

LIVING IN HARMONY

INSPIRING STORIES FROM ECOVILLAGES



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Editor: Dalia Vidickiene

Language editor: Craig Meulen

Author of illustrations: Steven Porter

Authors of case studies: Diana Leafe Christian, Achim Ecker, Gabriela Górewicz, Robert Hall, Antonina Kulyasova, Lars Levin-Jensen, Ina Meyer-Stoll, Artur Milicki, Laysan Mirzagitova, Andrzej Młynarczyk, Igor Morkovkin, Lina Mustafinaite, Dalia Navikaite, Vilnis Neimanis, Ansa Palojärvi, Monika Podsiadła, Artūrs Polis, Kalle Randau, Mia Saloranta, Katrien Van den Berge, Dalia Vidickiene, Alvis Zukovskis, Aivars Zvirbulis, Ingrida Zitkauskiene, Svanholm ecovillage Visitors/Guest Group.

Authors of pictures: Pirta Ala, Sami Ala, Achim Ecker, Alica Ferliková, Zivile Gedminaitė-Raudonė, Ivan Kulyasov, Maria Kulyasova, Ieva Lučiunaite, Vidmantas Melnikas, Artur Milicki, Dalia Norvaisaite, Jesús Pacheco Justo, Monika Podsiadła, Irina Popova, Steven Porter, Robertas Riabovas, Roberta Sabaliauskaite, Daina Saktiņa, Ingrida Zitkauskiene, Amatciems ecovillage archive, Kovcheg archives, www.parmainupilseta.wordpress.lv, Solbyn archives, Suderbyn Permaculture Ecovillage archives, Väinölä community archives, <http://ecoharmonykinscommunity.com/>.

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CONTENTS

Introduction	7
Extract from the Ecovillage Folk: A story about values	10
STAGE 1 OF THE ECOVILLAGE LIFE CYCLE:	
ECOVILLAGE ESTABLISHMENT – HOW DO WE START?	11
Focus on eco-techno decisions: Ecovillage as healthy and pleasant place to live	13
Amatciems ecovillage as a business project, Latvia.....	14
Barkowo Ecovillage as a non-profit project, Poland	14
Focus on social relations: Ecovillage as closely-knit communities	16
ZEGG ecovillage, Germany.....	16
Svanholm ecovillage, Denmark.....	18
New Generation community in Melkys ecovillage, Lithuania.....	18
Focus on spiritual values: Ecovillage based on a philosophical concept	19
Ecovillages based on the Kin’s Domain concept	20
Damanhur ecovillage as a living laboratory, Italy	21
Rozkalni ecovillage as a socio-therapeutic home for people with disabilities, Latvia.....	22
Local Alternative Society near Lublin, Poland.....	23
Transition Towns	24
The initiator of the Ikskile Transition Initiative society in Latvia: Artūrs Polis.....	24
Ways used by initiators to invite and choose inhabitants of ecovillage	26
Blagodat ecovillage initiated by group of inhabitants, Russia	26
Barkowo Ecovillage initiated by one family, Poland.....	27
Krunai ecovillage as Kin’s Domain settlement, Lithuania	29
Kurjen tila ecovillage with biodynamic farm, Finland.....	30
Understenshøjden ecovillage in the city, Sweden	31
‘Hare and other animals’ ecovillage growing out of the cultural society ‘Undine’	32
Amatciems ecovillage as a combination of an individual residence vision with real estate business, Latvia	33
Land and buildings: Design and ownership rights	34
Effects of the house on humans	34
Amatciems ecovillage, Latvia: Managed by a real estate company established by one inhabitant	36
Kurjen tila ecovillage, Finland: Managed by all inhabitants as a real estate company	37
Suderbyn Permaculture Ecovillage, Sweden: Owned by a cooperative whose members are its tenants.....	38
‘Hare and other animals’ ecovillage, Latvia: owned by a non-profit organization	40
Munksøgård ecovillage, Denmark: Mixed ownership.....	41
Financial sources for ecovillage establishment	42
Alternatively financed ecovillage: Suderbyn Permaculture Ecovillage, Sweden.....	42
Advice for ecovillage founders at the establishment stage of the ecovillage life cycle	45
Extract from the Ecovillage Folk: A story about the reasons to be rich	48
STAGE 2 OF THE ECOVILLAGE LIFE CYCLE:	
FIRST YEARS OF LIVING IN THE ECOVILLAGE – HOW DO WE PROCEED?	49
Getting out of the rat race: Darius, Lithuania	50
How to become an ecovillage resident without any start-up capital: Ivan*, Russia.....	52
Living in an ecovillage without money for a few weeks: Nikolay*, Russia.....	52

Eco-community building	54
Social life at Kovcheg ecovillage, Russia	54
Heart Circle as a community-strengthening tool in Keuruu Ecovillage, Finland	55
ZEGG Forum: A ritualized form of communication for larger groups, Germany.....	56
Wedding ceremonial in Krunai ecovillage, Lithuania.....	58
Common resources and their management	61
Common economy in Väinölä ecovillage, Finland	62
Management of common resources in a closely-knit ZEGG community.....	63
Communal business in Kovcheg ecovillage, Russia.....	64
Self-governance systems	66
Strengths and weaknesses of the decision-making model in Keuruu Ecovillage, Finland ...	67
Self-governance system in Kovcheg ecovillage, Russia	68
Decision-Making Processes in Svanholm ecovillage, Denmark	69
Advice for a young ecovillages	71
Extract from the Ecovillage Folk: A story on the benefit of changes	74
STAGE 3 OF THE ECOVILLAGE LIFE CYCLE: CHANGE MANAGEMENT –	
HOW CAN WE AVOID A GAP BETWEEN THE ECOVILLAGE VISION AND REAL LIFE?	75
Membership: A step-by-step process at Keuruu Ecovillage, Finland	76
Looking forward – the next generation	77
Children at Svanholm ecovillage, Denmark	77
School at Kovcheg ecovillage in Russia: Parents as the main teachers.....	79
Changes in decision-making model	82
Four-Choice Consensus Method, Sieben Linden Ecovillage, Germany	82
Holacracy as a new structure for organisation and decision-making at ZEGG ecovillage, Germany.....	83
Making decisions in a mature ecovillage: Solbyn ecovillage, Sweden	87
Test of ecovillage sustainability	89
Advice for mature ecovillages.....	94
Extract from the Ecovillage Folk: A story about cooperation.....	98
STAGE 4 OF THE ECOVILLAGE LIFE CYCLE: COLLABORATIVE CREATIVITY -	
HOW CAN WE TRANSFER OUR ACCUMULATED EXPERIENCE TO SOCIETY?	99
Learning by teaching and organizing public events	100
The German ecovillage ZEGG as a seminar centre	100
Activities in the society ‘Undine’, Latvia	101
World Peace Days in Dąbrówka, Poland	106
Collaboration	107
Swedish Njord: A network with a focus on representing the ecovillages of Sweden	108
The new way of networking: Starfish-type network initiated by Melkys ecovillage, Lithuania.....	110
Changing mainstream systems	112
Permaculture gardening promotion by Local Alternative Society, Poland	112
Lithuanian Natural Agriculture Network	115
Family School movement in the Piebalga ecommunity, Latvia	118
Advice for ecovillages starting the stage of collaborative creativity	121
Acknowledgement	122

Cancer cell could be described as body cell, which has withdrawn from a multi-cell union. It had performed a thankless task within that union for a long time but at some point it lost interest in maintaining its environment (the body) and became eager to develop independently. After all, a single-celled organism is free and independent, can do what it wants and reproduce to overcome death. Cancer cells look after their own interests and expand relentlessly, seeking freedom regardless of morphological boundaries and creating transition points (metastasis). The rest of the multi-cell union which they were previously part of are then treated as food.

The successful expansion of the cancer cell comes to a stop, however, when it completely weakens the body who served it as a nourishment environment. At this point the cell realizes that such behaviour leads to its own demise, but unfortunately it is already too late to make a difference.

Why do humans observing cancerous cells and this ruthless behaviour fail to notice that we act in exactly the same way? Why do we not see that the principles we, the people, are following to survive are actually the principles of the cancer cell?

Med. Dr. Oncologist Ričardas Kriaučiūnas

The eco-village movement was born and is developing as a bottom-up response to the selfish and short-sighted way that people relate to the Earth, which is no different from the behaviour of cancer cells. This movement is gathering people who are resisting the societal pressure to act like cancer cells. They encourage others to help the Earth recover from this terrible disease. They create eco-villages and look for ways to create lifestyles that do not affect the harmony between all aspects of our life: environmental, social and spiritual.

The number of ecovillages and their members are constantly growing. We believe that the eco-village movement has the potential to free us from being so dependent on the currently prevailing individualistic, consumerist and commoditised lifestyles. We believe that the eco-village movement has the potential to help us learn how to live together in harmony with the Earth.

Have you already joined the ecovillage movement?

The project team 'Ecovillages for sustainable rural development'

Vilnius, 2013



INTRODUCTION

One of the most active international consultants on the ecovillage movement, Diana Leafe Christian, advises anyone who wants to start an ecovillage to first visit successful projects in order to find out what they look and feel like. What is daily life like? How does the ecovillage function — ecologically and economically? How do ecovillage members govern themselves and create their unique social, cultural and spiritual life?

To find out which ecovillages you can visit and organise your journey of discovery, please visit the 'Ecovillage Road': <http://www.ecovillageroad.eu/>.

Another way to learn about ecovillages is to read this manual.

The manual is designed as a virtual tour of European ecovillages. Here you will find a collection of short 'how we did it' stories that describe different ecovillage models and the main elements of their design and governance.

The case studies presented in the manual were made during the implementation of the project 'Ecovillages for rural development', partly financed by the EU Baltic Sea Programme. They represent the most interesting and effective best practice to be found in the ecovillage movement in Europe, particularly in the Baltic Sea region.

The manual consists of four chapters. Each chapter explores a different stage of the ecovillage life cycle, starting from the establishment stage, when the main characteristics of the ecovillage should be decided, and finishing with the stage when the community becomes stable, has its own traditions and well-functioning governance, and can become a centre proliferating knowledge about the ecovillage movement, based on its own experiences.



Ecovillage life cycle stages

This life cycle approach helps us to understand the specific problems faced by the ecovillage and gives new founders a sense of perspective, because ecovillages go through different lifecycle stages just as people do. As a baby's life is different from a teenager's life, the challenges that a new ecovillage faces are usually markedly different from the challenges being met by older ecovillages.

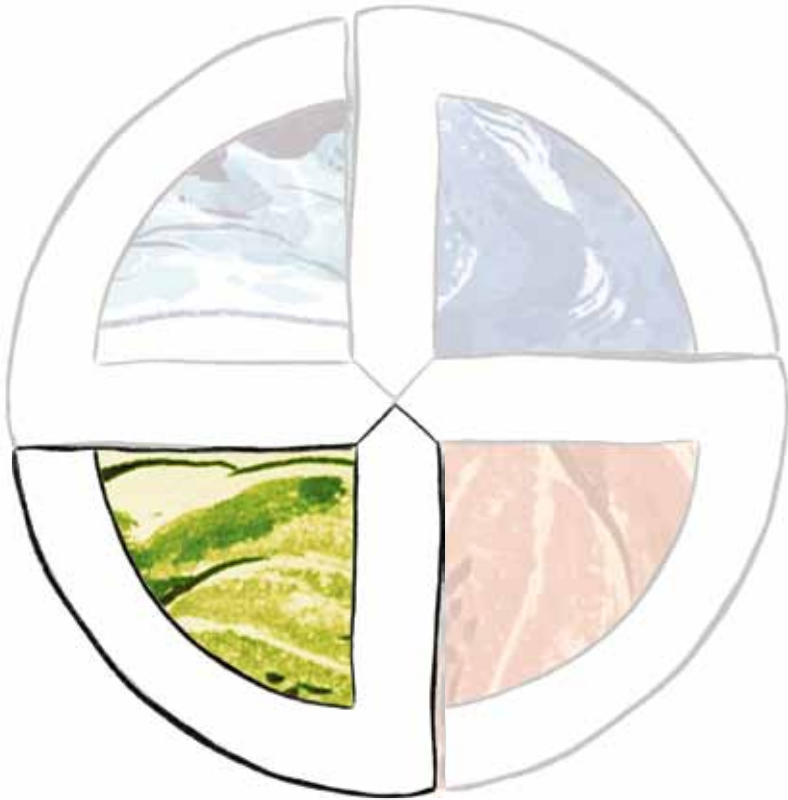
The ideal ecovillage does not exist. However, thousands of partial successful solutions do exist.

Learn from the experience of existing ecovillages and design your own model that is the most suitable for you.



Stage 1

EARTH SEASON



*Make your dream come true –
turn the sick Earth into a space of love.*

EXTRACT FROM THE ECOVILLAGE FOLK: A STORY ABOUT VALUES

A professor of philosophy came into the auditorium to give a lecture. He put a big glass jar on the table and filled it with large stones. Then he asked his students:

- Is the jar full?

The students confirmed that it was full. Then the professor took out a box of small stones from his briefcase and poured them into the jar. The pebbles nicely filled the spaces between the large stones. The professor then asked the students if the jar was full. They laughed and agreed that it was now indeed full.

Then the professor pulled out a bag that contained sand and poured this into the jar. The sand grains easily filled the smallest cracks between the stones, completely filling the jar. The professor asked the students again if the jar was now full. And they reaffirmed that it was.

Then the professor took a full glass of water and poured it into the jar. Water seeped into the sand and the professor was able to empty the glass. The students were amazed.

- Well, said the professor, now imagine that this jar is your life. Large stones symbolize the most important things in your life: family, friends, health, and work. Even if everything else disappears, they will still give you the feeling of fullness in your life. The small pebbles are secondary, but personally important, things, such as your studies, a car purchase and home repair. Then the sand symbolizes trivial things, even meaningless things. If you initially begin by filling with sand, there won't be place for any large stones or pebbles. So please pay more attention to the most important things. Find time for your family. Take care of your health. Decide what is really important for you and what really makes you happy. First of all take care of the main values: everything else is just sand.

One of the students raised the hand and inquired what the water symbolized. The professor smiled and replied:

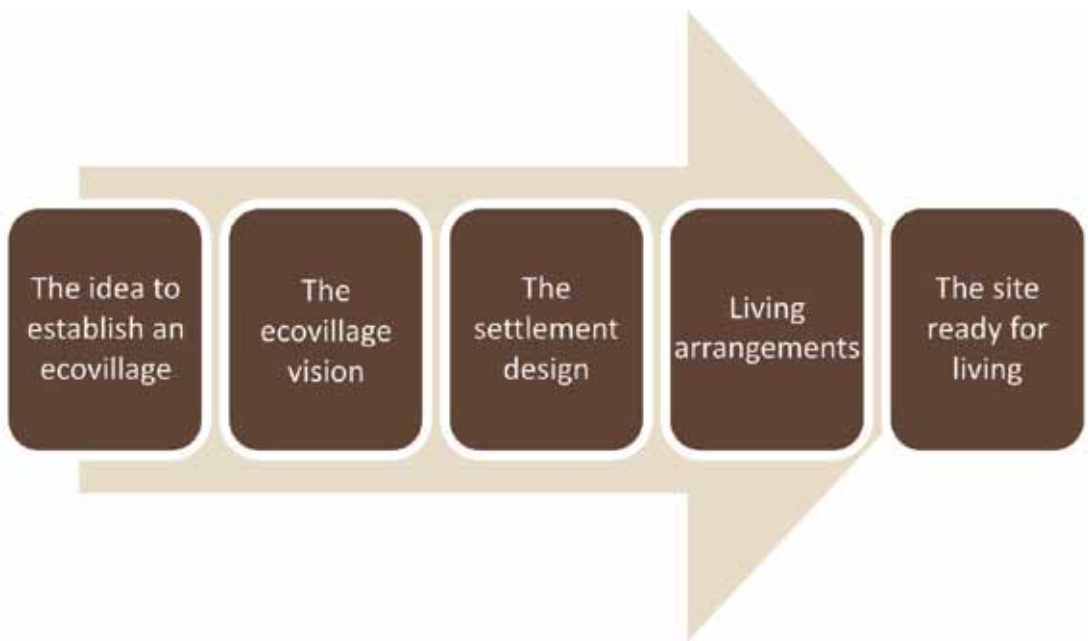
- I am glad that you asked. By adding water I wanted to show you that even though a person seems to have an extremely full and busy life, he can always find some time to relax, rest and have a drink!

STAGE 1 OF THE ECOVILLAGE LIFE CYCLE: ECOVILLAGE ESTABLISHMENT – HOW DO WE START?

Civilization has improved life in such a way that it will soon become unbearable.

Leszek Kumor

Time is needed to progress from the first idea to the establishment of an ecovillage because there are many decisions to be made and there is a lot of work involved. The first period of designing the ecovillage and beginning the living arrangements is the establishment stage of the ecovillage life cycle. At the beginning of this stage the ecovillage exists only in the minds of its initiators, as an idea to create a better place to live. In this stage, the ecovillage initiators need to formulate the ecovillage vision, prepare the settlement design and build the basic living arrangements. The site is then ready for initial living.



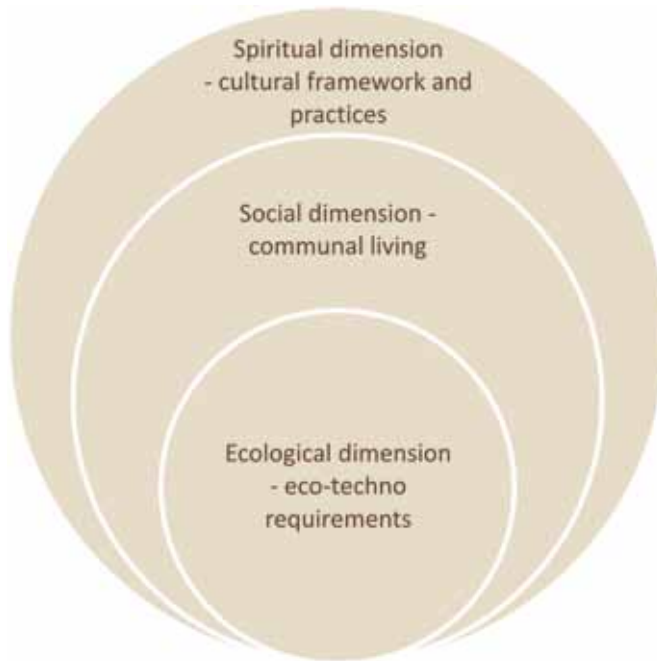
Main elements of establishment stage

The experience of Baltic Sea region ecovillages showed that the usual duration of the establishment stage is 2-5 years. However, for some ecovillages the process from the first steps in designing an ecovillage to having the place ready for living is likely to take 10 or even 15 years. Only a few succeed with a very short establishment stage of less than one year.

A wide range of people becomes initiators of ecovillage establishment: they could be one person or one family, a group of initial residents, a business company, an NGO, a religious organization, or even a municipality. No matter who initiated the ecovillage establishment, the duration and success

of the establishment stage mostly depends on the ecovillage vision. So the first and main task for the ecovillage founders at the establishment stage is to formulate a realistic yet inspiring ecovillage vision.

An ecovillage vision depends on the motivation and values of the ecovillage initiators. If we analyze the motivations and values of ecovillage founders, we find that they have three dimensions: spiritual, ecological and social.



Three dimensions of an ecovillage vision

If the founders of an ecovillage want the establishment stage to be shorter and to avoid many problems in the future, it is best to have a vision encompassing all three dimensions of an ecovillage model.

The vision for the ecological dimension of an ecovillage should describe the main eco-techno values of the founders: regarding buildings, infrastructure and activities on the territory of the ecovillage. The values must be formulated as requirements for all residents dealing with the following issues:

- Buildings (architecture, building materials)
- Water supply and sewage management
- Energy solutions (electricity, heating systems etc.)
- Waste management
- Usage of transport on ecovillage territory
- Agricultural processing on ecovillage land
- Livestock rearing and animal slaughter.

The ecovillages comprised of individual homesteads usually have 'internal rules' where they describe the main requirements dealing with eco-techno decisions.

The vision for the social dimension of an ecovillage should describe the desirable level of communality. Some ecovillages aim to live as one big family, the inhabitants share common resources, provide mutual aid and have a lot of common activities. Other ecovillages prefer a more individual lifestyle where residents communicate as good neighbours and organize some traditional social events or meetings to discuss development of the ecovillage but do not strive to spend a lot of time together. However, most ecovillages try to find a balance between individual and communal lifestyles, creating a supportive environment for the inhabitants who want to be a part of the group. Regardless of whether the founders' vision is a maximum, minimum or average level of communality, these founders should also declare the principles for the ecovillage governance. The ownership rights to ecovillage land, buildings, roads, and other infrastructure must be very clear for each potential resident of the ecovillage. Special attention should be focused on sources of finance for ecovillage building and the responsibility to cover loans and additional payments necessary in the future for maintenance of communal property, e.g. heating and repair of meeting houses.

