

## Design 8: Sacred Political Ecology Training Programme

**Design Brief:** to consolidate existing teaching materials and mobilise them as a training programme that makes shamanic tools and practices available to activists working for sustainability and social justice, including permaculture practitioners.

### 1. Background

This design arose from an emerging ambition to integrate my interests in shamanic practice with permaculture and other forms of community action. Much of the background work took place within a three-year shamanic teacher training programme that I undertook with Cadair Idris Centre for Shamanic Studies in North Wales from 2018 to 2020. This left me with the skills and material to deliver a training programme to empower environmental and social activists by providing access to shamanic tools and practices they can apply in their work. What I lacked was a plan to put that into practice, against a background of relocation to Portugal in late 2020 and ongoing uncertainty resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions on travel and assembly.

The design itself seeks to identify the best way to mobilise these resources, and was written in April-May 2021. In order to expand my range of design approaches, and due to curiosity about regenerative design, I decided to experiment with the **Tetrad design process**, adapted from earlier sources by Regeneration design consultants, which I heard about from several friends in Portugal who were taking their Regenerative Practitioner Training.<sup>1</sup> The Tetrad diagrammatically represents the interrelationships among four key dimensions of design processes: **potential/ground, goal, direction** and **instruments**. Although usually applied to place-based designs, its emphasis on working with actualising the regenerative potential of systems at multiple levels resonated strongly with the aims and orientation of this design.<sup>2</sup>

### 2. Ground

The ground refers to the existing potential that the design seeks to activate, and the question of how to tap into this potential as an ongoing resource. It recognises systems as existing as nested wholes, and seeks to address three levels: the design project itself, the immediate location where it takes place (proximate whole) and the wider system of which this is a part (greater whole). The point is twofold. First, to ensure the design process is situated in and responsive to the unique specifics of its implementation context. Second, to leverage wider impacts by ensuring the project supports the proximate whole to generate value for the greater whole. Understanding of the ground informs the conceptualisation of the project.

Applying this concept of **nested wholes** in the context of this design, I identified the following:

- Design project: the training programme
- Proximate whole: participants in the training (including myself and other facilitators and organisers as well as trainees)
- Wider whole: the fields of activism in which participants engage

As the training is not intended to be limited to participants from any specific field of social action, it is likely that several wider wholes will intersect. Put another way, I would anticipate that different participants will operate in different wider wholes; the training itself is thus generative of an emergent wider whole encompassing the intersection of all of these: the self-defining field of shamanic activism.

A key design tool at this point of the tetrad is the **law of three**, in which tension between an activating and restraining force is harnessed to create a reconciling potential that integrates them. Following the work of theologian Cynthia Bourgeault,<sup>3</sup> I generated an emergent sequence in which the reconciling potential at each level becomes the restraining potential at the next (Table 1). From this ultimately arises the key concept of *Shamanic Political Ecology*.

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1 <https://regenerationgroup.com/TRP-Program-Overview>

2 Pamela Mang, Ben Haggard and Regeneration Group, *Regenerative Development and Design*.

3 Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three*

**Table 1: Law of Three**

<b>Activating Potential</b>	<b>Restraining Potential</b>	<b>Reconciling Potential</b>
Pain and trauma associated with deep concern about the state of the world	Shamanic healing methods	'Wounded healer' activism empowered by transformed pain
Wish to connect with, learn from and act in service to nature	Direct communion with nature through shamanic practices	Shamanic activism working in direct partnership with and as part of nature
Need for spiritual work to become more politically engaged	Potential synergies between shamanism and permaculture (and other social change modalities)	Shamanic Political Ecology

For each reconciling potential, I was able to **identify value-adding roles** relevant to each of the different levels of nested wholes (Table 2).

