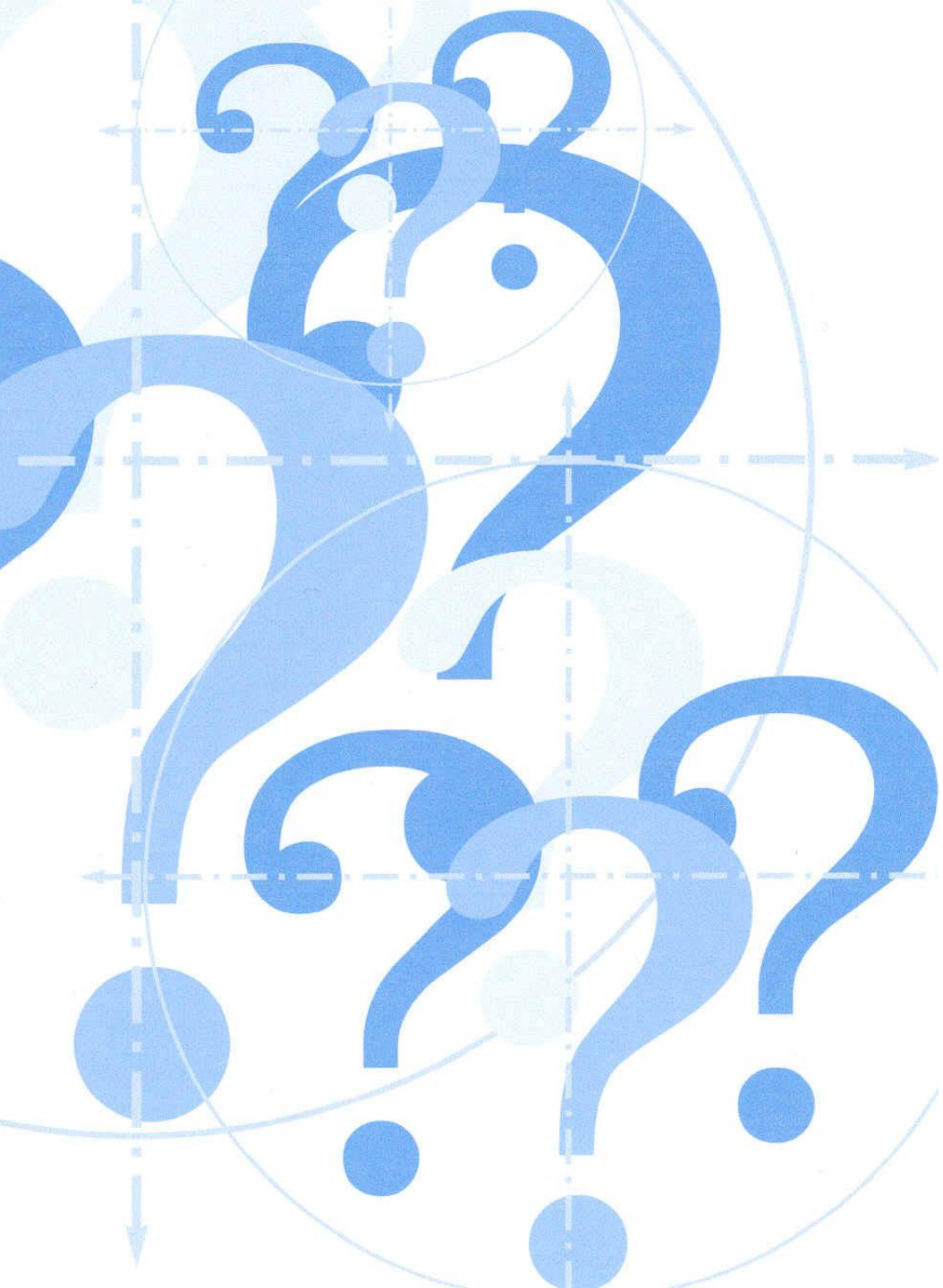
Sociocracy supports 'prosociality' at Narara Ecovillage: eg Collaborative Living at Narara (CLaN) group

- Our agreed ecovillage community Aim includes 'inclusivity' and 'diversity'

- Our legal structure limits Coop membership to property ownership – many drawn to our Aim lack financial resources to join on their own and inclusion is limited

- 'Collaborative Living at Narara' (aka CLaN) network formed as connection point

- Open to everyone – from long term ecovillage members to 1st time curious

- Zoom gatherings build/deepen connection and courage

- We Acknowledge Country, rotate facilitation role, co-create agenda, open, close and encourage contributions with Sociocratic rounds,– allowing safe sharing of sensitive issues - and we take no minutes

- The rounds give us an opportunity to practice waiting, listening and responding and so prepares new members for future circle meetings in community

- Through rhythm and practice of regular meetings, knowledge and practice are shared, relationships are deepened and the (often hidden) bedrock of community is laid

Celebration of Everything – 10 Years On!

Questions

Thank you!