The vision for the spiritual dimension of an ecovillage should describe the main spiritual values of the founders. Most ecovillages formulate spiritual dimensions of their ecovillage vision as a general aim to live in harmony with the Earth and all living beings. Some ecovillages take as their base a specific view of the world, described in terms of the philosophical theories such as Rudolf Steiner or Sri Aurobindo theories. If the ecovillage is focused on the spiritual dimension, a large part of the daily activities will be devoted for the awakening and transformation of consciousness. Rituals promoting the development of our inner self and a culture of creativity become an important tool to strengthen the spiritual life of an ecovillage.

Most founders of ecovillages initially focus on the development of one of these three dimensions and only later, when the ecovillage grows and come into contact with other members of the ecovillage movement, do they tend to gradually develop the other two dimensions. Although this is quite a natural way of evolving, it does take a while to implement. Moreover, trying to enact fundamental changes in the ecovillage vision at later stages of the ecovillage life cycle could be a source of conflicts. Therefore, when creating a vision it is desirable to agree in advance on all three dimensions regardless of the dominated motive to establish the ecovillage. We now present some examples of the motivations to establish an ecovillage grouped by their focus on one of these three dimensions.



FOCUS ON ECO-TECHNO DECISIONS: Ecovillage as healthy and pleasant place to live

The ecological dimension is actually the underlying dimension of the three. The wish to live in a healthy place in harmony with nature is common to the founders of all ecovillages. Some of the ecovillages focus on eco-techno decisions only, with inhabitants not pursuing a high level of intercommunication: good neighbourhood relations are sufficient. The vision of such ecovillages does not include agreement between members of the community on special spiritual values, a common philosophy or a unity of approaches. A focus on eco-techno decisions is most typical for ecovillages that are initiated as business projects.

AMATCIEMS ECOVILLAGE AS A BUSINESS PROJECT, LATVIA



*Panoramic view of Amatciems ecovillage.
Photo from Amatciems ecovillage archive*

The idea of the village came to the ecovillage initiator, the businessman Aivars Zvirbulis, when he realized his desire to live in a managed, picturesque and forest-enclosed property near the lake. In his village he intended to include and combine three natural elements: water, soil and forests. Amatciems is the result of this idea and is now home for him, his children, his friends and other people who hold the same views regarding the place they reside. Initially, the ecovillage initiator developed the project to fulfil his selfish desire to live in an environment that is suitable for him.

Aivars Zvirbulis with his wife bought the first hectares of land in parish Amata (approximately 80 km from Riga) in year 1987. During the year 1999 up to year 2000 the developer of village purchased neighbouring land plots and the area of the village increased to 300 ha.

Amatciems is changing the landscape, digging ponds, creating hills and replanting trees. Nevertheless, the biological rhythms of nature are observed when performing any of these activities.

The Internal Rules were developed based on the experience of similar villages in other countries and his vision of how to live in the managed village and get on well with nature, wild animals and other inhabitants of Amatciems. The plots around individual houses cannot have fences, which allows the free movement of wildlife including deer, foxes, birds and other animals. During the evenings and night time it is not allowed to make loud noises, and residents should remember that dogs are a friend of people and cannot be chained. For like-minded people these Internal Rules are not considered as restrictive; instead, they promote peace and silence. The village has already attracted additional people who value simplicity and uncomplicated living.



*A family house surrounded by the elements: water,
forest, meadows, gravel road.
Photo by Daina Saktiņa*

Aivars Zvirbulis and his team

Further reading:

Website of Amatciems ecovillage: <http://www.amatciems.lv/eng/idea.html>

BARKOWO ECOVILLAGE AS A NON-PROFIT PROJECT, POLAND

The initiative to establish the Barkowo Ecovillage was originally taken by one family. After a few years of unsuccessful attempts to join one of the existing ecovillage initiatives in Poland, the Milicki family decided to start their own non-profit project. They describe their motivation to create a new ecovillage as follows:

‘As a husband and wife, and also father and mother, we deeply experienced what family life might look like in the city and then consciously started searching for more peaceful, more sustainable,



Family house at Barkowo ecovillage.
Photo by Artur Milicki

safer and more independent ways of living on our beautiful planet. Our investigation and research directed us towards simple living on the land with the highest possible harmony with nature and - if possible - with the company of other like-minded people.

Our internal need of attaining personal fulfilment was also a very important factor in that decision-making process. We simply wanted to do something that we believed is meaningful for us, for our children and future generations; meaningful for Mother Earth, for the ecosystem. We had been feeling a very strong need to take an active part in the process of co-creating a natural, healthy, friendly and beautiful world - here and now - the world of kindness, wisdom and harmony. The concept of an ecovillage with its ecological, social and spiritual aspects seemed to us the very best idea to fully engage with.'

The family purchased 16 ha of land in the village called Barkowo in the north-eastern part of Poland and in 2011 moved there from Warsaw. The number of their local (and not just local) friends is increasing. Every year, from early April to late September, Barkowo Ecovillage is open for volunteers and students who want to expand their skills related to a self-sufficient, practical and healthy lifestyle.

To become a temporary or permanent resident of Barkowo Ecovillage you should agree with the following values:

- Ethical vegetarianism – driven by compassion for all sentient beings.
- Deep ecology – driven by care for the local and global community, biodiversity, ecosystem, planet, and future generations.
- Freedom from addictions – especially from those that cause nuisance to others such as alcohol, tobacco and drugs.
- Consensus – the decision-making model in which each member of the community has an equal right to vote and all decisions are adopted only with the agreement of all.
- Natural economy – open sharing of knowledge and experiences, as well as a surplus of crops, resources, services and goods.
- The Law of Free Earth – a view according to which we humans belong to this planet and not vice versa. All permanent residents of the ecovillage are the custodians and guardians of this place, equal to each other and equal to the place.

After a one-year probationary period, during which candidates reside, live and operate together, there is a possibility to become a permanent resident of Barkowo Ecovillage. This needs to be approved by a consensual decision of the current inhabitants.

Artur Milicki

Further reading:
<http://ekowioska.wordpress.com/en/>



Children at the front of the house in Barkowo ecovillage. Photo by Artur Milicki

FOCUS ON SOCIAL RELATIONS: Ecovillage as closely-knit communities



Some ecovillage founders are primarily driven by a desire to live in a better organized community. Although they admit that environmentally unfriendly behaviour is one of the major disadvantages of modern society, their aims are more than just technical ecologically focused solutions for an ecovillage. Their main purpose is to gather a group of people who are likely to socialize frequently and in which communication would be more balanced and life more secure than in traditional environments. Most ecovillages oriented on the social dimension foster inter-personal relationships and continually experiment to develop a better communication style, trying to ensure that life in the community does not interfere with the creative freedom of each individual.

ZEGG ECOVILLAGE, GERMANY

ZEGG was founded in 1991 as the next, bigger step forward for an existing closely knit intentional community that had started in 1978. At that time the motivation was to design and live a life that does not create violence any more. In 1991 about 80 people moved to the new site, of whom 40 to 50 had been part of the older community.



*Community in ZEGG ecovillage.
Photo by Achim Ecker*

The main focus of the community at that time was the social 'glue'. The idea was that problems we encounter have at least part of their roots in our social interactions. So if we understand each other and have a direct, open and transparent communication and feedback, we would be able to overcome any problem arising – together. Cooperation would be very strong. Consequently the main intention was to build community and the inter-human relationships. Not only from person to person, but also trans-personal: at the level of creating another, more peaceful, just, humane, caring world worth living in. It is clear that we spent a lot of time with each other, sharing, listening, and making art out of our problems.

It was understood and seen that the focus was to be living a life beyond personal likes and dislikes in the service of a bigger goal. Today I would interpret this as a spiritual goal, but then we did not look at it this way. My personal material circumstances are not so important if I have a meaning in life, and clear and direct contact with others and friends. The most important thing was not to be polite (since this is often phoney) but rather to be true. Security was seen in having friends around: together we could overcome all odds. Later I learned that this attitude is much more common in Latin and South American cultures. In the mutual understanding that we are dependent on one another, your social network and your friends become the security for the future and not so much your savings in a bank account or your private possessions. It is different to the European industrial attitude of having as much external wealth as possible in order to feel secure.

The motivation was to be an experiment of how we thought humanity could live out a way of life that inherently would not cause fear and violence any longer, and where people would not destroy the planet. So we tried out a lot of things. One core component was what we called 'Forum' or 'transparent communication'. The idea was that everything happening in the community would find a stage, upon which it could be expressed to the whole of the community. Motivations, fears, joys and loves are only

shared with best friends in our culture, but here they would be brought 'on stage': everyone would have the chance to see, sense and feel them, and to feel compassion. As all living systems operate with feedback loops we also thought carefully about what others think about us, how they see us, experience us or understand us. Within the 'Forum', participants sitting in the circle around this 'stage' then give feedback in the form of a 'mirror'. As with a real reflection (in a glass mirror), this 'mirror' is tinted only by the colour of the glass (the personal perception of the mirror-giver and the limits of this perception). It was a revolution to bring everything out into the open that our culture normally hides or only gossips about behind people's backs. It was frightening to merge my own inner perception of myself with the perception that others have. The psychologist C.G. Jung once said that as long as the inner perception and the outer are different, there is a 'shadow'. The psychological 'shadow' consists of parts of our personality that could not live at a certain time of our lives because they were not accepted in the society/family we were in. As long as these things remain in our 'shadow', which means we cannot even see it ourselves, they will influence and direct our lives from behind the scenes. The 'shadow' contains many treasures that are often painful to retrieve as they have been connected with the painful rejection we felt when we attempted to bring them into our life. Consequently any benign mirror can point out the path towards a once rejected part of our personality that now lives in the shadow. This reintegration may not be very pleasant as it means we have to face the rejection and the emotions around it again, but through it we grow and become more free.

Another secondary reason for our community living style was that we lower our ecological footprint when we live together and share many things in community. So ecological concerns were present right from the beginning.

In 2012 the community has grown to 110 members and this radical phase of breaking all our barriers has softened. You can look at it as the first storm: now it has calmed down to a steady wind of change. This is less radical: instead of breaking through our barriers, it melts them in a gentle stream of other possibilities. Nonetheless, we still have a special habit of intense communication and fewer boundaries than in the mainstream of society. Visitors to the community feel a general permission to just be. Maybe this is the biggest achievement and contribution we could make.



Women in the community . Photo by Achim Ecker

Some ZEGG people have moved out into the surroundings because they felt that they needed more private and normal lives. This is a constant issue in the community. How much do we want to be the revolutionaries living a sustainable life, which means also not fulfilling all my material dreams, while the rest of the world lives as unsustainably as ever? Does it make sense to sacrifice now when all others are not doing it? Can we turn the tide or do we just miss out on the benefits of life in a materialistic global world? For this we have no answer.

Achim Ecker, ZEGG, Germany

Further reading:

Website of ZEGG ecovillage: <http://www.zegg.de>

SVANHOLM ECOVILLAGE, DENMARK

Svanholm ecovillage was founded in 1978 out of a dissatisfaction with the existing society and a wish to create something new and better. The vision of the founders was to develop a kind of 'state within the State', with its own laws and ideals. The motivation to establish the Svanholm ecovillage was not based on a specific ideology: the residents do have common goals but there is no common spiritual basis that connects them.



*Community house at Svanholm ecovillage.
Photo by Zivile Gedminaite-Raudone*

The ideals which the residents do have in common and which therefore form the basis of their vision concern ecology, income-sharing, communal living and 'selvforvaltning'. This Danish word is hard to translate into English. It is rooted in modern Danish culture and is used in the development of educational and management ideas. It represents the idea of stimulating people, pupils and workers to be more involved in decision-making and feel responsible for the outcome. The English word 'self-government' would be the closest.

Self-government has been an underlying concept in the Svanholm ecovillage vision from the beginning. The aim of the ecovillage founders was to create a close-knit, self-governing community. They describe their vision as follows: 'We wanted a direct influence on decisions that concerned our own lives. We wanted to do as we pleased and do some of those things that simply 'can't be done' because they are 'absolutely unrealistic' or 'there's no money in it'. We think this 'selvforvaltning', this maximizing our influence on decisions concerning our own lives, should never be put into practice at the expense of others. Nor should it be at the expense of nature. Ideally, we should manage our use of resources in such a way that we don't use more than we give - that's the goal we're working towards. Sustainability, both on an environmental level and on a human scale.'

The people of Svanholm took out credit, purchased approximately 415 ha of land 55 km from Copenhagen with some buildings and started to build their own paradise – a small state with its own internal economic structure, traffic policies, environmental policies, education policies, health policies etc. Here they can more or less do what they want to make their dreams come true.

Visitors/guest group of Svanholm ecovillage

Further reading:

Website of Svanholm ecovillage: <http://www.svanholm.dk>

NEW GENERATION COMMUNITY IN MELKYS ECOVILLAGE, LITHUANIA

In 1990, when Lithuania regained its independence and citizens regained land that had been nationalized after the Soviet occupation, Zinaida Gineitienė, a lecturer at Vilnius University, regained 15 hectares of land situated near Vilnius which once belonged to her parents. As she was considering how to make better use of the recovered property, she came up with the idea of using the land to establish a community for a 'new' generation. 'My goal was altruistic', Zinaida says. 'I wanted to set

up a homestead where there was some room for both the old and the young. I wanted to teach the people to wake up and live differently: in harmony with nature, not seeking great riches or easy money. Living from what you create in your mind, and raise or make with your own hands. I was teaching people to start a business. Not with lectures like at the university, but in practice and through learning by doing. Young people experiencing social exclusion (long-term unemployed, ex-prisoners, single mothers, orphans) are being trained on my organic farm. We grow what we need in order to survive. There is a range of animals in the stalls. A cow, a goat, a sheep, and fowl contribute to a healthy diet for the community members. We promote local traditional crops such as hemp, which can be used in construction as well as in daily life as food and medicine. We teach how to use cheap organic materials such as clay, straw and sawdust to construct houses with ancient techniques, and many other things that help a person to become a friend of nature instead of an exploiter.'

Zinaida generously shares the land with others. 3 hectares were designated for use by a monastery, other plots given to several families willing to settle in the village and farm organically. She is proud that 30 families have become residents of her cherished Melkys village and five new members of the community have since been born there. At the beginning it was only an old house surrounded by fields, meadows and a forest. But her homestead has gradually become a powerful centre of attraction hosting numerous cultural events, seminars and summer camps. The village has seen increasing numbers of visits from Zinaida's regular helpers, students, (current and former) colleagues, various non-governmental and religious activists and also guests from abroad. Everything contained on this estate serves non-profit aims as well as educational and social purposes.



Establisher of Melkys ecovillage Zinaida Gineitiene with participants of summer school for orphan children. Photo by Zivile Gedminaitė-Raudonė

Having founded an eco-village, Zinaida now has one more dream. She wants her village to accommodate orphaned children and single or widowed senior citizens. This would be a home in which the young and the old would cooperate and find themselves some nice activities; residents would be assisted by volunteers, helping to lend their lives meaning with particular regard to dignity and plenitude.

Dalia Vidickienė

FOCUS ON SPIRITUAL VALUES: Ecovillage based on a philosophical concept

The spiritual dimension is the most general dimension of the three – it could even be called the 'umbrella dimension'. Residents of all ecovillages are people looking for an alternative lifestyle. For some of them, their vision of the spiritual dimension is simply a more nature-friendly lifestyle. Others also include closer community-seeking (in comparison with mainstream lifestyles) within this dimension. Some founders of ecovillages have more ambitious aims in this regard; for them the spiritual dimension includes seeking to perfect ourselves as human beings and our cultural life. Usually they strive to attract or include members from many religious orientations and find common spiritual values uniting all religions. Some of the ecovillages try to create their own concept of humanity, but for most of them, the beginnings of their design of ecovillage vision are to be found in particular philosophical concepts, such as Anthroposophy or 'Kin's Domains'.

ECOVILLAGES BASED ON THE KIN'S DOMAIN CONCEPT

The years since the turn of the millennium have seen hundreds of ecovillages and ecovillage initiatives inspired by the ideas in the series of books 'Ringing Cedars of Russia' by Vladimir Megre and his heroine Anastasia. Known as 'Kin's Domain' settlements, these are a new generation of ecovillages with a focus on sustainability for future generations of families. The first settlements based on this 'kin's domain' concept appeared in 2001-2002 in different post-soviet countries (Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, etc.); the idea took hold because the concept is looser than that of completely collective living and this was more appealing in these countries because of the experiences of forced collectivization during the Soviet era. Some years later, Vladimir Megre's books have been translated into other languages and Kin's Domain settlements have become popular not only in Europe but on all continents. In fact, the books have become the inspiration for a worldwide ecovillage movement of new generation. People inspired by Megre's ideas have joined together in 'Anastasia clubs' and the International Ringing Cedars Association has been created. 'A new ideology is needed, a life-style ideology,' they say.



A sample of Kin's domain design.
Source: <http://ecoharmonykinscommunity.com/>

Ecovillages based on the kin's domain concept are developed as settlements consisting of individual homesteads. Each family or individual has at least 1 hectare of land, developed as a self-sustainable ecosystem. One hectare of land is large enough to allow a complete, closed cycle of energy and matter. The boundary of a kin's domain is a living fence consisting of trees, bushes and shrubs. It ensures protection from the wind, gives shelter to wild animals and serves as a natural demarcation of the personal realm of the family. One-quarter to three-quarters of the area of the kin's domain is covered with perennials: forest and fruit trees and bushes. Rich native species are planted on the principles of enhancing

biodiversity. Hundreds of plant species are linked by the principles of permaculture to facilitate the co-existence of the different plants. Recycling of natural materials provides the plants with nutrients and increases the quality and quantity of the crop. If no natural water resource is already present within the territory of the domain, a small pond is dug. Houses are constructed from natural materials. Food is produced using permaculture principles: without ploughing, weeding, pruning, fertilizing or spraying with chemicals. The inhabitants of the ecovillage preserve their natural heritage, taking into account cultural traditions and the ancient knowledge of our ancestors.

The idea of a kin's domain is also an idea of a 'little homeland' for many generations. The domain should be a 'space of love', where men, women, children, plants, trees, birds and animals should live in love and care for each other. In response to a reader's question, 'How do you associate a hectare of land with the spiritual formation of man?', Vladimir Megre answered: 'The kin's domain is not just a hectare of land with potatoes you grow for sale, but a hectare of land where you are creating something having a certain level of consciousness and spirituality. This is a space connecting you with the Universe. All the planets of the Universe will respond to this space and, consequently, to you. They will become your friends, assistants and co-creators. You have your own territory where all vegetation has been planted by yourself and not by men you hired. Each plant and blade of grass loves you; and those plants, those living creatures are capable of collecting all the best energies of the Universe for you; collecting and giving them away to you. We all, together, should listen to our hearts and should

move on from merely speaking words about spirituality to materializing it. A hectare is a tiny spot on Earth. But millions of such spots will turn the whole planet into a blooming garden.'

Laysan Mirzagitova and Dalia Vidickienė

Further reading:

- Link to the first book of V. Megre 'Anastasia. I exist for those for whom I exist': <http://vmegre.com/en/>
- Kin's domain concept: <http://ecoharmonykinscommunity.com/>

DAMANHUR ECOVILLAGE AS A LIVING LABORATORY, ITALY



Residential building in the central area of Damanhur. Photo by Vidmantas Melnikas

The Federation of Damanhur, often called simply Damanhur, was founded to realise the dream of a society based upon optimism and upon the fact that human beings could be the masters of their own destiny without having to depend on other forces outside of themselves.

This was the vision of Oberto Airaudi when, with a group of 24 fellows and researchers, he founded the Spiritual Eco-Community, bought a piece of land 40 km north of Turin and started building Damanhur ecovillage as a place to live together. (The word Damanhur means 'City of Light'). Born in Balangero, Turin, in 1950, Oberto has had a clear spiritual vision and healing abilities ever since childhood. At an early age he undertook to develop this through constant, demanding experimentation outside of the classical academic institutions. His spiritual and personal growth has continued over the years through study, research travels, the re-awakening

of memories, the development of artistic abilities and the rediscovery of ancient knowledge. Philosopher, healer, writer and painter, he founded the Horus Centre in Turin in 1975 in order to present the results of his research publicly and to start up a more intense phase of experimentation; this was later to give rise to Damanhur ecovillage.

The aim of the Damanhur Spiritual Eco-Community was to create a centre for spiritual, artistic and social research. The community started with a specific task: building the Temples of Humankind dedicated to the divine nature of humanity. These underground temples were the main secret laboratory of Damanhurian people, where art, science, technology and spirituality were united in the search for new paths for the evolution of humanity. Symbolically they represent the inner spaces inside every human being.

The temples of Damanhurian philosophy are based on action, positive thinking, optimism and upon the idea that every human being lives to leave something of themselves for others and to contribute towards the growth and evolution of the whole of humanity. So the motivation was to create an ecovillage as a living laboratory based on the belief that within every human being a divine spark exists that must be reawakened.



The Inhabitants of one Damanhur Federation village decided to build their houses up in the trees. Photo by Vidmantas Melnikas



Inhabitants of Damanhur like to harmonise their psyche by walking in the labyrinth. Photo by Vidmantas Melnikas

After long periods of experiments, Damanhurian philosophy was synthesized into eight formulas called 'Quests', the steps of human and spiritual growth for individuals, groups and organizations.