**Table 2: Value-adding Roles**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Value to project</b>	<b>Value to trainees</b>	<b>Value to field of activism</b>
Wounded healer	A healing environment and access to methods in shamanic healing	Transformation of wounds into motivation and capacity for constructive action	Stronger base of skills in personal and group healing that can help overcome problems with projection, burnout, challenging group dynamics, etc.
Shamanic activist	Access to shamanic tools for nature connection	Alliance with nature as ally, teacher, source of inspiration and empowerment	Articulate and effective partnership with nature and action as part of nature, going beyond rhetoric and ritual
Shamanic political ecologist	Linking shamanic practice and social change activism	Insights into links between spirituality and activism, and tools to act upon these	Deeper, more meaningful connection between spiritual practice and social change, in theory and in practice

These insights allowed me to reach a refined **conceptualisation** of Shamanic Political Ecology as a field that supports acquisition of insights and tools from shamanic practice, for healing, understanding, empowerment and connection with nature, that can be mobilised in diverse fields of social change activism in the context of a wider general understanding of links between activism and spiritual practice and will and capacity to act upon these links.

### **3. Goal**

The goal is the desired end state resulting from the training programme. I first explored this in relation to the **permaculture ethics and principles**:

*Earth Care*: The programme will nurture people's capacity to act with, as and for the Earth in taking action for sustainability, including exploring shamanic approaches to ecological healing and regeneration. It will also make direct contributions to the local ecology at teaching sites.

*People Care*: Offering, teaching and advancing shamanic methods for personal and group healing are central to the programme, which itself intends to create an environment for person healing, growth and flourishing.

*Fair Shares*: The programme will emphasise the inherently diplomatic nature of shamanism, by giving people access to methods for their own shamanic work and supporting them to explore them on their own terms, rather than seeking to communicate any doctrine or dogma or create a spiritual hierarchy, and invite increasing co-creation over time. On the more mundane level of material

exchange, it will be an important contributor to my own livelihood, perhaps along with that of other contributors, who will need to receive a fair return on their work. At the same time, it also needs to remain financially accessible to those who might benefit most from it and have the greatest capacity to apply it in their own lives. By its nature, shamanism is something people often come to at times in their lives they are low on personal and other resources, so it is important that people in such situations are not excluded from participation.

*Design from Patterns to Details:* Core shamanism offers a range of very general tools (including journeying, healing methods, and various techniques for achieving insights and personal empowerment) that can be adapted in almost infinite ways to fit the needs of the person or situation at hand. The programme design will follow a similar pattern, including a range of modules and exercise that will be adapted and combined according to the needs of each group and trainee.

*Use Edge and Value the Marginal:* The programme creates and develops an edge between shamanic practice and social activism; each of these is a marginal pursuit in relation to the other.

*Integrate rather than Segregate:* The programme approaches shamanism and activism as integrated, interdependent pursuits, and looks to create synergies between them by identifying and activating reconciling forces.

*Catch and Store Energy:* Shamanic political ecology provides a framework and set of methods by which shamanic experiences, insights and skills are systematically applied in pursuit of concrete goals in personal healing and empowerment and social change.

*Observe and Interact:* Shamanic journeying offers a technique for deep observation and interaction with nature and ecological, social and eco-social systems of all kinds.

*Obtain a Yield:* Shamanic practice is not undertaken for its own sake - a shamanic journey is always undertaken for a specific purpose, with clarity of intention and focus upon that purpose the key factors that ensure it translates into tangible outcomes in material reality.

*Apply Self-regulation and Accept Feedback:* My experience of shamanic practice has been that my shamanic helpers are always important sources of feedback, who will guide me in regulating my activity and discerning how best to apply it. This can be applied in the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the course itself, with my shamanic (inner) teachers acting as my guides and mentors.

*Use and Value Renewable Goods and Services:* The shamanic journey is a simple, accessible service that anyone can do at any time. More than renewable, it is incremental: it is a tool that develops through practice and gives best results through regular use.

*Produce no Waste:* Shamanic healing methods transform the neglected and rejected parts of oneself and one's life experiences into great sources of empowerment - the 'wounded healer' whose apparent weaknesses and limitations are in fact the source of their greatest strength.