Expressed very simply, the Eight Quests are:

1. Act in order to be, with pure-minded intent.
2. Continue to act, to continue being.
3. Change your logic to transform yourself, from the I to the We.
4. Be aware, be available.
5. Harmoniously revolutionize your inner self.
6. Become the Artist of your life.
7. Search for what is True, beyond all certainties.
8. Choose your Ideal, and be open to others with Love.

Every year thousands of people visit Damanhur to study the philosophy, try out the social model and to meditate in the Temples of Humankind.

Dalia Vidickienė

Further reading:

Website of Damanhur ecovillage: <http://www.damanhur.org/>

ROZKALNI ECOVILLAGE AS A SOCIO-THERAPEUTIC HOME FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, LATVIA



*Main living house in Champill village Rozkalni.
Photo by Daina Saktiņa*

The initial idea of the founders of this ecovillage was to create a school based on the principles of anthroposophy and Waldorf education.

The Neimani family had the idea of creating a Camphill village after their experiences in Norway, where they lived, worked and studied for a period of five years in this type of village to familiarise themselves with the principles, options and values of life and work in these special communities. The principles of the Camphill movement can be summarised as: Everybody works according to his/her own abilities, takes part in the community life and relaxes. The main ideology of this

movement is based on the anthroposophy defined by Rudolf Steiner: recognition of the spiritual uniqueness of a human being, regardless of their race, nationality, religious beliefs, disabilities or mental backwardness. A Camphill community centre is a place that welcomes people with development disorders. People have a chance to live, work and learn together; they learn to do everything and to help each other.

With the knowledge and experience acquired in the ecovillage in Norway, the Neimani family with their friends returned to Latvia in 1999 in order to start developing their own Camphill village 'Rozkalni'. They already owned a



Children working in kitchen. Photo by Daina Saktiņa

suitable property: a farmstead or country estate located not far from Rujiena. It now serves as a social-therapeutic home for people with special needs.

Vilnis Neimanis and his team

Further reading:

- Website of Rozkalni ecovillage: <http://www.camphillrozkalni.lv/en/>
- More information on anthroposophy: www.antroposofija.lv
- The Camphill movement: www.camphill.no; www.camphill.org.uk; www.camphillassociation.org

LOCAL ALTERNATIVE SOCIETY NEAR LUBLIN, POLAND



*Community meeting of Local Alternative Society.
Photo by Monika Podsiadła*

The pioneers of L.A.S. come from groups of young people with an alternative world view who were active in the eighties in Poland – a period which saw the end of communism, social ferment and political persecution. Often disappointed and tired of the political situation, as well as the city life which aggravated this, some people decided to ‘retire from reality’ and hide in a Polish village to pursue their individual paths – to be closer to the nature and to be free.

The ‘escapees’ came from various cities and had not methodically planned their new ‘settlement’. Instead, it was the result of the political and social situation in Poland, the atmosphere of rebellion and the objections of the alternative groups of citizens. Generally speaking, the families made spontaneous decisions concerning the purchase or renting of land or houses. Most of the houses needed renovation. With the help of friends, new buildings were also built.

The first common ideology came from the Rastafari movement: traceable back to its Christian roots, with the exotic influences of reggae music. The Rastafari way of life is not a highly organized religion; it is a movement and an ideology. They accept much of the Bible, although they believe that its message has been corrupted. They do not accept the pope and Vatican. The movement is rather an informal association of people living close to nature, looking for the truth and their own freedom beyond ‘Babylon’ – the society of materialism, oppression and sensual pleasures. There is one more very important ‘ingredient’: reggae music. This is actually the only thing that the ecovillagers regularly practice together in regard to the Rastafari movement.

Later the members of L.A.S. no longer aimed to have the same religious or ideological interests and since 2012 the ecovillage unites people of different cultures. There are, for instance, Buddhists and Rastas here. Friendships between the members of society strike up naturally and are based on a common interests and aims. We appreciate the diversity of our world views; there are no religious antagonisms in L.A.S.

Initially, visits to the village were only temporary. Then it became a place for working and living. Most of the people living in our community are artists, musicians, painters, designers or architects. Each of us is looking for our own life path. What we all have in common is a strong need to be closer to nature.



*Common meal of community.
Photo by Monika Podsiadła*

The economic basis at the beginning of the settlement period was the manufacture of drums and other instruments. They were sold to the West and that provided a good, comfortable life for the families, giving them the freedom they were looking for. Currently many families still earn their living as artists.

Monika Podsiadła and Andrzej Młynarczyk

Further reading on Rastafari movement:

- *'Rasta Heart: A Journey into One Love', Robert Roskind, published by One Love Press (2001).*
- *'How To Become a Rasta: rastafari religion, rastafarian beliefs, and rastafarian overstanding', by Empress Yuajah, published by CreateSpace (2011).*
- *Link to the website of Polska Wspólnota Rastafari (Polish Community Rastafari) on Facebook (only in Polish): <https://www.facebook.com/polskawspolnotarastafari>*

TRANSITION TOWNS

The Transition Town movement of the last 5 years has gained broad attention in the UK, USA, Canada and Australia, where its principles are being applied in more than 450 transition towns. The idea is based on the scientific warnings about oil depletion and the threat of climate change; both of these will necessitate comprehensive changes – especially in industrialized countries. Transition towns are a creative and unique way to prevent the risks associated with this by applying the well-known life principle 'think globally and act locally'.

THE INITIATOR OF THE IKSILE TRANSITION INITIATIVE SOCIETY IN LATVIA: ARTŪRS POLIS



*Learning through practical work in the garden.
Photo from parrainupilseta.wordpress.lv*

Arturs is a young man who was one of the pioneers promoting healthy lifestyles and the ideas of sustainability in the online environment in Latvia.

At present Arturs actively implements his ideas in practice in the form of the society Iksile Transition Initiative (further in the text – ITI). This was the first self-organizing initiative of people in the Baltic States to promote sustainable town development, with particular regard to our dependency on fossil energy resources and to reducing the emissions responsible for climate change.

For a long time Arturs nurtured a dream to develop his ideal ecovillage in an untouched corner of Latvia. He knew that a project as ambitious as this would be expensive and difficult to implement, so although the idea is appealing and beautiful, it was postponed for some better times, other circumstances, etc. The idea to develop a Transition Town came to Arturs unexpectedly, but now he is putting his ecovillage-related dreams into practice in the town where he resides.

Arturs became interested in the ecovillage movement and principles of sustainable development in 2003 when he was 16 years old and read the books by Vladimir Megre, which had just been translated into Latvian. The ideas described there were so interesting that he wanted to discuss them with other readers, so a simple homepage was developed with assistance of his brother. This homepage was

noticed by other people who expressed some interest. Some active exchange of e-mail messages started. After a few months the first meeting was organized as a first step in establishing contacts between like-minded people.

Arturs became ever more interested in nature, being in nature and the open air, gardening, sowing and planting. Step-by-step Arturs became vegetarian (it was quite a long process). He stopped playing computer games and watching horror movies. Arturs developed a passion for growing indoor plants (there are now more than 120 plants in his collection) and cultivating his garden according to permaculture principles. He then became engaged in active promotion of these ideas on the radio, in the press and online.

At the end of 2009 Arturs visited the Findhorn ecovillage in Scotland to participate in a month-long training programme run by Gaia Education EDE (Ecovillage Design Education). It included a two-day seminar on the Transition Town movement. This was the first time Arturs had heard of this movement, whose main idea is applying ecovillage principles to the urban environment.

Arturs was impressed and started to disseminate the Transition Town movement ideas in Latvia. The first event was a showing of the film 'Home' at the Ikskile County library in March of 2010. After watching the film, those present were introduced to the idea of the Transition Initiative.



*Learning by doing with garden kiln construction.
Photo from parmainupilseta.wordpress.lv*

From then on Arturs organized a range of various educational and informative events around the issues of sustainable and healthy lifestyles. One milestone was the establishment of the society Ikskile Transition Initiative in 2011: this now takes up a lot of the time in Arturs' life. The society is membership-based and managed by a board. Its vision, mission and objectives are rooted in the belief that members can contribute to reducing climate change and resource depletion.

The Mission of the ITI:

- Educate the public on the significance of sustainable development and the personal benefits of this.
- Contribute to the development of an active Ikskile community and involving it in the transition processes.
- Support and provide consultations to the population of the county, enterprises and organizations on sustainable development.
- Facilitate decentralization in all fields.
- Implement projects at local and international levels to increase the ability of the county to withstand any social and economic fluctuations (especially, exhaustion of resources, climate changes and financial crises).
- The unifying value of the ITI is an enabling and harmonious environment – in nature, within each person and in relations between people.

The ITI implements projects divided into two blocks – public education and practical projects. Every project has its own responsible person who manages the various activities involved.

Artūrs Polis, member of society 'Ikskile Transition Initiative' board

Further reading:

• Website of ITI: <http://parmainupilseta.wordpress.lv/>

• Transition Town Movement: <http://www.transitionnetwork.org/>

WAYS USED BY INITIATORS TO INVITE AND CHOOSE INHABITANTS OF ECOVILLAGE



The number of people thinking about how nice it would be to move to an eco-village is increasing. However, this dream involves a little more than just buying a house built by a construction company in accordance with the latest environmentally friendly technologies and located in a beautiful place! So people inevitably face the question: 'Who will be my neighbours?'

At the establishment stage, few ecovillage initiators stop and think about the importance of fellow residents having a similar worldview and moral values. In particular, ecovillage founders focused on the eco-technical dimension tend to pay less attention to this interpersonal aspect. However, even sharing a defined philosophical concept does not always manage to bring together a community. For example, creating an ecovillage based on the Kin's Domain concept, ecovillagers might nevertheless come together from very different places with very different backgrounds. Most of them will have read the books by Vladimir Megre and more or less agree with his ideas, but in practice, when they start living in their villages they might realize that they all have quite different ideas on the many minor and major issues which life is full of. They also realize that without finding a common denominator it is difficult to avoid conflicts (see the article about Blagodat ecovillage).

In order to avoid many future problems, founders of ecovillages, especially in those ecovillages which aim to build a really strong community, should raise questions relating to the diversity of inhabitants at the establishment stage. Examples include: Does bringing the ecovillage residents into harmonious community require the same religion and/or similar ethical values? Will community-building be possible if the ecovillage inhabitants have very different educational or social backgrounds?

The following articles illustrate ways used by ecovillage initiators to invite and choose inhabitants and deal with related organizational problems.

BLAGODAT ECOVILLAGE INITIATED BY GROUP OF INHABITANTS, RUSSIA



House in Blagodat. Photo by Maria Kulyasova

'The Blagodat Commonwealth of Kin's Domains' was created between Moscow and Yaroslavl in 2002 after the initiatory group had gathered in Moscow in 2001. All of them were inspired by the books about Anastasia with the kin's domain ideals and the 'Space of Love'. At this early stage, anyone who was going to join the group had to share the basic ideas of these books, to have the intention of buying their own land for a kin's domain, and to start building their house. At first this starting group grew through word of mouth and then later through announcements and the internet. After Blagodat ecovillage had been founded near Pereslavl-Zalesskij (170 km from Moscow), in 2002-3 it was still easy to buy a plot of land in Blagodat and the process of selection was still extremely simple: newcomers were coming to Blagodat, were shown the available plots by one of two informal leaders. If newcomers seemed to be unpleasant they could refuse to sell them a plot, but there were no formal rules and restrictions about new members. Usually it was necessary only to state that one shares the main ideas about kin's domains and to pay the money for a

plot of land. The very few cases where the founders did refuse to sell a plot of land to certain persons were usually based on strong personal conflict, where somebody from Blagodat was strongly against that new member. People who did not accept basic ideas about healthy living were also not allowed to become members; alcohol consumption was one of these issues, for example. Newcomers usually had no problems with buying land and becoming members of Blagodat. There are no periods of probation, questionnaires, formal agreements or other normative documents for members. Blagodat has its own website (www.eco-blagodat.ru) and is listed on www.anastasia.ru and other sites about Russian ecovillages, so it is very easy for newcomers to find information about it.

The unwillingness of Blagodat members to have any framework or social agreement resulted in a high diversity of lifestyles and opinions on what life in the settlement should be like. Some kin's domain owners built big expensive houses, some started running businesses on their land, and others built small cheap houses, advocating minimalism and having free time for arts and spiritual development or for communicating with nature. This diversity and high levels of independence have been important characteristics of the Blagodat group from its very beginning. This in turn attracted independent and sometimes even individualistic people, resulting in a very low level of social communication and inhibiting the build-up of a strong sense of community. Many ecovillagers are very happy with this state of individual freedom: they would not like to live in a close community and they think that strong community suppresses personal freedom, which is not good at all.

Igor Morkovkin

Further reading:

Website of Blagodat ecovillage: www.eco-blagodat.ru

BARKOWO ECOVILLAGE INITIATED BY ONE FAMILY, POLAND

At the very beginning (2008/2009) my wife and I did not have enough money to start a brand new ecovillage project from scratch, so in a natural way we focused on investigating other ecovillage initiatives in Poland, looking for one to join. At that time we made a very simple website with a description of the main concepts of the project we would like to co-create. We included the basic requirements regarding fellow participants in the project and the main characteristics of the land we were searching for, such as shape, size, neighbourhood, distance to the city and more.

While we were travelling and speaking with people around Poland, an opportunity arose to purchase a very nice 20-hectare farm in the Polish mountains. Enchanted by the land itself and the entire area, we made up our minds: somehow or other we would collect enough money to buy that farm, regardless of any obstacles. In order to accomplish this we spoke with many people and friends who could have been interested in participating in the project. We also placed adverts on websites and forums clearly saying that we were searching for people with money who wanted to join a new ecovillage project and to purchase this particular farm in the mountains as co-owners. After only three months, all the money needed to purchase that farm was collected. Ten different people declared their participation and took a financial share in the project. In August 2009 everything was ready to begin the purchase process.

When I met the owner of that farm with two other representatives of the group in order to sign the agreement and pay the first instalment, he informed us that he had changed his mind and wanted to raise the previously agreed price. We were not prepared for something like this and we decided to

withdraw from the transaction at that particular time. After a few days we decided collectively as a group that we wanted to take a closer look at the market in order to check whether other opportunities existed to buy suitable land in that region for a similar or cheaper price. We soon found another farm which was much cheaper than the previous one and again we were ready to buy it.

The entire group had been communicating mainly via the internet. The very first meeting took place in January 2010 in Wroclaw after 7 months of very active internet cooperation. At that meeting it was clearly visible that almost each and every person willing to become a co-owner of the ecovillage project had remarkably different expectations, visions and goals. One person clearly said he just wanted to build a nice home to live in during holiday periods, another that he wanted to become a regular farmer and cultivate his part of land with a tractor. Someone else confessed that he was interested in having some land in order to sell it in the future at a profit, and yet another person wanted to build a small house where he could live when he retired.

For me personally this meeting was something like a wake-up call. It was clear that my personal endeavours to join a micro-society aiming towards sustainability and focused on the same goals (or to take part in creating such a society) might not be reached with this particular group of people. The group had formed very quickly and the possibility of purchasing ownership shares in a beautiful farm that could become an ecovillage in the future was a very important motivation to join that initiative. There were only two or three individuals in that group who were sincerely interested in creating a micro-society based on strong cooperative attitudes, consensus principles and similar goals and values. All of the others just wanted to take advantage of a land purchase in a nice area of Poland for their own purposes.

Soon after that meeting my wife and I openly resigned from further engagement in that particular initiative. We decided to join another group of people in north-east Poland who already owned 35 hectares of land and had invited us to help them create an ecovillage there. After a few months of intensive cooperation with them, we decided to purchase 16 hectares of land in Barkowo village, located in the same region. Recently we donated that land to a foundation we created. This year (2012) is actually the very first year of our presence on that land and the second year of the Barkowo Ecovillage Project.

As far as the process for recruiting new inhabitants to Barkowo Ecovillage Project is concerned, we wanted to make it very simple and natural. There is absolutely no rush.

A commitment to vegetarianism and abstinence from drugs and alcohol are basic requirements to become an inhabitant of the ecovillage. Then there is a trial period lasting at least one year. There is enough living space for one additional family or 2-3 people in a partially renovated house in the Ecovillage Barkowo. The ecovillage's land and property belong to the 'For Earth and People Foundation'. The council of the ecovillage is a collective body and takes decisions concerning the property on a consensus basis. 2012 is actually the very first year of our own trial period in this location. Although living conditions here are very austere, there are already a few people who want to join us and try living together with us during this initial period.

The very simple website (<http://ekowioska.wordpress.com/en/>) and word of mouth are the only ways we invite people to visit our ecovillage and join our project. We strongly believe that if we, as the initiators, can arrange our own life there in such a way that we will feel happy and fulfilled, then in a natural process other people will be inspired and happy to join us, to live in a similar way and to support this project or promote this way of living in any possible way.

Apart from my wife, myself and our 3 children there are no other full time residents of Barkowo Ecovillage yet. However there are about 10 more people who are engaging themselves actively in

development of this project and who are also potential permanent residents of Barkowo Ecovillage. Some of them are planning to come to Barkowo in the spring to live there and work with us, the Milicki family.

Artur Milicki

KRUNAI ECOVILLAGE AS KIN'S DOMAIN SETTLEMENT, LITHUANIA

While socializing in the Vilnius club for Vladimir Megre readers and on related websites, we gathered a group of people wanting to set up an ecovillage. We met often and developed a project for an ecovillage based on the 'Kin's Domain' concept. We decided that the ecovillage should contain:

- 50-70 individual homesteads – kin's domains – with 1-3 hectares per plot: The size of a kin's domain makes it possible to build a dwelling house and outbuildings, plant a garden and a forest, dig a small pond, and eventually form a fully-developed ecosystem. Each domain should be planted with forest trees and bushes. The land is owned by a family or an individual.
- Lanes
- Community areas: natural grassland for wildlife, sporting facilities, the common forest and protective forest zones, car parks, a pavilion, craft workshops, community building(s) for development of cultural and educational activities.

In the end, suitable land was found in an abandoned rural area about 50 km from Vilnius, on the territory of the former village Krunai. The land was the reason we moved there; there was nothing else in the beginning, only the land and two people who decided to buy it, even though they didn't yet have the money. When the time came to pay the first instalment, three people with financial resources had joined the initiators. And when the time came to pay off the rest of the land's purchase price, all the other people needed had also appeared.

Before buying the land we had a well-developed strategy. In 2003, we were looking for a place close to the city (40-50 km), but no further than 10 km from the main road, so that it would be easily accessible to city people. There would need to be enough land to build 50 homesteads (1-3 hectares per family, including the common village area). There was no need to find an extremely nice place because it would be possible to restore and renovate it later. Buying all the land immediately would be very difficult, so we were also looking for smaller pieces of land that had the possibility to expand.



*House at Krunai ecovillage.
Photo by Ingrida Zitkauskienė*

In the summer of 2004 we bought the first 19 hectares of land and 19 hectares of forest. Adjoining this, in 2005 we bought an old homestead in which we created the community area. 40 old apple trees had new owners. When the apples were ripe, there were so many of them that the trees could not hold the weight and began splitting in half. The harvest seemed like a gift to us from the land because we had come back to enliven a desolate place. In the autumn we also dug a pond to give ourselves somewhere to relax and freshen up after the collective work.

In 2005-2007 we dismantled the old log-brick walls of the cottage, using these and other sand-lime bricks to create a roadway at the waterlogged entrance to our settlements. We dismantled the log-walls from the cottage and barn, sorted and cleaned the logs, cleared out piles of rubble and

garbage (including asbestos roofing slate), cleaned up the well, and dismantled the ruins of the barn's foundation. We built a new cottage from old logs and put a shingle roof on it. Since most amenities were lacking, for the settling period we fitted out an outdoor kitchen, outdoor compost toilet and sleeping wagon. During all the work, several times a day we felt like children again and enjoyed a dip in the pleasantly cool pond. One of us lived in the homestead up until the first hard frost, so whenever the rest of us came we were greeted by the 'host'.

An establishment stage of Krunai ecovillage lasted for nearly 10 years as residents were in no hurry and tried to carry out most of the construction of the houses themselves. It was only in 2012 that residents started living there permanently; until then people had only stayed during the summer. Each family has their rhythm in accordance with their financial and other possibilities. Many of the tasks are carried out at collective work gatherings with the help of neighbours.

Ingrida Žitkauskienė

Further reading:

Website of Krunai ecovillage: <http://ekosodyba.lt/krunai/>

KURJEN TILA ECOVILLAGE WITH BIODYNAMIC FARM, FINLAND

The initiators of this project were a group of young families who wanted to live in the countryside, grow their own food and live ecologically. They thought it would be easier and more convenient to do it together in a communal way. They also wanted to establish a biodynamic farm because there are only a few of them in Finland. (Biodynamic agriculture is a method of organic farming that emphasizes the holistic development and interrelationships of the soil, plants and animals as a self-sustaining system. Biodynamics is based on Rudolf Steiner's philosophy, known as anthroposophy.)

This group of young families had already started to search for a suitable place to establish the farm and build a little village in 2003. The site was finally found and bought by four families in March 2011. In total, the land offers the possibility to build houses for nine families.

During those years many people were interested in this ecovillage project but most of them left the group because the search took such a long time. Potential inhabitants were attracted and informed in many ways: public meetings to introduce the project in the nearby city, distributing leaflets, attending appropriate fairs and events, and sending e-mails. Articles in newspapers and interviews on the radio and TV also gave publicity to the project.

When the farm was bought the ecovillage still needed new inhabitants. At this stage the most successful demonstrations were the 'working bee days' organised on the farm. For example, the community invited some associations from the nearest city and organised bus tours to the farm. Visitors enjoyed performing voluntary work and discussions with the ecovillage members. A lunch of organic food was also offered to the visitors. These events engendered a lot of interest in the ecovillage: by 2012 there were seven families building their homes, with space remaining for only two more family houses.

Mia Saloranta

Further reading:

Website of Kurjen tila ecovillage: www.kurjentila.fi

Biodynamic agriculture: www.biodynamics.com, www.biodynamic.org.uk, www.demeterbta.com

UNDERSTENSHÖJDEN ECOVILLAGE IN THE CITY, SWEDEN

Just a few blocks from Björkhagen's metro station, about 12 kilometres southwest from the very centre of Stockholm, and more centrally located than most of Stockholm's suburban neighbourhoods: this is where you can find Understenshöjden ecovillage. On a birch-covered knoll not far from multi-story apartment blocks there are 44 households nestled in an urban oasis. A small stream separates the Kärntorp sports area from the birch thicket and the ecovillage's houses, which almost melt into the surrounding woods. Understenshöjden clearly broke with the tradition of ecovillages being rural or semi-urban. Instead Understenshöjden became a statement that urban municipalities could support a new form of urban renewal where the best of rural and urban could be united.

Autumn 1989, Mia Torpe, a student of architecture at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, heard an inspirational lecture on eco-building given by Varis Bokalders. The idea of creating eco-housing in the city spread among her friends and neighbours in her Stockholm neighbourhood of Björkhagen. By May 1990 the residents' association EBBA or 'Ecological Housing in Björkhagen' had been formed. Members were tired of poorly ventilated and anonymous flats built with hazardous materials. Much of the focus was on creating a safe and healthy place to raise children.

The number of families interested in the residents' association was more than twice the number the ecovillage would eventually accommodate. The association then created study circles, organised field trips and invited guest lecturers to educate its members in defining what their goal actually was. A list of people interested in the ecovillage plans later grew to 2000 people.

The residents' association formally requested the City of Stockholm to assign suitable land in Björkhagen for the construction of an ecovillage. However, the right to build on this particular parcel of land had already been officially sought by two development companies: Swedish Tenant-Owner Cooperative Housing Association and City of Stockholm's Cottages Agency Limited.

The City's civil servants wanted the project to be given to their own Stockholm municipal housing company. Municipal politicians then went against their own civil servants and decided that two development companies would be given the building permission on the condition that they built ecologically and did this in cooperation with the residents' association EBBA. In August 1992 the co-housing cooperative was established with a board of directors equally divided between the two development companies and the residents' association.

Understenshöjden was established rapidly in comparison with many other ecovillages; it was only 5 years from the birth of the idea until the 42-apartment complex stood ready to move in to. The project was not connected to any particular party, which helped gain broad political support for Understenshöjden. The decision was made at a time when there was a national problem of 'sick houses', where newly built housing was found to be mouldy and unhealthy and construction experts and building codes were being publicly questioned. In addition, Understenshöjden gained popularity because it was an alternative to the outward migration of 'green belt' refugees from the cities. Instead Understenshöjden tried to change the building process itself. While not all environmental goals were achieved, e.g. waste water treatment, Understenshöjden was successful in expanding the ecovillage concept from being simply about energy efficiency to being a platform for a more holistic and healthy way of living.

Robert Hall

Further reading:

· Website of Understenshöjden ecovillage: www.understenshojden.se

· Christian, Diana Leafe (2003). *Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow an Intentional Community*, Gabriola Island, BC, CAN: New Society Publishers.

'HARE AND OTHER ANIMALS' ECOVILLAGE GROWING OUT OF THE CULTURAL SOCIETY 'UNDINE'

Several interested parties came together to establish the House of Fairy-Tales at Christmas in 1995: a place to organise a range of different events in the city of Jurmala. The local government provided a building with an area for the society's activities. The process developed and in 1998 the society 'The Green Order – House of Fairy Tales 'Undine' was founded. It has become a cultural centre and the venue for regular meetings of representatives of different ecovillages.



Joint meeting in Undine. Photo by Daina Saktiņa

In this regard, the society works together with another society: 'Hare and other animals' ecovillage. Founded in 2009, this can unofficially be considered as the affiliate of the society 'Undine' in the rural environment (in Jaunjelgava county, Sece parish). 'Hare and other animals' ecovillage is an area where agricultural, educational and handicraft activities and events take place. The area of the ecovillage owned by the association is 65 ha. There are 13 ha of agricultural land, which has been gradually freed from bushes. The remaining land is woodland, swamp and a bosky clearing. There is one farmstead with the residential house (inhabited by a family of

4 people), a greenhouse and the founders' pottery workshop. Space is available providing opportunities for new members to build a house and become actively involved in the development of the ecovillage.

The society 'Undine' serves as an unofficially defined 'filter' for the selection of persons who hold the same views. Saturdays are the open days in 'Undine', when any person interested can come and see the house and surroundings, take part in the activities or simply enjoy the atmosphere. The society's members consider it to be a place where everyone wants to come back to, a place that gives strength and inspiration, and a place that provides the sense of home.

If they come through the first step of the 'Undine filter', interested people then have a chance to visit the 'Hare and other animals' ecovillage. For this, approval needs to be granted by the ecovillage members. The most important factors are a genuine interest in and understanding of the ecovillage, as well as ideas about one's own future life there. All land and buildings are property of the society 'Hare and other animals' and new inhabitants have to become a member of this society.

There are three society membership options for those interested in living in the ecovillage. The first is 'Undine', the second is 'Hare and other animals' ecovillage, and the third is to become a member of both societies. Once the interested person has become a member he/she should follow the Articles of Society. A candidate member has the same rights and duties as a member, excluding the rights to vote at General Meetings and rights to be elected to 'Undine' institutions of finance and revision.

It is not mandatory to build a house and start living in the ecovillage when someone becomes a member. It is sufficient to provide active support to the societies and take part in their activities. Since 'Undine' is located closer to the capital city, most of the activities take place there (including meetings of members and their common events).

The first inhabitants of the 'Hare and other animals' ecovillage previously owned the land. They then donated this to the society and became members. It is planned to increase the number of inhabitants (families), however so far there is no clear vision of the desired number.

Information source: <http://www.undine.lv/eng/>

Further reading:

Website of 'Undine': <http://www.undine.lv/eng/>

AMATCIEMS ECOVILLAGE AS A COMBINATION OF AN INDIVIDUAL RESIDENCE VISION WITH REAL ESTATE BUSINESS, LATVIA

This ecovillage was founded by the businessmen Aivars Zvirbulis as a perfect place to live for himself and his family. He created the company 'Amatciems Ltd' to provide real estate management. In the beginning it was only the developer who lived in the village, and then other members of his family moved there. The next inhabitants were people who had already concluded the land and house purchase agreements as joint buyers of the property.

The village was not advertised in any special way; those who were interested found their way to the place and applied for a home. Information about this village was spread from one person to another by word of mouth: the best source of advertising.

After few years ecovillage created a homepage where it is possible to view some information about the internal rules of the village, terms of sale of houses and land, prices, and some other services.

The population of Amatciems is made up of both foreigners and Latvian citizens. The village developer personally examines all applicants and assesses whether the person can live in such an environment or not. The main criterion is compliance with the internal rules of Amatciems: observing silence, appreciation of living beings, the building regulations, restrictions concerning agriculture, etc.

In order to provide a peaceful and quiet environment in the territory of Amatciems, no activities disturbing public order or creating offense are allowed. In order to respect the population that spend their holidays or vacation in Amatciems and want to rest and relax, it is prohibited to use any loud mechanical equipment such as lawn mowers, construction tools or similar equipment before 8:00 a.m. and after 9:00 p.m. Music in cars and premises which disturbs other people is not allowed either. Since most of the roof coverings are reed, no fireworks or other pyrotechnical activities are permitted, except at events centrally organized by the manager in the location specially allocated for this purpose.

There are no special plans for communication among villagers. Amatciems residents prefer to live freely in their own houses. Sometimes villagers organize joint holiday celebrations at Christmas, New Year or Easter, for example.



*Panoramic view of Amatciems ecovillage.
Photo from Amatciems ecovillage archive*

The village has generated a lot of interest with its ideas and harmonious environment. Not everyone who is attracted to Amatiems will be able to move here, however, since purchasing of a dwelling site requires a certain amount of funds.

Aivars Zvirbulis and his team

Further reading:

Environment of Amatiems ecovillage: <http://amatiems.lv/eng/environment.html>

LAND AND BUILDINGS: Design and ownership rights



In the current culture, an individual will tend to shape his environment according to his own preferences and understanding of beauty. In ecovillages this tendency is not encouraged. Instead, the terrain itself determines the size, shapes and layouts of any structures needed – as much as possible. Factors considered here could be the orientation of the house to the sun, the prevailing wind directions, and other natural factors. However, even ecovillagers still rarely take psychoenergetic influences on people into account.

Dalia Navikaitė, one of the establishers of Maciūnai ecovillage in Lithuania and holder of a PhD in history of art, argues that effects on the energetic well-being of residents should be taken into account when creating living environments. This includes consideration of natural patterns in relation to buildings and their components, shapes, building location and the layout of the complex. For example, Lithuania traditionally has rectangular double-ended residential houses. In many cases this tradition became established because of the available building materials and technologies: for example, it would be difficult to build a round log house. However, different house types that are not traditionally well-established are now being made possible thanks to modern technologies and eco-sustainable materials, such as different types of straw buildings (frame, assembled, etc.), mixed clay and straw buildings (or clay/chaff and other mixtures), and even ‘living’ houses, which are formed out of a tree, or in other words, grown instead of built. A side-effect of this is curiosity or a desire to be unique or sophisticated becoming the key motivation for choosing a non-traditional home type. ‘Of course, that is also welcome, but really it is necessary to know the effect of the house type on a human and their life because we are affected by our surroundings regardless of whether we created it ourselves or it was given to us,’ says Dalia. Here we present some of his tips regarding what should be considered when choosing the shape, materials and location for buildings.

EFFECTS OF THE HOUSE ON HUMANS

My experience and theoretical knowledge shows that at the time of designing your house you should focus on the following elements and choose design the most beneficial for you.

House shape

Round house: gives lots of movement. Residents could feel as if they are in a centrifuge. So a round house is inappropriate for a quiet and orderly life; an increase in discussions, or even permanent quarrels among residents could arise. However, the circular form is one of the finest choices for public

or sacred structures, which is why since ancient Greek times the amphitheatre has been frequently used and why so many central 'town squares' are actually round. After the schism in Christianity, in the Byzantine church the rotunda was the most popular plan, which was made popular for the construction of churches during the Renaissance.

Hexagonal house: family; this is like a bee's honeycomb, which is characterized by comfort and security; acts like the mother's womb where you are protected from everything.

Square house: provides stability, levels, and balances, but also stops movement: freezes and frames.

Amorphous house: provides flexibility and softness; it is close to nature, but can often lead to vagueness and lack of resoluteness or difficulty making decisions, so it is far from suitable for everyone.

Traditional rectangular house: gives feeling of reality and tangibility. Perhaps it is the reason why our grandparents and great-grandparents were so 'down to earth'. Other variants similar to the rectangle and acceptable for residences are L-, T-, and U-shaped houses.

The general patterns should be taken into account selecting a **form of roof** as well:

Flat roof: if covered in grass this may look very nice and blend well with nature, but in some cases it can weigh heavily and press against the ground (of course, its combined effects with those of the house shape also have to be considered). For dreamers this might be good, but for many other people it could push them towards excessive materialism.

Gable roof: helps the residents to 'keep the spine, the axis of life'.

Four-slope or other equilateral roof: centres and helps to balance the energies of the residents of the house.

Windows and doors: The direction of opening has a particular effect: opening into the interior injects energy, opening outside gives away the energy. So if you want guests to visit frequently and gain an impression of you as welcoming hosts, then construct the door opening into the interior and windows to the outside. If you want a sheltered, private life, then make a door which opens to the outside. If you install windows opening inwards, unwanted energies could come in; if windows can't be opened, energy can stagnate and lack fluidity or motion and you will feel restricted in your actions and thoughts, eventually becoming indifferent and even losing your motivation to do anything.

Site selection:

You should take care when choosing a life **on the water**. Previously, it was general practice to avoid building a house where the groundwater is too high or the ground is springy. Many argue this was because of the fear that there will be constant moisture, which is not a relevant fear today because modern building materials can be used to significantly solve this problem. However, life on the water also has an energetic impact. Often, this type of location for housing affects the general state of the residents due to a constant feeling of internal instability. However, if you want to develop non-traditional thinking or regularly want to have new ideas, you should definitely build your house on the water!

An open area provides space for the house, the feeling of flying, and an opportunity to look beyond the horizons – a sense of power. Modern people often desire this, although this is not always conscious. Perhaps it is the reason why a homestead near a lake on a hill has such high value: after all, here you can see the most. However, this option has a side effect: it can lead to arrogance and disregard for the people around you, your neighbours and the environment as a whole. This is especially true for the

house on the hill, since this location encourages a desire to feel superior to others. Consequences of this desire include an unconscious envy of people living nearby and the wish to humiliate or belittle. For these reasons, the location should not be chosen unless the resident is very aware. It could also be beneficial for people with low self-appreciation since the location can enhance their self-esteem; negative side-effects can be avoided as long as they are able to maintain their awareness.

A house in a hollow provides comfort but can lead to an inner feeling of closure and failure to realize the sense of self, making it suitable only for those who really are internally free from any shackles.

Traditionally, the preferred location is housing on a **higher space planted with trees**. This not only protects the house from unnecessary moisture and wind, but also creates the right emotional state: intimacy that can be overcome and opened up to wider horizons. This version gives a balance of inner and outer worlds.

Construction materials:

Clay: (includes daubed clay structures and clay-mix homes, as well as dried (or burned) brick houses). This 'grounding' home can lend some people a sense of gravity. Straw dwellings, on the other hand, are light and cheerful.

Wood: wooden housing will provide security and a state of safety.

Dalia Navikaitė

In order for an ecovillage to function it is important to have not only the proper design for the site, including building layout and architecture, but also the right model for land and real estate property regulations. There are a lot of different models how to manage land and buildings of ecovillage. Each of them has strengths and weakness. Find the ideas most suitable for you situation in the following case studies.

AMATCIEMS ECOVILLAGE, LATVIA: MANAGED BY A REAL ESTATE COMPANY ESTABLISHED BY ONE INHABITANT

The land (300 ha) is owned by the developer of village Aivars Zvirbulis. The company 'Amatciems Ltd' was created to provide real estate management and manages house and plot sales. A variety of plots and houses are available for purchase. Depending on the financial resources available to the purchaser, it is possible to select the most suitable property. Prospective owners can choose from vacant plots, plots with partly commenced constructions, and plots with finished or even furnished houses. The plot sizes range from 4,000 to 10,000 square meters.

The territory of Amatciems encompasses the land for private house building, with public access areas established by the manager. Only residential use is foreseen. It is permitted to build a single family house, a bathhouse, a garage located near the house, arbors and other constructions suitable for meeting the household needs of one family. It is not permitted to use plots on this estate for any religious and cult activities, political activities, bars, discothèques and dance clubs, casinos and gambling houses, placement of any gambling equipment, provision of intimate or other similar services,

entertainment events, provision of trade and mass services, any types of manufacturing, or any other activities that could lead to higher levels of noise and smells.

Amatciems is planned as a village with a relatively uniform style of houses, therefore construction, reconstruction, placement or preservation of any single family residential house, garage, fence or other constructions, pools, tennis courts or other recreational constructions within any land plot are allowed only by written approval of the project from the chief architect of the administrative territory and the company manager.



*Founder of Amatciems ecovillage.
Photo from Amatciems ecovillage archive*

Some of the plots available include the beginnings of a residential construction but the interior works are not done yet. The price of these houses consists only of the expenditure used for construction. They give each owner the option to choose the style of further construction and decoration.

In the plots for sale where the construction has not been started, any construction project by the new owner has to fit in with the overall general impression of the village and follow the construction rules laid down within the Amata municipality. The plot owner can always choose from suggested standard projects and then adapt it to their own personal needs. Interesting log house projects have been built which fit in perfectly with the surrounding landscape. Standard projects combine minimal construction with maximum room space. It is possible to make a home to your own exacting standards and wishes which fits in perfectly with the surrounding landscape and also complies with the local rules and regulations.

Aivars Zvirbulis and team

Further reading:

Rules of Amatciems ecovillage: <http://www.amatciems.lv/eng/rules.html>

KURJEN TILA ECOVILLAGE, FINLAND: MANAGED BY ALL INHABITANTS AS A REAL ESTATE COMPANY

The land and the old buildings (for common use) are owned by a real estate company which was established by the inhabitants. The company lets plots for the houses to the shareholders and they build and own their houses privately.

An architect made a plan for the village. The new residential houses will be situated near the old buildings of the farm and near to each other. This is the best solution for the landscape and also for the common use of some buildings.

The appearance of the new buildings will be adapted to the rural cultural landscape. There are instructions for building principles concerning: location, shape, size, materials and colour, as well as courtyard plantings.

The houses and the water will be heated centrally by locally sourced wood chips. Water comes from the public water mains. The water heating will also use solar energy during the summer. The long-term aim is to produce all the energy needed by the community onsite, including electricity.

In the community there is one couple who has taken on the main responsibility of farming in a biodynamic way. The other residents of the ecovillage like to eat these vegetables which are grown in their village and biodynamically. They can buy them from the farmer couple at a low price because the farmers don't seek to make a profit from the vegetables they sell to fellow community members.

Mia Saloranta

Further reading:

Website of Kurjen Tila ecovillage: www.kurjentila.fi

SUDERBYN PERMACULTURE ECOVILLAGE, SWEDEN: OWNED BY A COOPERATIVE WHOSE MEMBERS ARE ITS TENANTS

The land and buildings in Suderbyn ecovillage are owned by a cooperative society, which is registered as a 'ekonomisk förening' under Swedish Law. This means that the members collectively own the buildings and land. In order to become a member, they have to buy an equal share and pay an annual membership fee. Members have the right to vote at the annual meeting and to elect the board of the organisation.



Air picture of Suderbyn Ecovillage. Photo from Suderbyn Permaculture Ecovillage archives

Design of ownership

Before Suderbyn Permaculture Ecovillage was created in 2008, the 5 founders visited other ecovillages abroad and in Sweden to get inspiration. During those visits they saw problems with the practice of individual ownership. In some ecovillages with private ownership, conflicts arose when some private owners didn't act according to the vision of the community. Also, private owners were spending more time on their

own plot instead of on the common area, which then created more individualism. So, unlike most ecovillages in Sweden, Suderbyn decided it did not want individually-owned land or buildings and opted for collective ownership of the land. Therefore they created a democratic cooperative that owns the farm and 5 hectares of land. The collective ownership is clearly connected with their strong focus on permaculture, and this includes also taking care of the commons and nature.

Instead of co-housing, where inhabitants own their own space, the 13-20 residents (depending on season) of Suderbyn rent their rooms from the cooperative. The rents are set at a level to cover both the use of private and common spaces. There is no formula or the like to decide the rents but they are subjectively decided; this has been a problem at times, especially when new accommodation is arranged, and therefore the rental system will most likely be revised in the near future. Since all the rooms are available to rent it also makes the ecovillage accessible to people who want to try out living there and those on a lower income. The old farmhouse has 6 bedrooms, a living room, dining room, kitchen and shower. In 2011 two cabins were brought onto the property (by crane). One of the cabins has three bedrooms, and the other cabin has one sleeping room and one common living room. The dry toilets are in a separate building.

This ownership model is designed in a way to make it easy for new people to become members and to feel an equal co-owner of all land and property. For Suderbyn it seems important to have

clear written rules about membership, and therefore everyone's membership status is written in every annual report. In one special case, one family moved in but didn't want to live in the collective house; the cooperative bought a new cabin to rent to them and put it on the property.

How to become a co-owner?

Membership is only offered after 6 months of living in Suderbyn. In this way, interested persons can try out living in the village and the current inhabitants can get to know the newcomers. After living at Suderbyn for six months, the inhabitant is expected to become a member if they want to stay in the village longer. Every new individual member has to buy one equal share of EUR 12 000. This can be paid at once (full members) or over a maximum of 5 years (joining members): this is fixed in the statutes. Everyone pays individually but children under 16 don't have to pay for membership. Suderbyn wants to make sure there are possibilities for everyone to become a co-owner regardless of their income level. According to the statutes, the board has to approve the membership and the payment plan.



*Residents and volunteers of Suderbyn ecovillage.
Photo by Jesús Pacheco*

Members need to pay an annual fee of EUR 24 in order to get the right to vote at the annual meeting. However, it is not necessary to become a member.