*Use Small and Slow Solutions:* People need first to take small steps, in learning the basic techniques of shamanic practice. Then they can apply them to whatever ends they wish, gradually learning to do more with them over time. Likewise, the training itself can begin small and with introductory trainings, then grow over time into an extended programme that moves at the pace that is best, both for me and for those following it.

*Use and Value Diversity:* Everyone has a different approach to shamanism, reflecting their unique personality, strengths and needs. The programme needs to honour and support it, allowing everyone to find the route through and place within it that works best for them.

*Creatively Use and Respond to Change:* Shamanic practice is inherently transformative: everyone involved in the programme will change dramatically as a result of doing it, and the world around them will change to the same degree. Being flexible enough to accommodate that, the programme itself is likely to develop in unanticipated ways in response to changes from within and without.

To encapsulate all of these insights, I applied the **viability-vitality-evolution** design tool from Regenerative Design to articulate the goals of the project in relation to each of the nested wholes identified at the Ground stage (Table 3).

**Table 3: Viability-Vitality-Evolution**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Viability</b>	<b>Vitality</b>	<b>Evolution</b>
Course programme	A materially self-sustaining programme: financially self-sufficient (ideally generating a surplus) and also accumulating other forms of capital (social, cultural, intellectual, spiritual...).	The programme attracts new people, ideas and energy that constantly push understandings of its nature, purpose and ways of doing things	The programme both helps define and responds to changes in the emerging field of shamanic activism, and is open to taking new directions as and when circumstances change.
Training cohort	Participants can more effectively apply shamanic practice in their activism and everyday lives, in ways that create obvious benefits for themselves and those around them.	Participants are empowered to follow their own shamanic path, directed by motivations and goals of their choosing and uniquely shaped by these choices.	Participants and the groups they are part of actively contribute to advances in the field of shamanic activism and the ways it reshapes shamanic practice and approaches to social change.
Wider field of activism	Stronger presence, awareness, understanding and application of shamanic insights and methods in various fields of social change activism.	Shamanic activism emerging as a defined and vital field in its own right, that helps push the edges of both shamanic practice and activism.	A wider reinvigoration of shamanism as a recognised aspect of sustainable societies and important tool for their creation.

#### **4. Direction**

The direction point provides both orientation in relation to the overall purpose of the design and a reference point for evaluating progress. It guides action in relation to both ordering - the vocation, or sense of unique purpose - and organising - assembling the appropriate elements in appropriate relationship to achieve this.

I had already done substantial groundwork in both these respects during a three-year programme of shamanic teacher training that I took with Christine Mark and Jane Shutt of [Cadair Idris Centre for Shamanic Studies](#) in North Wales, from 2018 to 2020. The training emphasised use of shamanic journeying as a tool for both identifying and sustaining alignment with vocation, and to support and complement use of other methods in detailed course design. I see shamanic journeying as a versatile design tool, with many possible applications in permaculture design.

I was also able to bring to the ordering component various tools - including **learning outcomes, session plans, and course schedules** - from the Permaculture Training of Teachers course delivered by [Designed Visions](#), which I took during summer 2013. On this basis, during the course I had developed detailed plans for several teaching events: a weekend introductory training on basic shamanic journeying skills (see Appendix 1), a three-day intermediate workshop introducing Shamanic Political Ecology (Appendix 2), and a set of outlines for a more in-depth training in key themes relating to shamanic political ecology that could

be taken over one or two years. As the programme is still under development, and will be adjusted according to the needs of the learning community as it builds, I have decided not to include detailed schedules here.