When members want to leave the ecovillage and cancel their membership, they can request their membership share be paid back over a maximum five-year period.

Members' rights

Members have the full right to elect the board and other officers and to suggest proposals at the annual meeting. They also get, according to a board decision, a discount on rent. Full members pay 60 EUR less and joining members pay 30 EUR less per room than a non-member. (An inhabitant is a joining member during the time he/she is paying the instalments for his/her share.)

Likewise, the board can decide about other rights of the joining members, such as voting rights or right to hold a seat on the board or similar.

Suderbyn thinks that it is also important for the cohesion of the ecovillage to grant non-members such as volunteers and scholars an involvement in the decision-making and a chance to share their opinions while they are part of the community. Therefore all meetings to date have been open for everyone staying in the community. With more members and inhabitants this might well change.

As a new joining member of the cooperative in Suderbyn, I like the openness and inclusion of the ecovillage for new members, especially for young persons like myself with little money. Unlike under individual ownership, here I am able to become a co-owner with an agreed payment plan for the membership share lasting 5 years and be part of the ecovillage.

***Katrien Van den Berge, joining member of Suderbyn cooperative
Text based on the interview with Robert Hall, founder the ecovillage***

'HARE AND OTHER ANIMALS' ECOVILLAGE, LATVIA: OWNED BY A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

The ecovillage is located in Sece Parish of Jaunjelgava County at a distance of 111 km from Riga. It was registered as a society in 2009 and is a non-profit public organization.



Undines courtyard. Photo by Daina Saktiņa

The administrative institutions of the society are the General Meeting of Members, the Board, Council, and the Chair. The Board consists of the Chair of the Hare and other animals Ecovillage and 3 other members chosen by him. The Council consists of the Board and 6 other members chosen by the Board. The financial and economic activity is controlled by an auditor elected by the General meeting from members.

The highest administrative institution is the General Meeting of Members. This has the right to: change the statutes; elect and dismiss the Chair and auditor of the organisation; approve the budget and annual report; decide on liquidation or reorganisation of the organisation; decide on conceptual questions about Hare and other animals Ecovillage.

The Board or Council makes its decisions by a simple majority vote. If the votes divide equally, the vote of the Chair is decisive. The Board and Council both have a quorum of half of the members.

Members and candidate-members of Hare and other animals Ecovillage are admitted by the Board or Council. A candidate-member can become a member only after one year.

The organisation was launched using donations from members and candidate-members, private persons, legal entities and the LEADER project.

All real estate on the territory of the ecovillage is common property of the society. Decisions about property management are taken in the General Meeting of Members.

The area of the ecovillage owned by the society is 65 ha. There are 13 ha of agricultural land, which has been gradually freed from bushes.



*Design of Undine meeting room.
Photo by Daina Saktiņa*



Courtyard of the main house in the eco-village "Hare and other animals". Photo by Daina Saktiņa

The remaining land is woodland, swamp and a bosky clearing. In 2012 there was one farmstead with the residential house, a greenhouse and a pottery workshop run by the founders (LEADER project). Two families lived permanently in the ecovillage. The project to construct the crafts houses has been submitted. In the future it is planned to build a community building and about 10 individually located farmsteads.

Every member (private person) of the society is the co-owner of the ecovillage territory with responsibility for the entrusted property. A member can select any specific plot and build their house there. Members of the society are given

lifetime use of the land for free; principles of equality of plot area are observed by the members. There are not any particular regulations as to the materials and appearance of the buildings to be constructed; of course, the condition 'as natural as possible' applies. The new owners develop the house to their liking.

New residents are offered a temporary summer dwelling where they can live while building their house. Although the individual farmsteads will be built by new residents, they will not become their property: all real estate will remain property of the society.

Information source: <http://www.undine.lv/eng/>

MUNKSØGÅRD ECOVILLAGE, DENMARK: MIXED OWNERSHIP

The Munksøgård eco-village was established in 2000 as an integrated part of a newly developed neighbourhood named 'Trekroner'. It is located on the edge of the city of Roskilde about 25 km west of Copenhagen, adjacent to farm fields.

The development was designed to provide for diversity in housing sizes, ownership types and in support of different age groups. The development includes 100 row houses of different sizes and accommodates about 225 children, youths and adults in a socially lively community. The community is subdivided into five dwelling groups each of 20 row houses. Each dwelling group has their own common house for joint activities (common dinners, meetings, parties etc.). The dwelling groups have different types of ownership. One dwelling group is privately owned as single family houses, and one is a co-operative association (the residents own the houses collectively as an association but at the same time the residents also privately own a share of the house they occupy). Three of the dwelling groups are owned by Roskilde Building Association and these houses are for rent. The residents decide who moves into the rented houses. One of these three dwelling groups is only for young people, one is only for seniors, and one is open for all age groups.



Map with houses of different ownership types in Munksøgård eco-village. Photo by Dalia Norvaisaite

An old farm that belongs to the community is located in the heart of the settlement. The farm buildings host many common activities: cafe, vegetable shop, gift shop, office space for rent, sleepover room for rent, shelter for bicycles, bicycle repair workshop, storage space for rent, and keeping of animals.

The residents manage the operation and further development of the settlement themselves.

A number of associations with general assemblies and a board of directors elected by the residents manage the commonly owned property and its operation. This includes the heating plant, wastewater treatment plant, waste recycling station, old farm buildings and common houses. One association manages the commonly owned property of all five dwelling groups, one manages the old farm buildings, and each of the five dwelling groups has separate associations managing their activities. A dwelling group usually holds meetings every month. Residents' issues of general interest are discussed at an advisory common meeting held about every second month and open to all.

The technical operation is managed in a number of working groups, such as snow clearing and road maintenance, maintenance of drains and wastewater treatment, and operation of the heating plant.

Apart from technical working groups there are working groups directed to social activities, including arrangement of parties or social activities in relation to certain national holidays. Each of the working groups manages their own budget assigned at the general assembly. All residents are expected to take part in at least one working group.

For Ecovillage Munksøgård there is a long waiting list, made up of 'ordinary' people who want to move in.

Lars Levin-Jensen

Further reading:

Website of Munksøgård ecovillage: http://www.munksoegaard.dk/index_en.html

FINANCIAL SOURCES FOR ECOVILLAGE ESTABLISHMENT



Acquisition of real estate is perhaps the most critical point in the creation of an ecovillage. It has to be done with regard to many factors in order to facilitate a continuously harmonious growth of the community. Purchasing land is one of the greatest challenges for an ecovillage initiative. Exceptions are some very special cases such as Sieben Linden Ecovillage in Germany or Kovcheg Ecovillage in Russia, where a societal system transition had made cheap land acquisition possible.

When selecting the method of funding for the establishment stage, most of the ecovillages put a strong emphasis on ethical financing. Looking for ways to improve people's lifestyle, they do not want to leave the financial system untouched. So when buying land, constructing buildings and funding other infrastructure, ecovillage founders try to avoid borrowing from the mainstream banking system and use social banking instead.

According to Roland Benedikter in an article published in the journal 'The European Financial Review' on February 15, 2012: 'In Europe, Social Banking and Social Finance have been big trends among bank customers since the 1980s. Social Banks focus on social responsibility, transparency, and sustainability. They consider themselves as 'catalysts for social change' without the primacy of profit. During the crisis, not only did they not lose any money, but they made the highest gains in their history, increasing their assets with growth rates of about 20-25% per year. In 2009 – at the peak of the crisis – their average growth rate was about 30%. It is expected that the overall growth rate of European Social Banks will remain stable at 13-15% per year in the coming years and that they will reach out to one billion people by 2020.'

ALTERNATIVELY FINANCED ECOVILLAGE: SUDERBYN PERMACULTURE ECOVILLAGE, SWEDEN

Suderbyn ecovillage was able to finance their land purchase at short notice using alternative financial solutions. By bringing together Sweden's two main alternative financial institutions, JAK Banken and Ekobanken, Suderbyn Ecovillage was able to quickly and ethically finance its land purchase. However, it is open to discussion whether or not the financing was chosen on a fully ethical basis, or mostly for economic reasons.

Background

Gotland Ecovillage Network (today known as RELEARN Suderbyn), founded in 2007, was dedicated to establishing an ecovillage on Gotland but had failed to find appropriate land that could be purchased. Finally, the initiative group identified a suitable small farm on sale through an internet-based auction. The group succeeded in placing the highest bid accepted by the sellers and was offered the chance to purchase the land for 1 550 000 SEK on 8 May 2008.

That same evening Suderbyn Cooperative Society was formed and the race was on to complete formalities within a matter of weeks. The sellers required the purchase to be completed by 1 July, which was also the deadline for the full payment for the land. The group was reminded several times that there were plenty of other potential buyers waiting to replace them. In order to complete the purchase, the cooperative had to register itself legally in the National Registry of Companies, pay 10% down payment within days, get special approval to purchase agricultural land from the County Administration and borrow around one million Swedish krona.



*Sunset in Suderbyn Ecovillage.
Photo by Jesús Pacheco*

Furthermore, the initiative group had to temporarily borrow private money to make the down payment, draft a set of statutes for a democratic non-profit cooperative that would easily attract new members to the initiative, complete the formalities of registration, open bank accounts and solicit a one-time membership share of 100 000 SEK from the five founding members, thus collecting 500 000 SEK in member capital. The Swedish Law on Acquisition of Agriculture Lands required county administrative board approval of the purchase of land by a legal body. The application was made and more information was required by the County regarding the ambitions of the initiative. In the end all the requirements were met within 6 weeks.

The Gotland County Administrative Board issued a decision that the land was 'well suited for the establishment of a permaculture ecovillage', the National Registry had approved the cooperative and two alternative banks were ready to finance the land purchase.

Details of the loans



Team of international volunteers constructing the dome. Photo from Suderbyn Permaculture Ecovillage archives

While the initiative group had been individual members of the JAK membership bank since 1990, Suderbyn Cooperative Society had no previous relation with the bank. The bank demanded a business plan, collateral in the form of holding the deeds to the land being purchased, and fire insurance. In addition, the bank also required that the Cooperative use its own capital to finance the 'top' of the purchase, letting JAK take the safest 'bottom' financing. However JAK would not lend the 75% of purchase price needed, but only 50%, or 750 000 SEK. JAK suggested that the Cooperative contact a second bank 'from the high street' and acquire a commercial loan for the final 25% of the purchase price. The Cooperative chose to turn to JAK's main competitor Ekobanken, who turned out to be more than happy to finance the 25% (or 412 500 SEK) and even to finance the portion which JAK was offering. The cooperative was in the end content to lend from both these alternative lenders and to develop a relationship with them both, in preparation for the day when additional loans would be necessary. Mortgage deeds of trust for a total of 1 162 500 SEK were then turned over to the two banks.

About JAK

In 1965 a Swedish NGO was established with the name 'Land Labour Capital National Association for Economic Awareness' (literally translated from Swedish). The association was inspired by its sister organization that was founded in Denmark in 1931. The goal of the association was to raise awareness of the damaging effects of interest on societal development and the promotion of an interest-free society. In 1970 the association could issue its first loan. During the interest crisis in Sweden, created by the Soros speculation on the overvalued Swedish crown (krona), around 30 000 Swedes flocked to JAK, bringing it out of the obscurity of fringe idealistic segments into the mainstream. As a result, in 1993 the association became a cooperative, and in December 1997 JAK was approved by the Swedish government to be a membership bank. This Bank License protects JAK's clients and members via the State Deposit Protection Guarantee, as it does for all Swedish banks. J.A.K. (Denmark), JAK Bank Italia (Italy), Reciprocal Bank (UK), Rentevrij (Belgium) and o/ZB (Germany) are part of the European interest-free banking movement. There is also a similar interest-free practice within Islamic banking, which is accessible in other parts of the world.

JAK granted a 30-year loan, of 750 000 SEK, to Suderbyn. The Cooperative has to repay 6250 SEK each quarter, but as well is obliged to save 6250 SEK per quarter for 30 years, money that Suderbyn cannot access until the loan is paid off. In addition the Cooperative had to pay a loan capital deposit of 45 000 SEK which likewise cannot be retrieved until the 30-year loan is repaid. This means that the loan will be paid off, Suderbyn will be refunded nearly 800 000 SEK.

About Ekobanken

Ekobanken started as the Free Cultural Fund of Järna in 1980 and merged with Sola Savings and Loan in 1992 to become Ekosparkassan. In 1998 the institution was transformed into Ekobanken, one of Sweden's first membership banks. Together with Cultura Sparebank (Norway), Banca Etica (Italy), GLS Gemeinschaftsbank (Germany), La Nef (France), Freie Gemeinschaftsbank (Switzerland), Andelskassen Merkur (Denmark) and Triodos Bank (Netherlands), Ekobanken belongs to an international banking movement called Social Banking or Sustainable Banking. This movement is also behind the 'Global Alliance for Banking on Values'.

In order for Suderbyn Ecovillage to get its 20-year loan of 412 500 SEK from Ekobanken, it first needed to be approved as a socially and ecologically ethical project. Once approved, the cooperative had to become a member of Ekobanken and purchase a membership share in the bank, equal to 5% of its loan. Thus the cooperative bought 20 625 SEK of shares in Ekobanken, creating more lending capital. In the end the Ekobanken loan to Suderbyn was publicized in the bank's publication 'Transparent Lending' for all to see. Suderbyn now makes a variable monthly mortgage repayment of around 1200 SEK to Ekobanken which includes repayment of capital and an interest payment (in 2012 it was 4%).

But what about fire insurance?

In spite of their common criticism of the ethics of the commercial finance sector, both banks required Suderbyn to insure the property against fire. The insurance in itself is logical as the banks must be sure of the Cooperative's ability to repay, which is connected to renting of rooms and cabins in the ecovillage. However neither of the banks was able to recommend ethical insurance providers on the Swedish market as such do not exist. Then the UK insurer that offered ethical property insurance was contacted but it did not want to enter the Swedish market. The cooperative, as a member of both banks, motioned to the respective banks' annual meetings that the two banks cooperate to find an ethical solution for the insurance of their members' properties. While the smaller Ekobanken reacted positively in principle, JAK dismissed ethical insurance as being outside its focus. The best suggestion

to proceed was Folksam Insurance, which places its funds in the bank Robur, which in turn guarantees that no more than 5% of the capital is invested into weapons, alcohol or tobacco.

Conclusion

Alternative, ethical financing is important to many ecovillages who want to make a break with the mainstream financial markets. Many ecovillages in Sweden have turned to one of Sweden's membership banks for ethical loans and networking with like-minded organizations. The accessibility of alternative finance is, however, not equally accessible in the EU. Suderbyn was able to combine two different types of alternative loans, one without interest and one requiring documented ethical objectives. In the end the cooperative was content to have relations with both; and very pleased that they avoided conventional financing.

Robert Hall, Katrien van den Berge

Further reading:

- Website of Suderbyn Permaculture Ecovillage: www.suderbyn.se
- Website of JAK bank: www.jak.se
- Website of Ekobanken bank: www.ekobanken.se
- Website of Global Alliance for Banking on Values: <http://www.gabv.org/>

ADVICE FOR ECOVILLAGE FOUNDERS AT THE ESTABLISHMENT STAGE OF THE ECOVILLAGE LIFE CYCLE

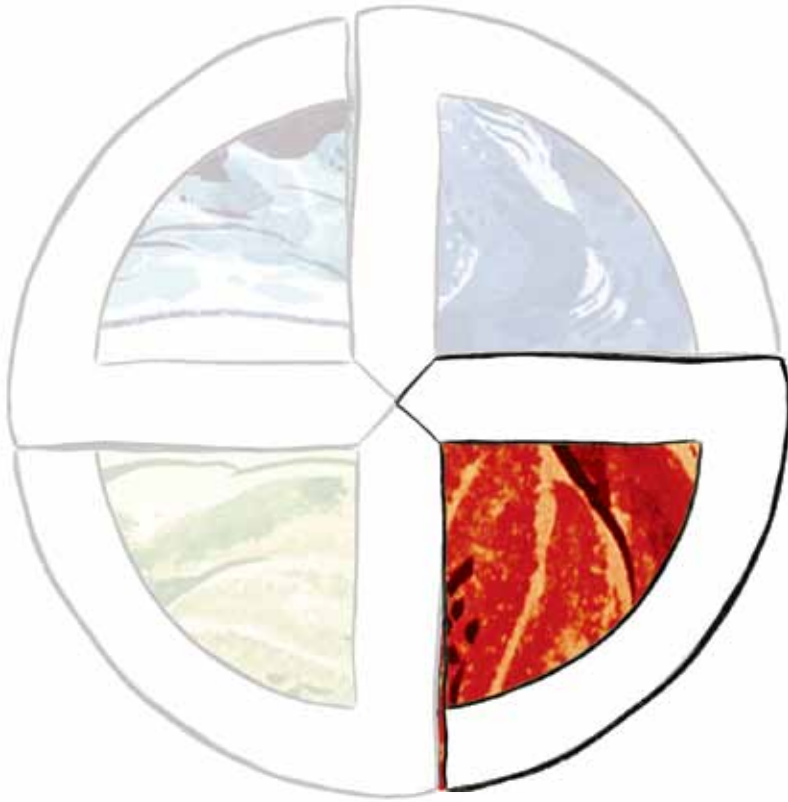
(based on the experience of Baltic Sea region ecovillages)

- Clearly identify your values and describe them as a vision of the ecovillage in terms of the three dimensions mentioned here. As a tool for the formation of a sustainable ecovillage vision, you can use the test on ecovillage sustainability (see Chapter 3).
- Define certain criteria for the selection of ecovillage residents; this will provide a basis for community cohesion.
- Consider the patterns dictated by nature when designing the village.
- Choose a clear model of ownership rights for land and other immovable property; agree on a model for future payments for ecovillage maintenance and repaying loans.
- Select an ethical funding method for the ecovillage establishment; consider alternatives to the mainstream banking system, such as social banks, credit unions, and micro-credit.



Stage 2

FIRE SEASON



*Use your creative fire, not only by giving up bad habits,
but also by shaping a new life style.*

Extract from the Ecovillage Folk:

A STORY ABOUT THE REASONS TO BE RICH

Once upon a time there was a businessman. He had built up his business by working hard; his daily life was full of stress and the constant fear of making a wrong decision. He had no spare time for his family or for himself; even his evenings and weekends were full of business dinners, receptions and games of golf (which he hated) with all the necessary influential business people. He could only 'afford' 10 days' holiday a year. Then he would go to his favourite seaside village to enjoy the nature and tranquillity.

During one of these holidays he was walking along the seashore and saw a fisherman slowly unloading his small catch from his boat. It was noon and the businessman hadn't had his lunch yet, so he stopped to ask the fisherman:

- Did something happen to your boat? You have returned very early from fishing.

The fisherman looked at the boat and said:

- No, nothing happened. My boat has served me well for many years.

- Ah, so maybe you returned early because you don't feel well? Do you need a doctor? – inquired the businessman further. The fisherman smiled:

- Oh no, I feel great.

The businessman felt like he wasn't making himself understood.

- So why was your fishing trip so short? – he asked directly.

- I have caught enough. Half will be for my family to eat and the other half will be to sell.

The businessman was outraged:

- Nobody works like that. So what are you going to do now?

- Oh, I still have a lot of work to do. I'll go home to have lunch with the family and then play a game with the children. In the evening, my wife and I will visit our neighbours, we'll smoke some fish, taste the first harvest of their plums and have a little chat about life.

The businessman was stumped:

- But all of that can't be called work. You should be fishing until it is dark.

This time it was the fisherman's turn to look perplexed:

- And what do I need to do that for?

The businessman sighed and began to explain:

- If you were fishing every day all day, you would catch a multiple of the fish you catch now. You could sell all that extra fish and save enough money for a second boat. Then you hire your neighbour so that he can go fishing for you, too. After some time, you would have enough money to buy more boats, and all the men of the village would work for you.

- And what do I need all that for? - asked the fisherman again.

- You are so small-minded! Just think what it could lead to. You could even set up your own fish processing plant or take over your competitors. That way you would make even more profit. Then you could move to live in the big city and run your business from there.

The fisherman still didn't understand.

- And what do I need to do all that for?

- You could become extremely rich. Perhaps you'd become a millionaire.

Despite this new explanation from the businessman, the fisherman still wasn't sure what he meant.

- And what's the use of that for me? What will I do then?

This question confused the businessman. After all, he had just explained his dreams for the future. So he paused for thought and then an answer came to him:

- Well, when you are truly rich you will be able to afford frequent holidays at the seaside.

STAGE 2 OF THE ECOVILLAGE LIFE CYCLE: FIRST YEARS OF LIVING IN THE ECOVILLAGE – HOW DO WE PROCEED?

It is not so important to do a lot of different tasks. It is much more important to take the necessary steps at the right time.

Geshe Jampa Thinley

The careful design of the ecovillage is an important step but the first years of living in the ecovillage will always be full of new challenges. The second stage in the ecovillage life cycle sees individuals and the community having to find ways to organize their practical, everyday life. The main challenges of the first years living in an ecovillage are generally: downshifting, finding new alternative activities, community building, management of common resources, and creation of a decision-making system.