To consolidate this work in the context of this live design, I took a **shamanic journey** for an answer to a question derived from the definition of the direction point in the tetrad model: *"What and who source the bigger picture the programme serves, and keep it present during delivery?"*

The journey revealed the vocation of the programme as contributing to the awakening of global nature as a self-conscious entity, by supporting participants to find their roles as part of the sensory and analytical organs of that emerging planetary consciousness. Within this, it offered me three methodologies for orientation towards that vocation:

1. Work closely with the land spirits at each site that hosts training sessions, as co-teachers and advisors.
2. Continually draw on the support and guidance of my own shamanic guides and teachers, at all stages of programme development and delivery, including preparation and follow-up of each training event.
3. Support all who take part to find and act upon their own vocation as shamanic activists.
4. Concretely, this involves land journeys and drum journeys before and after each training event, as an integral part of monitoring and evaluation.

## 5. Instruments

The instruments point corresponds to the design or integration stage, where choices are made about the selection and placement of elements in order to fulfil the design aims in ways that mobilise and enhance the potential of the place or project as revealed at the previous points on the tetrad.

**Table 4: Capital Generation**

Capital Pools	Elements					
	Participants	Organisers	Programme	Venues	Activism	Shamanism
Social	Connect with like-minded practitioners	Connections with trainees, collaborators and supporters	Community of trainees, alumni, tutors & supporters	Higher visibility, usage and popularity	Connections with shamanic practitioners	Connections with activism and activists
Material			Pool of teaching infrastructure	Provide hosting infrastructure		
Financial	Fair prices for training	Fair income for work done	Course revenues	Revenues from hosting		
Living	Living capital as a source of spiritual, intellectual, experiential and cultural capital					
Intellectual	New individual and shared understandings	Learn from and feed knowledge into trainings	Experience & evidence lift knowledge		New insights on shamanic activism	New insights for engaged shamanism
Experiential	Skills as shamanic practitioners	Experience in course delivery	A field of collective knowledge	Experience of hosting shamanic trainings	Access to shamanic insights and practices	Widened field of application of shamanic know-how
Cultural	Cultural uses of shamanic knowledge	Experience in ritual, ceremony, story and song	Culture of learning and collaboration	May become cultural landmarks	Culture of shamanic activism	Strengthening culture via political action
Spiritual	Increased spiritual capital and capacity for its generation	Delivery needs high levels of spiritual capital, and raises them	Becoming a vibrant spiritual community	Sites of spiritual practice	Activism as spiritual action <sup>4</sup>	Engaged spirituality - avoids spiritual by-passing <sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Harvey, *The Hope*.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Augustus Masters, *Spiritual Bypassing*.

In the regenerative development paradigm, delivery can be framed as ongoing generation of different types of capital, via synergistic interactions among the various processes by which these capitals are generated. Using the **Eight Forms of Capital** model,<sup>6</sup> I identified the following ways in which the course programme generates different forms of capital and enables their exchange among key elements in the system (Table 4).

Based on this, the **web of life** indicates intracapital flows among these elements (Figure 1). This shows how the course programme acts as a vehicle to stimulate multiple forms of capital generation and exchange among participants, teachers, venues and the wider wholes of activism and shamanism. Within the programme, many of these interchanges will happen directly, which is omitted from the diagram. The point is that the programme creates interrelationships among these elements that allow these interchanges to happen in the first place, and the pools of capital thus generated to build incrementally, and synergistically, over time.<sup>7</sup>