Main elements of Stage 2 of the ecovillage life cycle

Most people move to live in an ecovillage because they are tired of materialism and the excessive consumerism of our mass culture. They want to experience less stress and spend more time on the things they consider more important: for example, socializing with family and friends, psychic training, and exploring the surrounding natural world. This conscious decision to stop striving for unnecessary wealth or prestige and shift to a simpler life is often called 'downshifting'.

Downshifting as social behaviour has continually grown in popularity among populations living in rich industrial societies. However, every individual's decision to downshift should be a conscious and

well-considered action. It is not enough to criticize mainstream society where the cult of consumerism has become the spiritual focus. There is more to downshifting than just restricting your purchases to real necessities and nature-friendly items or changing from a full-time job to part-time work. Life goes on after moving to an ecovillage and you need to find alternative activities and livelihoods if you want to spend your time meaningfully.

Experiences in ecovillages show that those who make a success of downshifting and enjoy it are initially very clear on what they want. In other words, they are clear on their positive intentions and not just on the 'negative' side – what they find intolerable and want to escape or give up. The reader will now find some individual stories from inhabitants of ecovillage on the topic 'How my life in an ecovillage differs from my previous life'.

GETTING OUT OF THE RAT RACE: DARIUS, LITHUANIA

Darius Ražauskas is 26 years old and used to live in the second largest Lithuanian city Kaunas. He left his job and a comfortable life in the city and went to live in Ročkiai ecovillage in Lazdijai region. He was a Masters graduate from Vytautas Magnus University School of Management and also a nightclub manager. These are the facts he could have said about himself just a few years ago, but now Darius Ražauskas presents himself as a teacher of happiness, a raw food enthusiast and an ecovillage community member.

'I am a real child of the city. I grew up in a block of flats, although I also used to spend summers in the countryside at my grandmother's. After school I went to study in Kaunas. During my university years I worked as a real estate salesman and a journalist. I also went on summer trips to Ireland and worked there as a builder.'

After talking about those years, which seem to represent a normal life for many people, Darius goes on to reveal he did not feel truly happy in the city. Night work and constant stress began to tamper with his health, and childhood problems came back: 'As a kid I was not a very healthy child and constantly had various diseases. I used to sit by the window and watch kids playing in the yard, and I used to feel sad. Disappointed in conventional medicine, my parents began looking for help from herbalists and bioenergy specialists. And within half a year they brought me back to normal life. Now, I haven't had any colds for many years; in fact, I haven't had a cold since the time I stopped taking chemical drugs.'

This long period of being continuously sick also had a positive effect for Darius: 'When I was having non-traditional treatments I met lots of interesting people who had a different worldview. While I was ill and lying in bed, I used to create movies in my mind, draw and dream of flying cities. This is how I developed my visual imagination and creativity, and it helps me now to reach my life goals. At the moment I am writing a book and that creativity is a great help.'

Darius' family was not wealthy, living very modestly. He used to dream of living more comfortably when he grew up, and moving to Kaunas to study seemed to open up this opportunity for him: 'I wanted to make new friends and have an interesting life as soon as possible. I was rushing to make up for a lonely childhood, when I was sick and anxious. I dived into a life full of parties, alcohol and cigarettes. While I was still a student I already became a managing director and felt the taste of power. After all, when you are young, there is no greater pleasure than running the parties which everyone wants to come to. You feel so powerful, for example, when you can let somebody in for free or refuse some people entry at all. I received a lot of attention, fame and money.'

‘However, soon I felt that my job as a nightclub director did not make sense. I was not doing anything beneficial for humanity.’ While living in the city he began to ask himself if this lifestyle was what he wanted: ‘... working from eight to five in order to make more money and pay back the loan on a box in a block where even living is very unhealthy. Is this all I can expect in this life?’

Stress and night work were damaging his health so he started looking into the benefits of eating raw food, but ‘doing this in the city is difficult’. Then he read ‘Anastasia’, the book by V. Megre. Along with the other books from the same author, this presented the relationship between human and nature in a way he found enjoyable and interesting.

‘I quit living in the city and gave up a good job with a good salary because it did not give me satisfaction and because it damaged my health. I realized that this way of life is in conflict with my values.’

Along with others from the Kaunas ‘Anastasia’ club, Darius started looking for an ecovillage where they could buy land and live. ‘We wanted beautiful nature, a good community and good soil. When we found an emerging eco-community in Ročikiai we became satisfied as it was a beautiful place and the price of land was affordable as well. So we didn’t waste any time and purchased the land.’

‘After leaving the city I planted vegetables and trees and helped neighbours to build their houses. Many will say that I have not yet done anything of value, but it seems to me that my activity was very meaningful. After all, I was planting trees and the fruits of these trees will be eaten by my grandchildren and great-grandchildren. In the short term I plan to build a homestead; so far I have been living in the open air, sometimes spending the night in a temporary shed or at my neighbour’s.’

For Darius there is a clear difference between life in the ecovillage and life in traditional village, ‘which for me is associated with hard physical work on the land that can only be brightened up by alcohol’. The natural farming principles in the ecovillage allow to grow cucumbers, pumpkins, cabbages without them having to be watered, fertilized and weeded. ‘Living in an eco-community gives a sense of security, the neighbours are always ready to come and help you. For example, you start to build the house. In the traditional village you would probably work alone all the time. But here, in a wink of an eye neighbours gather and work is carried out ten times faster. After work we eat together, dance, and sing. In addition, living in the community saves money. For example, building a house requires a concrete mixer. For one person it would be expensive to buy, and we rarely need it. Residents of our ecovillage collected a hundred or two hundred litas and bought a concrete mixer. Also we bought a trailer and a good lawnmower. For the thousand litas I would have spent on my own mower, I bought ten other tools I needed. This is the power of community.’

Darius says he is grateful to the city for showing him how he does not want to live. And he is grateful to the ecovillage movement for giving him hope in his quest to lead a meaningful and happy life.

Lina Mustafinaite

Further reading:

Darius website address: <http://www.esujums.lt/>

HOW TO BECOME AN ECOVILLAGE RESIDENT WITHOUT ANY START-UP CAPITAL: IVAN*, RUSSIA



*One house from wooden blocks is finished and the other is preparing in Kovcheg ecovillage in 2012.
Photo by Irina Popova*

Before coming to the ecovillage, Ivan was a freelancer. The young man's profession was actually tractor operator, but he was also a musician and composer. He came to the ecovillage without any savings and had no financial support from relatives or anyone else. So he had to earn money by working in the ecovillage. He is being hired by other ecovillagers when they need to dig a pond because he can operate an excavator. He is also involved in the common works involved in the construction of the ecovillage's roads. According to the ecovillage rules, when the ecovillagers make a decision to construct a road, they then collect the money and should hire somebody from the ecovillage who can do this work.

Now Ivan's main business is the construction of traditional blockhouses. He organized a team with a few other ecovillagers, and they make houses to sell. They revived traditional Russian ways of house building: they do not use modern instruments or techniques. They make timbered blockhouses with round logs by hand using old, specialist types of axes and other traditional tools; this prevents the timber from decaying or being infested by insects (timber beetles and others). Houses built in this traditional way in Russia can be found standing without any decay for 100-200 years. Up until now a lot of these old houses can be found in Northern Russian villages. Before the middle of the 20th century – before industrialisation – most villagers had the knowledge and ability to build a house by hand and would do this, either by themselves or together with relatives and neighbours. Now there only a very few masters left in old villages and it is difficult to find them in order to learn their craft or order a house.

This is why there is a great demand for the blockhouses made by Ivan's team, which are quite expensive if compared with usual industrial houses. Sometimes the clients have to wait for several months or one year because these houses take time to be constructed.

* The name has been changed

Laysan Mirzagitova



Working team from Kovcheg ecovillage construct houses using only axes according to traditional techniques. Photo by Irina Popova

LIVING IN AN ECOVILLAGE WITHOUT MONEY FOR A FEW WEEKS: NIKOLAY*, RUSSIA

Before starting a project to establish an ecovillage, Nikolay had his own small furniture-making business. He did not continue this business after he moved to the ecovillage with his family. So now, if asked the question, 'What do you do for a living in your ecovillage?' he replies, 'First of all it is

necessary to understand that people living in the ecovillages need much less money than people living in cities. The main expenses in the cities, such as food, transportation and utility payments, are much less in the ecovillages since the majority of their food is being grown by themselves, they do not need transportation daily, and they provide themselves with wood for heating. So they only need to pay regularly for electricity.’ According to Nikolay, the main difference between a city and an ecovillage is: ‘In cities you cannot live without money even a few days; in ecovillages you can easily live without money for few weeks, or even months.’

Nikolay and his wife grow almost all their own vegetables and some fruit and berries in their approximately 0.1 ha garden. In summer and autumn (4-5 months) they provide themselves with almost 100% of their fresh herbs and vegetables. The rest of the year they still have potatoes, beetroot, cabbages, carrots, onions and pumpkins from their storage, and they prepare a lot of preserves. They also grow part of their cereals and provide themselves with honey. In this way, they provide themselves with about 50% or even more of the food they need (they are vegetarians).



Pavilion for observing bee-garden in Kovcheg ecovillage. Photo from Kovcheg archives



A good yield from the garden. Photo from Kovcheg archives

Nikolay’s family income is mostly provided by beekeeping, holding seminars on natural beekeeping and selling bee-hives. They sell surplus honey and bee products which are not used by their family or their numerous guests and relatives. Demand here is higher than supply, so there is no need for any advertising or sales infrastructure. Some people interested in developing natural bee-keeping on their own land order beehives from Nikolay. These original beehives cannot be found in the usual shops for bee-keepers. They also order beehive frames. Seminars on natural beekeeping also bring some income to the family, as well as to other ecovillagers involved in their organisation and logistics.

Beekeeping is not a ‘business project’ for Nikolay, it is rather a passion, or service; Nikolay has set himself a challenging goal to promote natural bee-keeping with Central Russian bee species widely in Russia. He conducted research on bee-gardening, wrote and published two books on natural bee-keeping, conducted a dozen seminars on this topic, and continues his research and experiments today. He regards the income he receives from this more as a ‘by-product’ of his passionately performed, socially valuable hobby and service.

Nikolay’s wife is growing a tree nursery in their homestead. At present, they mostly plant their young trees on pastures surrounding the ecovillage. In future, the nursery could also become a source of income.

* The name has been changed

Laysan Mirzagitova

ECO-COMMUNITY BUILDING



Public pressure on those who think differently can be huge. To ensure that residents of ecovillages do not gradually succumb to this and return to modern consumerist society or put pressure on other members to reduce the eco-technical requirements of their ecovillage, it is important to support each other. Even in ecovillages designed as collections of individual homesteads, constant socializing among residents is an important factor to ensure that standards in the ecovillage remain more nature-friendly than in conventional settlements. This is one of the factors that make creating an eco-community such a big job. There are many ways to do this, and each ecovillage can choose the most suitable method for their situation, taking into account the interests and aspirations of the residents. The following articles are about practices directed toward the creation or enhancement of eco-community. They have an emphasis on joint activities for environmental projects as well as the organization of events, festivals and rituals that help to maintain a better connection with the natural rhythms of their homeland or understand the original aim of ancient national and regional rituals.

SOCIAL LIFE AT KOVCHEG ECOVILLAGE, RUSSIA



Members of Kovcheg learn about herbs together. Photo by Irina Popova

Kovcheg, created in 2001, is a large and quite successful ecovillage; it is probably the most well-known ecovillage in Russia. It originally grew out of the ideas described in the books of Russian author Vladimir Megre as a settlement of Kin's Domains. In 2013 there were about 150 residents (including nearly 50 children under 16) living on the land. Of these, more than two thirds are members and the rest are considering moving there. The whole 79 ha of its residential territory is already distributed among its members; they can only accept a new member if someone leaves the ecovillage or cancels their membership.

Social life is a very strong part of Kovcheg ecovillage life. As most of the residents of Kovcheg are highly educated people in very diverse fields, they decided that everybody who is able to should present their knowledge and skills for general benefit, free of charge. As a result they have an abundance of trainings and classes being offered and conducted regularly. They have a theatre study group led by a professional artist, a choir led by a professional director (both for adults and children), study groups for the Hindi language, Indian dances, aikido, art crafts and drawing, as well as about 15-20 different study groups for children. Additionally, interest groups meet, celebrate and do common work, including a group who grow vegetables and cereals together. They also hold community celebrations: Earth Day (July 23), and traditional Russian sun celebrations (6 times a year).

In Kovcheg several projects have been implemented to create communal infrastructure. They constructed a communal house (it was the first building constructed in the ecovillage), a



Men are singing at the Kovcheg concert but their children do not want to watch. Photo by Irina Popova



Master class in making wooden tableware in Kovcheg. Photo by Irina Popova

sauna, the school building, a sawmill and wood processing workshops. Members also built roads and installed an electricity line from the state grid. There is a system of responsibility for these objects and for their maintenance and a system governing their use.

Kovcheg residents regularly maintain their territory. They also plant many trees; one large-scale project was planted to conserve the public forest from illegal cuttings. This then grew into a new project of forest management for the territories surrounding the ecovillage: they clear windfall timber and dry wood, plant new trees, and have organized an eco-path.

They organize about 15 seminars per year on 6 different topics: natural bee-keeping, eco-housing, stove construction, ecovillage life, medical herbs, and motherhood. In 2009 they started organizing annual youth summer camps (for people aged 14-25); this gives young people from different ecovillages an opportunity to meet each other and network. Two years later they also started a summer camp for children.



*Building a house together.
Photo from Kovcheg archives*

Laysan Mirzagitova

Further information:

Website of Kovcheg ecovillage: <http://www.eco-kovcheg.ru>

HEART CIRCLE AS A COMMUNITY-STRENGTHENING TOOL IN KEURUU ECOVILLAGE, FINLAND



*Heart circle method helps to maintain a good atmosphere in the ecovillage.
Photo by Pirta Ala*

The 'Heart Circle' is an important tool for creating 'social glue' at Keuruu Ecovillage. Typically, once a week the ecovillage residents gather together to express their emotions and feelings. Participation in the Heart Circle is voluntary but desired.

The basic ideas of the Heart Circle are: listening to others in an authentic way; cultivating a respectful attitude towards everybody; talking sincerely about one's own feelings; and full confidentiality. Nothing that is told and heard during the Heart Circle is taken outside of the circle, unless the person involved does that himself.

In practice, the Heart Circle is conducted as follows: Participants sit in a circle and somebody acts as a facilitator, explaining the principles if needed. The one who talks has a 'talking stick' (a real or imaginary object) which means that nobody else is allowed to talk at the same time. The length of time each person can talk is sometimes restricted, but often each person can talk for as long as they like. After a person finishes, the 'talking stick' is given to the neighbour, often in a clockwise direction. During a Heart Circle session, at least two rounds of talking turns are held; often there is a longer one at the beginning and a shorter one afterwards, which sometimes serves as a comment round.



*A Heart Circle is a beautiful way to communicate with each other.
Photo by Pirta Ala*

The participants are allowed to talk about whatever they want. Subjects might arise from earlier experiences or recent events. They can be deep life-changing subjects or minor irritations. The main point is: nobody is criticized and the issues are not discussed or commented on.

Regular practice of the Heart Circle helps the residents to get to know each other at a deeper level and to create compassion towards others. Verbal expression of major or minor emotional burdens without immediate discussion already helps to resolve them or at least minimize their impact. The Heart Circle can also be used to express gratitude and positive emotions.

Ansa Palojärvi

ZEGG FORUM: A RITUALIZED FORM OF COMMUNICATION FOR LARGER GROUPS, GERMANY

The ZEGG ecovillage in Germany developed its own form of transparent communication, known as the 'ZEGG Forum', which is now being adopted worldwide by various social networks and communities. It was born out of a desire for truth and healing, both personal and global. Forum creates an empathic social environment that supports us to stay present with all that is inside, whatever it may feel like. A guiding principle is: 'Nothing original inside of me is bad or wrong.'



Play for creative energy. Photo by Achim Ecker

ZEGG Forum is a ritualized form for larger groups. The group sits in a circle and the centre space becomes a 'stage' upon which people's thoughts, feelings or anything that moves them can be made visible to others. One person, the 'presenter', steps into the middle of the circle and 'presents' herself. It is like an existential stage for the whole person, including physical and verbal expressions, the mind, creativity and feelings. The aim is to reveal whatever is authentic, alive and true and to share the inner motivation behind one's actions. It is a powerful tool to reveal the blind spots in a person's awareness and to salvage the treasures that lie in our 'shadow'. This sharing creates a

space of trust and openness between people, fostering healthy transparency when it comes to the issues of love, power and decision structures. It helps to maintain a clear distinction between factual discussion and emotional processes. Forum is thus a significant building block in the development of self-knowledge and trust within the community. Participants experience freedom and a permission to be who they are. They can then allow others to witness them as a whole.

The ZEGG Forum draws on more than 35 years of experience in group dynamics and conflict resolution. We developed the Forum in 1978 to make processes transparent and understandable for all the members involved in a long-term social group experiment. Since then we keep changing and expanding its format.

How it works?

The group gathers in a circle. There are specific roles which contribute to the Forum. Two people are **facilitators**, who generally remain in this role for the whole session. The others hold the **circle**. One after another, different people can assume the role of **presenter** or protagonist, and the rest of circle can then be their **mirrors**.

The **presenter** enters the centre of the circle to share what is moving or touching him or her. She is invited to use the whole space in the middle and is free to move around, to speak, to act and to

connect with her feelings. Perhaps the presenter shares his experience of a particular situation. Her only goal is to be or become authentic.

The people in the **circle** support the presenter with their full loving awareness and presence. Their role is to perceive and to witness the process. It can be very powerful and touching to witness someone in the middle going deeper into himself. The topics being presented often touch issues that are relevant or current for many in the group, triggering their own processes. As observers in the circle, we have the chance to experience how many of our emotional processes are similar; whatever happens in the centre is exemplary for all those around.

Usually each Forum is guided by two profoundly trained **facilitators**. Their training is to become more authentic within themselves and learn to remain with their emotions and those of the presenter whenever they arise. They are ‘midwives’ assisting the birth of authenticity within the presenter. Ideally there is one person of each gender co-facilitating the Forum. The facilitators alone guide the process and they may intervene at any moment. They are given the trust of the group to guide the process, following their own experience and intuition. The purpose of the facilitator is to help the presenter reveal his personal truth, his power, his highest potential – so that he and the group can all experience it.



*Presenter sharing ideas in the middle of the group.
Photo by Achim Ecker*

When the presenter has finished, he returns to his seat and the centre becomes free for others to step into and share what they perceived. We call this a **‘mirror’**. Several participants offer their perspective of what they noticed, one after the other. These mirrors are not commented or discussed. A mirror is a gift for the presenter, offering him a chance to learn what others think or feel about him and offering others in the group a chance to supplement, broaden and sharpen the issue he brought forward. On the path to growth in self-experience, this form of social feedback is indispensable. It is the presenter who has the responsibility to accept or decline a mirror’s insight, depending on whether it makes sense to him or not. Even the best mirror is just a signpost on our path; it doesn’t save us from having to walk the path on our own.

An effective and skilful Forum will bring out our feared shadows with humour or in some theatrical and non-identified way so that it can more easily be perceived without judgment. Sometimes the energy shift can be very subtle, for instance if the facilitator invites the presenter to move faster, to exaggerate gestures or to put a sound to a feeling. Trying out different ways of behaviour and theatrically acting out emotional processes helps the presenter to detach from his emotional states. He directly experiences that he is more than his changing emotions.

How do we use Forum in our communal life?

Everybody who lives at ZEGG learns the basic guidelines of Forum. So everybody here is familiar with the format. We have some Forum groups with sessions running for about 90 minutes. Some meet once a week. In particular, newly joining community members attend a continuous Forum group which meets once a week for about two hours. Nowadays the community, with more than 100 members, is too big to have one Forum group for everyone. Forum works best with 15 – 35 participants.

One challenge with Forum is that it only makes sense when you practice it continuously within the context of a group that is more or less stable. To build trust it needs to have a continuous space and people need to be able to keep working with the same people on the same issues. This then creates a

communal experience, more understanding and more connection between people. In ZEGG now we live in a community where many members are either busy or travelling due to their work situation, which makes it almost impossible to have a Forum for everybody every week.

The whole community is sometimes invited to a 'thematic Forum', where we share our personal and non-personal opinions on a certain issue. We organize three 'community intensive times' throughout the year, which are well attended and run for two or three full days. During these periods we share about changes in our lives and our perspectives on community issues. And we use the time to plan and share around specific issues like 'How do we each deal with money', 'How do we want to build houses' or issues relating to planning for the next year and the larger events organised and hosted by the community.

The Forum is part of our continuous, ongoing journey at ZEGG towards a lively space of fluid relationships, conflicts, feelings and friendships. This journey entails both inner and outer work, nourished by the fertile soil of trust and transparency that Forum creates. At the same time we have started to make use of further tools such as Non-Violent Communication (NVC) and other community building instruments. Living in community is ideal for this journey since community builds a supportive environment for growth and provides ongoing continuity. We see this as our contribution towards the world we want to see: a world that forms from deep within the hearts of the people. Transparent communication, and therefore Forum, is part of the glue that keeps our community alive and together: it lies at the heart of our community.