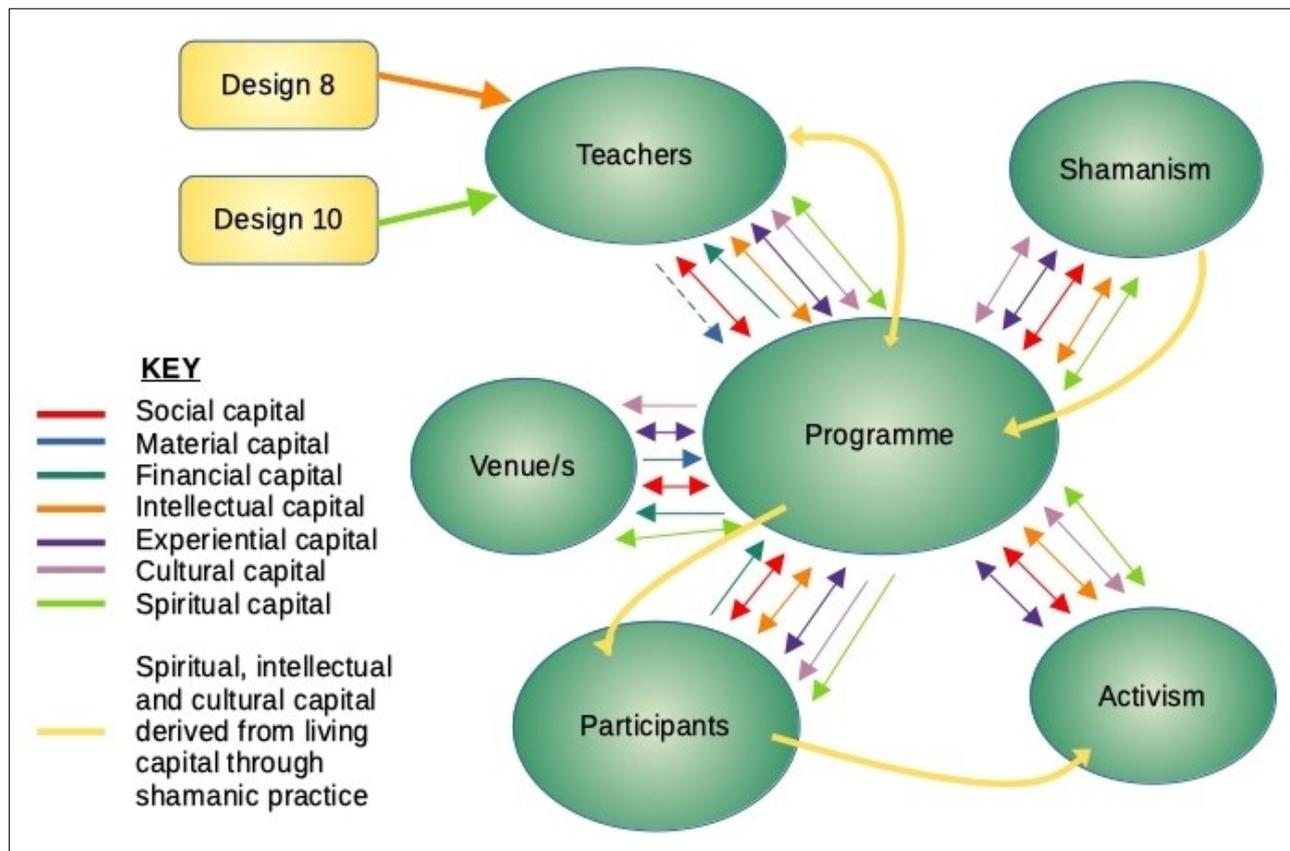


Figure 1: Web of Life diagram indicating main capital flows

Two further features of the diagram, neither of them straightforwardly accommodated in the web of life model in its strictest form, are particularly noteworthy. First is that living capital (often referred to as natural capital) is neither directly generated nor exchanged within the system. Rather, the course programme provides a vehicle whereby participants and teachers can leverage natural capital as a source of spiritual, cultural, experiential and intellectual capital, both for themselves and on behalf of the wider wholes of activism within which they operate. As a major goal of such activism is to protect, support and restore living systems, this is ultimately a generative and cumulative effect, if the programme is successful in its aims. Second, as organiser and teacher I have key responsibilities to nurture my own intellectual and spiritual capital and offer them as a resource for the programme and participants. This design is thus strongly interdependent with Design 9, my writing programme, and Design 10, my 000 design.

<sup>6</sup> Ethan Roland & Gregory Landua, *Regenerative Enterprise: Optimizing for multi-capital abundance*.

<sup>7</sup> The programme is thus *autopoietic* in its own development, and its relationships with the entities involved (see Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana, *The Tree of Knowledge*), which I see as the key goal of both permaculture and regenerative design.

Drawing all of this together, I created an **implementation plan** (Figure 2). This has three main strands:

1. Checking availability, suitability and terms of use of potential venues
2. Establishing a schedule for the different training offerings
3. Promoting the programme via suitable media (including through my website and writing programme, described in Design 9)



## 6. Evaluation and Reflection

Design evaluation uses the **four questions** (in the format used in the Open University course B713 Fundamentals of Senior Management):

### 1. *What did the design achieve?*

The design addressed the original design brief, providing me with a clear and realistic action plan through which to take the programme forward. The design has employed a diverse range of design tools, within a design framework that I had not previously used.

### 2. *Which aspects went well?*

Permaculture ethics and principles sit strongly at the heart of the design. These and other design tools operate in an incremental fashion - each produces new insights that both feed into subsequent phases of the design, and enrich understanding of the project in their own right. There was also a strong synergy between the use of shamanic methods as design tools and use of the tetrad as a design framework

### 3. *Which went less well?*

I found no place in the tetrad for a systematic assessment of resources or consideration of limiting factors, and think the design would have benefitted from these. The design also failed to make full use of the tetrad's emphasis on people and place, because neither the locations of the training nor the concrete identity of participants are yet determined.

It was also initially hard to identify the point at which the design itself took place. This may well reflect my lack of experience using this design process; in future I expect I will become better equipped either to identify where these steps would take place, or to understand how and why the framework delivers results without necessarily needing to make them explicit. Another possible weakness was the vagueness around who will actually take part in these trainings - effectively this is a design for myself, concerning my next steps in initiating the work, but it would be useful to repeat the process knowing exactly who participants are and what they bring to the programme.

### 4. *What would I do differently next time?*

It would have made sense to include attention to place (which somehow emerged of its own volition partway through the design), from the start. Another iteration of the design process that is fully grounded in place, once venues have been chosen, would be a useful exercise. It would also make sense to perform further design iterations for specific training groups, once their composition is known, and perhaps as a collaborative process.

## 7. Reflection

I found this another very interesting and rewarding design. Using a new design process was an rewarding challenge, working out when and how to use design tools already specified in the tetrad framework, and how best to choose and where to place design tools from other sources. Until about halfway through the process I was unsure if it was actually working, but around the time I got started on the Direction point things really started to build and flow well.

The tetrad framework provided a powerful context that allowed the design tools to generate numerous new insights, often emerging unexpectedly and in ways that gave me a different perspective on the project and design process. Examples include:

- The roles arising from the use of the law of three
- Identification of different capital flows and sources of capital, and the nested wholes that benefit from these.
- The way combining the eight capitals framework and web of life revealed how shamanic practice can be viewed as non-consumptively translating living capital into other forms of capital that can be mobilised to practical ends, including defense of nature itself.
- The emergence of place as a key feature of the design, despite not being taken into account in the early stages.

I found the synergy between the tetrad as a design framework and shamanic methods as design tools especially interesting. The tetrad framework's emphasis on mobilising intangible qualities such as source and vocation is well served by shamanism methods. In turn, the tetrad seems particularly well suited to enabling meaningful and effective use of shamanic practices in a design context. I am looking forward both to exploring the tetrad design process and Regenerative Design approach further in the future, along with further use of shamanic design tools within other design frameworks.

It also became clear to me that the tetrad frameworks' emphasis on place and people is also where its greatest power lies. Effectively, with hindsight, I approached this as a design for myself, to orient myself in terms of taking the programme forward. The tetrad framework proved effective in achieving this, but would have been even more effective if applied to a concrete place, for a defined group of people. As it is, it has helped clarify how to move forward in these respects, and invites further iterations once they are known, perhaps as a collaborative exercise within the context of the training programme. This highlights the emergent nature of this programme, the need for further ongoing design work as it proceeds, and the value of the tetrad process and Regenerative Development framework for achieving this.