In addition to Forum, ZEGG community members meet regularly in a variety of ways: men's and women's groups for more intimate sharing; the Sunday 'Matinee' to share ideas on a more spiritual or intellectual level; the plenary meetings for matters of information and decision-making; eating shared meals every day; celebrations to mark the seasons; making music; art actions; dance; in the ecovillage's own sauna; and for communal work.

Ina Meyer-Stoll, Achim Ecker, ZEGG community

Further information: Hopefully this description gives readers a good initial idea of Forum, but it should be clear that people cannot 'do Forum' just by reading the description above, without any practical experience. To get to know it better or study it, or to arrange a trainer to come to your community, please visit the web-page: www.zegg-forum.org.

WEDDING CEREMONIAL IN KRUNAI ECOVILLAGE, LITHUANIA

Each country's prosperity depends on the welfare of its main 'cells' – here we mean families. Each person's well-being depends on the harmony in the family in which he grew up. When the family is based on the love between a man and a woman, they are able to create a space of love around them. Children are born, grow up, and mature in the atmosphere of love. Our ancestors knew which actions strengthen love and even make it eternal. One of these actions is an ancient wedding ceremonial, which we call the 'Coronation ritual'.

There have been three weddings in Krunai ecovillage. Two of them were attended by over fifty people and one of them was more modest with about twenty guests. The newlyweds registered their marriages in their city: some in the church, some in a registry office. Although each festival was different, depending on the choices of the couple and their imagination, all of them had some common organizational features.

Background to the Coronation Ritual

Creating a space of love can only be possible in your self-made homestead, where each plant, animal, bird and celestial body is reflecting human feelings of love. From the very beginning, a man and a woman have to do everything with love: planting trees in the garden, building the kin house, and making their dreams come true.

In ancient times, two young people in love had to choose the right place for their homestead. They would select the piece of land by considering what their home will be like and how to plant a variety of plants, so that everything between them should be balanced and it would give pleasure to their children and grandchildren in the future. A few young couples came to our ecovillage and, like their ancestors, started their joint future by choosing their plot of land. The couples chose the location for their future homestead, observe the place and dreaming of creating the vision of a Kin's Domain in a few months or even a year. They planted alleys, trees and flower beds. They selected the site for a house and a bathhouse next to the excavated pond. After some time they rethought, repaired, and replaced everything again and again. It is important to think everything through well before trying to turn dreams into reality. The vision of creating a Kin's Domain brings a couple closer together, reinforces and unites. It's like a test before the wedding. It goes without saying that the wedding ceremonial should also take place in the emerging space of love. The best time of the year is summer, when it is warm and nature is blooming.



*Wedding ceremony moment in Krunai ecovillage with a wreath placed on a man's head.
Photo by Robertas Riabovas*

Preparation. Preparations start a few days before the event: grass is cut with scythes, tents are built, some benches and tables are made, a fireplace is prepared, gates are built and decorated with herbs, and so on. The newlyweds are helped by friends and relatives.

In ancient times, before the wedding the young couple would visit each homestead in the bride's and groom's villages to invite all of the neighbours to the big celebration. Villagers awaited the guests with excitement as it was a great honour and responsibility to contribute to the creation of a new love space. They listened carefully to every word of the young couple so they could understand what gifts were expected from them. The young man, for example, praised a beautiful foal, or the young woman was pleased with extremely delicious apples. Each guest's gift was a contribution to the development of a new homestead. Neighbours were glad that their gift of a foal would bring joy to its new owners and their apple-tree would fit among the other plants. During the ceremony each donated plant was immediately planted according to the homestead layout prepared by the new couple; this meant that after the wedding there was already a planted garden and green fence around the new homestead space. In this way each inhabitant also forms a close relation to the new homestead because it contains a part of their homesteads and they have participated in the process of planting.

Unfortunately the first couples marrying here couldn't enjoy this ancient tradition of self-made gift ordering because Krunai ecovillage is still in the process of developing. It is planned to apply this meaningful tradition in the future, however!

First day of the wedding. Friends, relatives, neighbours meet the newlyweds and their escorts at the gate. As they walk past, songs are sung and grain is thrown over their heads as a symbol of fertility. They are greeted and gifts are given. The presents are extraordinarily creative, including musical wishes, short performances and handicrafts. Many plants are donated; these are immediately planted.

The most important moment during the wedding is the coronation. The young couple themselves pick the most suitable time for the ceremony. This may be preceded by greetings and dinner or it may precede them. It might even be at night under the shining moonlight and the stars. The young couple prepares for the ceremony by walking in the meadows and making flower wreaths (the 'crowns'), enjoying the tranquillity, being aware and merging with the divine state. When the time comes for the coronation, they place the wreath crowns on each other's head and say their vows, fastening their love union. It is not only the beloved people but the whole space – including trees, flowers, birds, animals, the sky, the sun and the moon – which is involved in the birth of a new family. As if God would bless them.

The wedding feasts here were vegetarian and with no alcoholic drinks. Settlers in our village are mostly vegetarian; those who eat meat generally easily give it up after some time. There are no requirements to be vegetarian but it is a natural process. Our favourite wedding drink is homemade kvass (a fermented beverage made from rye bread).

Towards the evening, after all the rituals and a variety of dishes, the fun begins, led by folk music performers. People dance folk dances, play instruments, sing and play games.

Some then sleep in the tents, some people go to neighbours' buildings, and some have fun until dawn.

Second day of the wedding. In the morning, just after sunrise, the first to wake up are musicians, who then play the accordion to wake the wedding participants. People gather by the fire, drink tea, share experiences, and enjoy a long breakfast. The second day has no rules. It could be long walks in the village, stealing the bride and seeking redemption, bathing in the ponds and the like. But in the second half of the day the guests begin to disperse.

A few days later everyone helps to clean and restore the site. For a long time afterwards there is an inexplicable feeling at that spot, as if the wedding site was glowing with joy.

Wedding guidelines in brief:

- A man and a woman who have decided to start a family find a piece of land where they will build up their own Kin's Domain. It is preferable to choose a location where they are surrounded by people with similar beliefs.
- Together they decide upon the future vision of the Kin's Domain. Preparation of this vision can take months, even years.
- The wedding is organized at the site of their future Kin's Domain.
- Before the festival, the couple visit the people who will come as wedding guests and 'order' their wedding gifts.
- In the ceremony, the young couple crowns each other by placing a wreath crown on their head with their own hands, consolidating their desire for co-creation together.
- The wedding feast is vegetarian, with no alcoholic drinks.
- Ethnic music, dances and songs are the main entertainment.

The wedding celebrations carried out in the way described here helped to unite us as an ecovillage; we became closer and relatives came together. The parents and relatives of the young couples could familiarise themselves with their children's future neighbours and raise their concerns or doubts about their children's chosen lifestyle living in an ecovillage.

In the future, there are plans to celebrate 'coronations' not only for newlyweds but also for married couples regardless of age: this ritual conjugates two loving people and shares the divine creation in a

particular place. A couple strengthens their union of love. The ancestors and future generations join together on a small patch of land – the Kin's Domain.

Ingrida Žitkauskienė

Further information:

Website of Krunai ecovillage: www.ekosodyba.lt

COMMON RESOURCES AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

A huge range of different models exist in ecovillages related to assets and their management. Some ecovillages have a common property regime where all assets and income go into a common pool and residents use them according to certain self-imposed rules. Other ecovillages have just a few objects of common infrastructure, such as village roads, electricity generation or communal heating. Most ecovillages are looking for their own optimum balances regarding the level and choice of property (and sometimes income) to be treated as common resources.



The extent and type of common property in a particular ecovillage depends on the residents of an ecovillage and their desire to communicate with each other. Ecovillages created as a settlement of individual (family) homesteads usually choose a model with a minimal level of common property. Here, operating costs for common goals are often covered by one-time charges. On the other hand, ecovillages created to live in close community mostly choose to maximize the resources treated as common property and prefer models with some degree of common income and assets.

Developing and maintaining a common economy model is a big challenge, especially if the aim is to create a self-sustainable economic system for an ecovillage. In addition, the degree of community lived by the population in any particular ecovillage changes over time. At some times a close-knit and friendly community is formed more easily, while at other times hostilities increase or communication becomes less frequent. In such cases, there is a need to revise the previously selected degree of common property. Below there are some examples of how the common property is managed in the ecovillages who are creating a village-scale economy.

COMMON ECONOMY IN VÄINÖLÄ ECOVILLAGE, FINLAND

Väinölä theosophical community was founded in 1978. Modern theosophy refers to a religious and philosophical system largely based on the ideas of H. P. Blavatsky (1831-91). Väinölä is an independent, unregistered group where the ideas of Finnish theosophist Pekka Ervasti (1875-1934) are being realised and put into action. It was his ideal for theosophists to create a community with a common economy. One attempt failed earlier due to a lack of confidence. It was only in 1978 when a group of people, led by Martta Horjander, found the courage for another attempt; this experiment is still continuing in Väinölä.



*Living together at Väinölä community.
Photo from Väinölä community archives*

In 2013, Väinölä community is home to over 30 adults. Väinölä community acts like a family when it comes to the economy. The residents live in a voluntary common economy. The majority of the members earn money outside of the community, while others perform 'unpaid' work in the community taking care of the household, gardening, arts, maintenance, etc. All earnings are put into a common pot and are used to cover all of the expenses of the community and its members.

There is a general partnership for independent entrepreneurs established at Väinölä. At the moment, it has over 20 members. They can direct their earnings to the common account. The main income sources are business contracts outside of the community for two working teams – one specialized in painting buildings and another in cleaning (mainly in industrial buildings). Some money is earned from the Väinölä summer theatre, a common business. Members of Väinölä community don't accept financial support of any kind from the state since they want to be as independent as possible.

All common costs are covered by the common money and larger investments are decided together. Working teams receive money based on their requirements. Three community members are nominated to take care of the bookkeeping and other finances. These persons are not there to evaluate requirements but simply to do the bookkeeping and to prevent budgets from being exceeded. No fixed pocket money is given to members; instead they may use money freely from the common coffers. The community trusts each of its members to take only enough to cover expenses that are important for them.

The common economy model works well at the Väinölä community. There is practically no private property at the community. When it comes to common property, owning has been replaced by taking care of. All members are highly involved in the common economy system. In the long run it can be seen that the factors crucial for the community to succeed are: the similar spiritual background and goals in life, a high volunteer spirit, and freedom to make some individual choices.

Ansa Palojärvi

Further information:

Website of Väinölä ecovillage: www.ihmisyydentunnustajat.fi

MANAGEMENT OF COMMON RESOURCES IN A CLOSELY-KNIT ZEGG COMMUNITY, GERMANY

ZEGG is an intentional community of 110 members (adults, youth, children) and a large international seminar centre on 15 hectares of land in Germany.

The system we run has grown 'organically', as we would say. It was not pre-planned in a master plan on a designer's desk and then implemented, but rather developed as best practice in the course of the growth of the community and seminar centre that we run together. This process of empirical discovery has been going on since the founding of the intentional community in 1978.



*Communal labour-photovoltaic in the background.
Photo by Achim Ecker*

Right from the beginning we shared a lot of values and material things. This was important for us to break the logic of profit-seeking market enterprise. In the beginning of ZEGG in 1991 it was clear that we would buy the land and houses together and each one of us would hold one equal share of the limited company we formed. New members also contribute €2300 for one share. During the course of the years there were moments when this concept was threatened, such as times of low economic income for the community and when one member offered to privately buy one of the existing houses from the community, for example. This would have solved our financial shortages in the short term, but wisely enough we resisted the temptation. In the following years I visited many communities and saw that common ownership of the land and houses seems to work better than any form of private ownership.



Maintenance of the common property. Photo by Achim Ecker

The limited company runs the seminar business, receiving the income from our guests' contributions for food and lodging. It is also the owner of the property and houses and rents the accommodation to the community. Every community member contributes into a community 'kitty' to pay for their food and housing. Some of the work for building maintenance is paid by the limited company.

At ZEGG, all of our accommodation shares a central heating system for warm water and room heating which is composed of several components using diversified technologies and resources. We decided that this would give us more security in times of crisis than having one heating unit using one resource only. So now we have 260m² thermal solar panels, three gas-fired co-generation plants (each producing 5kW electricity and 15kW heat), a wood-chip boiler of 500kWh and a wood-log boiler of 350kWh as our backup system. The 'waste' heat from our big walk-in refrigerator and freezer pre-heats our warm water, bringing up its efficiency to above 90%. About 90% of our electricity we produce ourselves in 450m² photo-voltaic cells and the co-generation plants. The rest of the electricity we receive via the mains from Greenpeace Energy, sourced from renewable resources.

We have our own high-quality well water and clean our waste water in a very low-maintenance and low-energy planted soil filter. This system has been working perfectly for 20 years.

We shop (food and basic household items) and cook cooperatively. We have our own 1.5 ha vegetable garden and many fruit bushes and trees planted in a permaculture edible landscape. We

bottle, freeze and store fruits and vegetables for the winter. We have an efficient recycling system and a car-sharing pool. Most tools and machines are used, owned and maintained commonly.



*ZEGG ecovillage common vegetarian kitchen.
Photo by Achim Ecker*

For each one of these things a team or a person is responsible to organise and maintain it. This proved important to keep things in order. There needs to be some personal responsibility involved. If we just live by the notion 'everything belongs to everyone and we simply use it' then this easily results in tools being in bad shape or left in places where nobody can find them when needed. As we could not solve this problem of responsibility differently there now are caretakers for each area (gardening, landscape, construction, carpentry, painting, etc.).

An internal system keeps track of the hours of work performed by each member. For example, there are gardeners in charge of the garden and the harvest. The kitchen team then processes and uses the produce from our land and the purchaser orders anything we need to buy in from suppliers.

Foodstuffs are kept in a cold store in the basement of our guest house. This is where the central kitchen is located and where most of us eat communal meals together. We also serve these meals and share the dining hall with the visitors to the seminar centre. Alternatively, members are free to eat and cook at home, taking food from our store.

All of the members share weekly cooking and cleaning shifts in the kitchen and in public spaces. This is organized in small self-responsible groups of 10 to 14, who have the duty to fill the rota on a specific day per week. This sometimes becomes tiresome, as individual members perceive the chore as an interruption to their other daily duties and workload. But considering the luxury of being served well-cooked meals every day, the commitment to perform one kitchen shift a week is actually not very much effort.

The woodworking tools and machines are lent out during office hours to members if they know how to use the tool. We have a carpentry workshop for repairs and building wooden furniture, windows and doors. There is a maintenance team for all daily works and repairs on our sizeable site.

All the teams have their own designated responsibilities and these are then coordinated in a management team. We use a sociocratic form of organization and decision making called Holacracy. There is a case study in Chapter 3 about this for you to read.

The savings in money, natural resources and energy are significant when tools and equipment are used commonly. But it needs a blend of common resources and personal responsibilities to make the system work well.

Achim Ecker, ZEGG

COMMUNAL BUSINESS IN KOVCHEG ECOVILLAGE, RUSSIA

The Kovcheg ecovillage is a settlement of Kin's Domains and consists of individual one-hectare homesteads. Each family solves their financial issues individually. However, as Kovcheg was initially conceived as a community of people interacting with each other and developing in a common direction, they started several common projects from the very beginning, including those which could

bring some income to ecovillagers. They didn't manage to launch any large-scale community projects, but several small projects are still successfully working. These projects cover the needs of ecovillagers and partly work for external customers. The first example is the community sawmill and carpentry shop. The second example is the seminars organized in Kovcheg ecovillage.

The necessity to have a sawmill and a carpentry workshop in an ecovillage is obvious. The ecovillagers always need building and repair materials, but it would be expensive and ineffective to have mini-sawmills and carpentry workshops in each household. Therefore the ecovillagers took the decision to build a common sawmill and carpentry workshop. There were people in the ecovillage ready to take on the responsibility for this project, build these objects and support their further functioning. They expressed their readiness at a general meeting which is the main organ of decision making in Kovcheg, and the members approved the project for implementation. Money for the construction was collected from those members who wanted to participate in the project. According to Kovcheg principles, those inhabitants who invested money in the building and purchase of equipment would get this money back once the workshops started their activity and earned their first income. All construction work and supply of necessary equipment for the workshops was provided by ecovillagers themselves.



*Common joinery shop.
Photo from Kovcheg archives*



*Children in the bee-garden.
Photo from Kovcheg archives*

Then the workshops started functioning according to the following rules. The price was fixed for the use of the equipment per hour. Any ecovillager could come and work as long as he needed, and he had to pay for the time he was using the sawmill. This money was used to pay back those who invested in the construction of the workshops. There was a responsible person who taught other members how to use the sawmill, kept records of use, gathered the money, and scheduled the timetable. Some of the ecovillagers couldn't work by themselves on the sawmill and needed assistance. A fixed price for this kind of work was determined as well and the assistant was paid for his work. There also were people in the

ecovillage who needed wooden boards for construction works in their houses and were ready to buy them as finished boards. A price was also fixed for this and those ecovillagers who performed this work could earn money like this. In this way, the sawmill became an important source of income and occupation for some ecovillagers and the source of building material for many others. At this stage the sawmill had not started working for customers outside the ecovillage.

The work in the carpentry workshop was established on the same principles. People used it for making furniture for their houses; some even made musical instruments. Other people used the workshop to make beehives and beehive frames; these were products which were in demand both inside and outside the ecovillage. As a result, some of the ecovillagers started earning money from customers who didn't live in the ecovillage. The workshop's potential for fulfilling demand from the external market is large enough and not currently used to the full. Everything depends on the wishes and needs of the inhabitants. As we see, infrastructural objects that first play a significant role in covering the internal requirements of the inhabitants can then be used for a profit, too.

The seminars organized by Kovcheg ecovillagers form the second example. At present, there are several types of trainings and seminars developed in Kovcheg: ecovillage design, natural beekeeping, ecological building, use of edible and medicinal wild herbs, and women's seminars. At first, the

seminars were primarily intended to be a way to share experiences; they were also a way to regulate the increasing flow of guests to the ecovillage by hosting specific groups at specific times. There is an ever-increasing interest in ecovillages among city inhabitants and the demand for these seminars remains high. Alongside their primary training and educational role, the seminars have now begun to bring an income for the ecovillagers. So the seminars can also now be described as a business project.



*Seminar on wild herbs in Kovcheg Ecovillage.
Photo by Ivan Kulyasov*

The seminars represent a collective activity with a lot of people generally involved; according to their contribution each of these then receives their share of the profits made from the participation fees. Usually there is one main seminar coordinator who organizes the event. He keeps in touch with potential participants, gathers and distributes the fee, and coordinates the work of all the contributors from the ecovillage. There are four types of work for the seminar. The first one is transportation of the participants from the train station to the ecovillage and back. The coordinator makes arrangements on this matter with inhabitants who have vehicles, who meet participants at the station and drive them back to catch

their return train. The second type of work relates to the meals. Usually the participants of the seminar have lunch and dinner in the common house. Some ecovillagers cook for them during the seminar. Some of the products (such as vegetables) are bought from ecovillagers, if available, which is also a way for them to earn money. Accommodation for the participants is the third source of income from seminars. The participants are hosted by ecovillagers in their private houses. Those who host the participants provide them with bed, bed sheets and with breakfast. And finally, the fourth type of seminar income is for the trainers who present the seminar. There are seminars conducted with a whole team of trainers, for example, on ecovillage design, and others, such as the ones on beekeeping, with only one or two teachers. In this way, seminars turn out to be an effective means of financial support for a large group of inhabitants and can be considered as a type of small collective business in the ecovillage.

Antonina Kulyasova

SELF-GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

One of the reasons to move to live in an ecovillage is often a protest against the evils of today's society with its complicated and bureaucratic management systems. Therefore ecovillages often prefer decisions to be made as simply as possible. On the other hand, the opinions of members always have to be taken into account. Many consider the most satisfactory decision-making methods to be based on reaching a consensus, where every resident is involved in the decision-making and a decision is made only when all the residents support and agree to implement it. Consensus-based methods with the possibility to include the entire population in decision-making are especially common ways of managing ecovillages in the first years of the village's life. However, larger ecovillages often use a mixed decision-making system in which some of the decisions are made by consensus, some should be approved by a majority, and some are delegated to an ecovillage board or to specific working groups responsible for a certain activity.

The following articles describe examples of decision-making systems in mature ecovillages that have existed for more than a decade. They have already passed the second stage of the ecovillage life cycle and are able to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of their decision-making systems.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE DECISION-MAKING MODEL IN KEURUU ECOVILLAGE, FINLAND

Keuruu Ecovillage was founded in 1997. In January 2013, Keuruu Ecovillage was home to 31 people, from 0 to 73 years of age with seven of them under 17.

At the Keuruu Ecovillage there are basically three different kinds of decision-making models. With issues where rapid decisions are needed, the decision-making model is based on a majority vote. Minor purchases or decisions on common gardening work dates are examples for this. With larger and more serious subjects, such as financial investments or choosing new residents, the decision-making model is based on a consensus of those present. This means that a decision can be taken only if nobody raises an objection. A third decision-making model is the delegation of certain special topics to committees or working groups, who are empowered to take the decisions. An example of a project where this is applied is building restoration.



Rainbow and the dormitory building at Keuruu Ecovillage. Photo by Sami Ala



Snow covered tree on the wall in Keuruu ecovillage. Photo by Pirta Ala

Decisions concerning the whole ecovillage are made at so-called 'Monday meetings'. Every Monday the ecovillage has a meeting which is open for all members and other residents. (Other residents are occasional visitors or residents who wish to get a permanent membership of the ecovillage during a step-by-step procedure lasting more than half a year.) Everybody can suggest a subject for the meeting by adding it to the list hanging on the wall.

The working model in these meetings is 'the circle'. The subject is introduced and then everybody in the circle shares his or her opinion. This guarantees that everybody is heard.

The meetings are open for everybody, but only official members of Keuruu Ecovillage Association are allowed to participate in the decision-making process concerning decisions for large financial subjects or new residents and members. An especially important rule is that only members decide about new members.

The board of Keuruu Ecovillage Association has meetings approximately once a month. All decisions are actually made at the 'Monday meetings': the board is just the legal body obligatory for every association. So the board meetings are used to record the decisions of the 'Monday meetings' officially and decisions about financial matters and new residents or members are confirmed.

Ansa Palojärvi

Further information:

Website of Keuruu ecovillage: www.keuruunekokyla.fi

SELF-GOVERNANCE SYSTEM IN KOVCHEG ECOVILLAGE, RUSSIA

Kovcheg ecovillage was founded in 2001. In 2013 it has approx. 150 residents, of which nearly 50 are children under 16.



*Discussing together.
Photo from Kovcheg archives*

The decisions are made at the general meetings of all members of the ecovillage. There were quite a lot of people living there from the very beginning, so it has been difficult to make decisions by consensus. They decided to make decisions based on a three-quarter majority of the votes by members present at a meeting. (A member is a family or person owning a 1-ha plot of land. If this is a family, only one representative votes.) During the first years, general meetings were quite regular. Usually, residents gathered every month since there were a lot of issues to discuss: accepting new members, organizing infrastructure, deciding on various rules, and other facets of the social life. Nowadays the general meetings are only organised upon request, when there are topics which require a decision.

There are at least two disadvantages of the system of voting by majority. First of all, there are many minor or rather narrow special issues which were also discussed at the general meetings, taking up a lot of time and making the meetings long and tiresome for those members who were not interested in or familiar with those issues. To overcome this, they later introduced smaller meetings for more narrow-interest or specialist, technical issues (examples include road construction and maintenance). Those who feel competent to discuss those issues can take part in the smaller meetings; these happen relatively frequently (approximately once a week). General issues remain the responsibility of the general meeting.



*Even the kids get organised.
Photo by Ivan Kulyasov*

Another disadvantage with voting by majority is that it can create a persistent split if there are some serious issues on which there are two opposite points of view. For example, in Russian ecovillages (but not only Russian ones) this often arises regarding issues of land ownership, such as whether it should be collective or individual.



Men's Circle. Photo by Ivan Kulyasov

A trial was conducted with an elected council for deeper discussions and elaborations on major issues, to help achieve a common view and overcome existing contradictions. This Council gathered 1-2 times a week but at the time of writing it had not yet

grown to its full strength. Another attempt to create a space for discussions and strengthening of unity and common views is the discussion club.

Antonina Kulyasova

DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES IN SVANHOLM ECOVILLAGE, DENMARK

The Svanholm ecovillage functions as a very close-knit community with a common economy. In 2013, Svanholm was home to about 85 adults and 56 children plus a varying number of guests.

‘Swallowing the pill’

The communal meeting is the highest decision-making body. It is held every two weeks and is open to all members and guests. Here we exchange information, discuss and make all the general decisions that concern the collective. At Svanholm we decide things by consensus. This means that everyone has to agree on a proposal before it can be approved. Consensus is a model to avoid the frustration and dissatisfaction which a minority can feel after a majority decision has been taken. If one member is against a proposal it will not be carried out; however, the proposal is not simply rejected ‘and that’s that’. In reality, the process is just prolonged: a proposer may have to go back a couple of times and make changes, adapting their proposal to take into account the comments and objections brought forward at the communal meeting. He or she might even have to perform a few somersaults and ‘swallow the pill’ before a proposal will be acceptable to everyone.

Some proposers decide to withdraw the proposal when they realise that they might have to swallow more than one pill. Proposal can always be put forward again later, if they sense the sentiment has changed.

Members objecting to a proposal are also expected to help come up with an alternative they could accept. If it is sensed at the communal meeting that a decision is being blocked or prolonged because two parties in opposition are pushing in different directions, they are normally asked to talk together and come up with a new proposal. The experience shows that the problems have been discussed more thoroughly than before. And sometimes the solution turns out in the end to be something completely different.

‘Listening and yielding’

If we want to be truly ‘self-governing’ at Svanholm we have to choose the consensus model. Otherwise we would actually be governing each other, depending on the majorities involved. The consensus model also has another advantage: it doesn’t encourage an intensification of the differences, which often happens before the call to vote for or against a particular proposal (a referendum). This increased polarization can be seen very clearly in the way the political debate is run before a major referendum. If you want to have something carried out at Svanholm, it’s not as much about profiling your opinions and getting the last word, but more about ‘listening and yielding’. If you’re capable of being open and flexible and adapting your ideas to the wishes and needs of others, you can in turn be sure your proposals will be taken seriously.

When important decisions need to be made at Svanholm, we don’t make them hastily. We consider it to be important that the subjects are looked into thoroughly before decisions are made. Therefore we have a rule that says a proposal can’t be decided on at the same communal meeting where it is presented. The final decision can be made only at the next meeting (or later, if the proposals need to be revised).

'Staying centred'

Of course sometimes things get rushed anyway. For instance, if the kitchen wants to exceed their budget because they've just been offered a new oven that would make everything so much easier and better, but the offer is only valid for one week. 'Staying centred' helps to make these decisions quickly.

Sometimes it can be difficult for the individual at Svanholm to stay centred when faced with the sheer complexity of decisions. For example, if we have been allowed to produce more milk by the EU, and the cattle group wants to buy another 30 milk cows, what will the financial consequences of such a decision be in the long run? Maybe we know that it implies enlarging the cowshed, more people working there, new machines and so on. But how much can we earn? How will it affect the quality of our crops to have more manure? What will the market for organic milk be like in 2-3 years? Will we have to pour it down the sewer, or will the people of Copenhagen be queuing up to make sure they get some?

Both owner and employee

When you participate in all levels of the decision-making process, things often turn out to be more complicated than expected. At Svanholm a member is both employer and employee, and they have to look at things with the eyes of both the manager and the worker. And in every project it's not only the financial, but also the ecological side that has to be right – in other words, all ends have to meet. Furthermore it all has to fit into the visions the community has regarding how Svanholm should be in the future. For this reason, the members always try to make the most realistic calculations possible before they take the jump and make the final decision.

Sub-groups

To a great extent, the proposals will have gone through one of the many sub-groups before they reach the communal meeting. If Jacob, for instance, applies for admittance to the collective, the proposal has already been through the Contact Group. If there is a proposal about increasing the cash credit, it has been through the Economy Group. The proposal from Anita, who wants to start a course of education to become a circus artist, has been through the Education Group. And so on. The individual groups can make their own independent decisions within a certain framework. If the communal meeting has decided on a sum during the yearly budget rounds for investments, for instance, it is up to the Investment Group to agree on how this sum is to be divided between the work groups according to their needs. The communal meeting also decides how many people can be on education leave at a time, and then it's up to the Education Group to determine who the lucky ones are this year.

Whenever possible, we operate according to the principle that the people in the sub-groups are the ones closest to the issues. The ones who want to start a course of education are the ones in the Education Group, and those who have investment plans are the ones in the Investment Group, for example. Of course interests and initiatives are what it is all about, and all sub-groups are open to everybody at Svanholm.

Visitors/guest group of Svanholm ecovillage

Further reading:

Website of Svanholm ecovillage: <http://www.svanholm.dk/index.php?id=77>

ADVICE FOR A YOUNG ECOVILLAGES

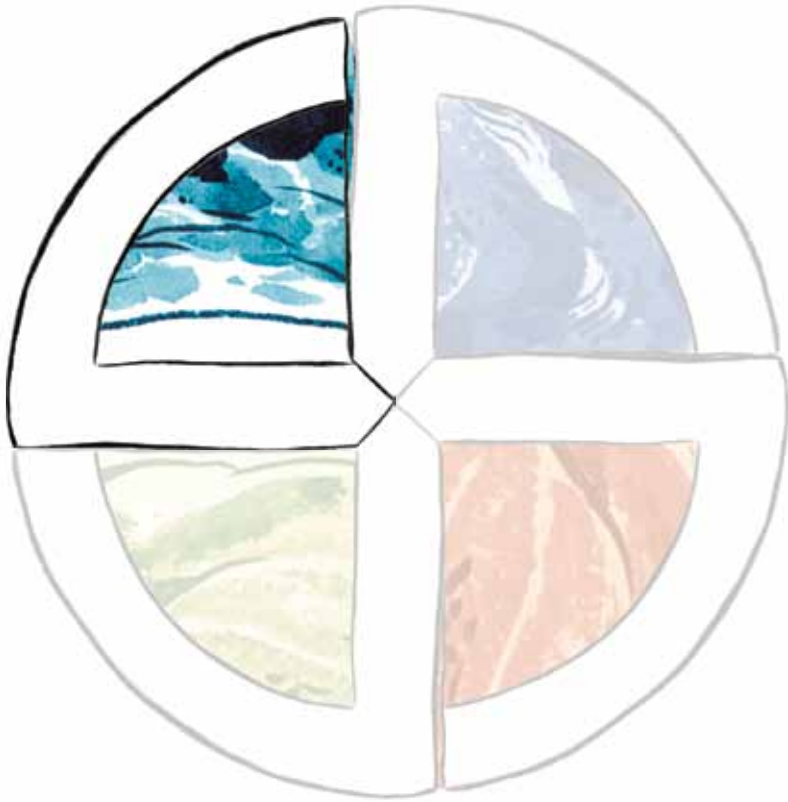
(based on the experience of Baltic Sea region ecovillages)

- Joining the ecovillage movement is not just a protest against the evils of society and an opportunity to escape the rat race. After moving to an ecovillage, life goes on and there is a need to find alternative activities and livelihoods. You should be honest with yourself about what is most important to you and what you would like to have more of in your life if you want to spend your time meaningfully.
- It is important for ecovillage community members to feel a sense of community based not only on values but also on general activities. In order to maintain and enhance the ecological dimension of the village, special attention must be given to environmental projects and events that help villagers to better feel the natural rhythms of their homeland and understand the original aims of ancient national and regional rituals.
- If an ecovillage chooses to have a lot of common property then it requires a lot of focus on the creation of a suitable self-governance system and some written and unwritten rules about who can be accepted as a member of the community.



Stage 3

WIND SEASON



*Keep using your energy to blow the dust off everyday life,
otherwise the unused wind will accumulate
as a storm and blow you down.*

Extract from the Ecovillage Folk:

A STORY ON THE BENEFIT OF CHANGES

One day a man returned home from work, sat down in the kitchen and started complaining to his mother:

– If you could only imagine, mother, how difficult my work has become since our team was merged with the other department. I used to have a clear idea of my role and I felt the other colleagues considered me to be an expert in my field. Now the new employees constantly argue with me and never fulfil my requests. Today I felt like I was being fried in a pan because we spent the whole day on strange discussions about the fundamental issues of our business.

His mother was preparing pancake batter. She put a pan on the stove, started frying pancakes and then replied:

– As far as I can see, these changes are actually very good for you. Previously, everything went so smoothly that your character became just as soft as this pancake batter. You lost the ability to defend your views and to say no. And now look how stiff the pancake batter has become in the frying pan. In the same way, your character is slowly changing and becoming stronger.

She served her son his first pancake and he thoughtfully lifted it from his plate and examined it:

– Well, maybe you're right: my character might be hardening because of these changes. But when one colleague started crying after I talked to him yesterday I was afraid that instead of being a team-player I am turning into a dictator. In the past I always tried to treat everyone kindly, but now the constant arguing annoys me so much that I stop any discussions abruptly and don't even try to find polite words.

This time, as she replied, his mother was breaking up a bar of chocolate:

– Look, now the chocolate is solid but when I warm it up it will become soft. It's the same with you: after frying in a pan of changes every day, you will learn to manage your emotions and find ways to avoid being excessively blunt in relations with your colleagues.

She poured the molten chocolate onto the pancakes and put a cup of coffee in front of her son.

– Changes can give a man all the characteristics that he lacks. As long as they don't make your character either too soft or too hard, they will make you as powerful as coffee, which has the ability to transform an extremely hostile environment – boiling water – into something new – an aromatic and delicious drink.

STAGE 3 OF THE ECOVILLAGE LIFE CYCLE: CHANGE MANAGEMENT – HOW CAN WE AVOID A GAP BETWEEN THE ECOVILLAGE VISION AND REAL LIFE?

‘There is nothing constant in this world, but inconstancy.’
Jonathan Swift

Creating a sustainable ecovillage involves continual changes and those ecovillages aiming to create a closely communicating community face particular challenges. Life will inevitably put pressure on the initial vision of an ecovillage: residents of an ecovillage have to constantly strike a balance between the desire to stick with the original vision of the ecovillage agreed on during its establishment and the changes needed in order to adapt to the realities of the time.



Main challenges at Stage 3 of the ecovillage life cycle

Most ecovillages try to minimize any changes to the ecovillage vision formed at the establishment stage. However, in some cases it is difficult to avoid these changes. Major challenges are generally faced by an ecovillage if the younger generation who grew up there prioritizes other values and promotes a different way of life or if the ecovillage develops and new residents move in.

Ecovillage growth through new residents can pose a significant challenge to the sustainability of the community. New residents often have new values. They often come directly from mainstream society, bringing mainstream values with them; changing habits, standards and preferences takes time and ongoing effort.

Where an ecovillage experiences major growth or a significant number of residents change, it may need to conduct a review of the vision it developed during the establishment stage. Is the ecovillage ready to redesign its vision to integrate new residents who have different attitudes? If not, criteria need

to be set and a selection process developed for evaluating potential members: this could include a lot of characteristics and stages. Clear rules describing the duties of community members are also very helpful to avoid conflicts. In extreme cases, they also help to exclude somebody from the ecovillage membership if their behaviour is incompatible with the usual accepted community behaviour.

MEMBERSHIP: A STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS AT KEURUU ECOVILLAGE, FINLAND



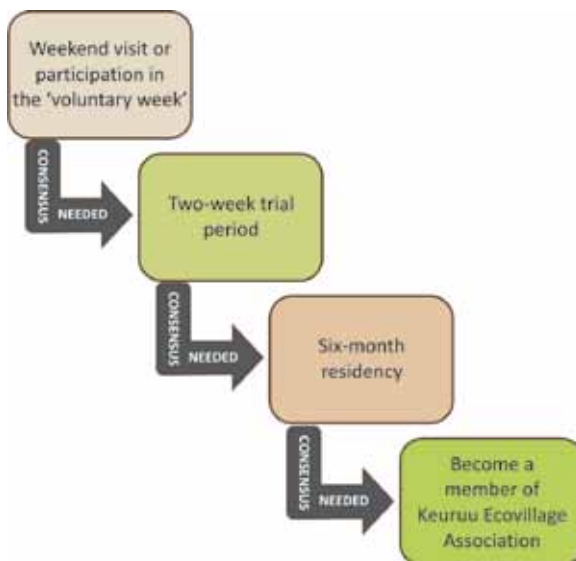
*Snow Covered yard at Keuruu ecovillage.
Photo by Pirta Ala*

Keuruu Ecovillage was home to 31 people in 2013. Ecovillage accepts new members to its community. At the very beginning, there was no entrance mechanism for new residents. Very soon it was noticed that both the ecovillage members and interested potential residents would benefit significantly from a stepwise system to get to know each other and their ways of living.

People who are interested in becoming a member initially visit the ecovillage for two days. The aim of this first visit is to get to know the community and people who live there and to receive all the information needed to make a decision about moving there.

After this first visit, the community decides whether the person can come to stay in the ecovillage for a two-week period. After the two-week stay a decision is made about a six-month residency. After that they can apply for membership of the Keuruu Ecovillage Association.

At each step, the decision to select that person for the next stage is always made by consensus at the meetings of association, after an open discussion. The consensus principle is considered to be very important: if only one member objects, then that applicant cannot stay and continue on the path to becoming a resident / member of the ecovillage.



The stepwise membership process at Keuruu Ecovillage



Bird on the sign of Keuruu Ekokylä. Photo by Pirta Ala

All members and other residents are committed to following common rules and agreements. Keuruu Ecovillage tries to keep its rules to a minimum, but some simple rules were set after a few years of ecovillage establishment. They are called 'The 3 Ks', referring to their Finnish terms 'Älä kannä, älä käänytä, älä kähinöi' (Don't get drunk, don't proselytise, don't fight). Violation of these rules is very rare, but it would lead to a rapid reaction. After one written warning the next violation against the rules means that the person needs to leave the ecovillage; this is especially strict with alcohol or drugs. In cases of aggressive behaviour, individual mediation or 'the heart circle' of all members are tried first.

Initially, all members were expected to perform four hours of voluntary work each working day for the ecovillage. There is no accounting system and the working hours are not monitored in any way; it is up to each individual resident/member to fulfil this duty. Nowadays, there is a common agreement that the duty of all members is to carry out their own activities to support, to sustain and to develop the goals of Keuruu Ecovillage Association. In practice, most responsibilities and duties are shared among the ecovillage members (maintenance, cooking, cleaning etc.).

Ansa Palojärvi

LOOKING FORWARD – THE NEXT GENERATION

In order to ensure the long-term sustainability of an ecovillage it is important to keep in mind that the future will depend on the younger generation. Are the children going to live in the community when they grow up? How different will their values be and how will living in the ecovillage change? These issues are constant concerns regarding the future outlook of any ecovillage, so they emphasise the involvement of children and youth in ecovillage life and an education based on the ecovillage movement's ideas and experiences.

CHILDREN AT SVANHOLM ECOVILLAGE, DENMARK

Children have a high priority at Svanholm ecovillage and the community aims to integrate the children in the everyday life of the community as much as possible. In Denmark both parents usually work outside their private home and the day-care institution system generally provides for all children up to the age of 10. This is one of the highest standards in the world. It is part of the Danish welfare model that all parents have the right to have their children looked after during working hours; the common tax pool covers the majority of the expenses and parents pay a minor contribution, calculated according to federal laws. Typically children attend day-care from the age of 6 months. This means that the average Danish child spends most of its morning and day away from home in a day-care institution or in a private childcare group with 3–4 other children. At the age of 3 the toddlers continue in kindergartens and from age of 6 to the age of 10 they go to school about half of the day and attend an activity centre the rest of the day. From the age of 10 they may attend youth clubs or sport and music clubs, for example.

These day-care arrangements are welfare benefits and for most families it works out fine. However, the children are spending most of their time in a special children's world almost totally apart from

the world of adults, except for the staff of the institutions. So children do not experience the working life of adults nor do they have much chance to run free in nature. They have to adapt to a variety of institutions throughout their childhood, and they have to conform and adapt to new schedules and varying policies and philosophies in each new institution. There is very little room for self-government.

Children's self-government

In Svanholm children live with their parents like other children do, but they are closer to many other adults and they participate in nearly all aspects of Svanholm life. The compulsory schooling is outside Svanholm: the Danish school system foresees daily attendance of 2–4 hours from the age of 6, rising to 6–7 hours by the age of 16.

The focus of childcare at Svanholm is the wish to give our children the opportunity to participate in a broad range of activities and events, including working life, and to give them room to develop individually and as a self-governed group. We try to help them to find their own rhythm and interpret their own needs – which is difficult if you have to spend your whole childhood in the very regulative environment of an institution.

At the moment we have a rather large group of pre-school children (up to 6–7 years) who are taken care of in our pre-school childcare group in the children's house which is open for other children from the area, too. The staff are members of the community who have childcare as their job and are usually educated in that field.

With a few exceptions, children can come and go as they want; many different adults relate to them and participate in their up-bringing. But there are also some particular adults who are responsible and work professionally with the children. Children cannot be integrated into modern production processes and of course we have to run our enterprises in effective and competitive ways, but it is always possible for them to watch the processes and to see what their parents or other adults are dealing with. If something of interest happens in the ecovillage, you can be sure that the children are on the scene.

Children and work

Some of the teenagers are interested in joining in the work activities so we make agreements with them that they can work after school and earn a little extra pocket money. Such agreements are always based on the youngsters' own will, but appointments have to be kept – or to be changed if there is a wish for that.

A modern competence

Generally it is our aim to arrange childcare and education so that our children grow up to be as self-governing as possible, and we do so mainly by offering them lots of space, many possibilities both indoors and outdoors, and room and time to find their own ways. Children have many ways of reacting and managing their potential and we see it as a very essential 'modern competence' to be able to administer personal potentials, needs and wishes. People today have to know themselves and be capable of feeling their needs, and we must help them learn to be realistic in relation to the options on offer in their surroundings.

Different children, different approaches

Some children have many contacts among their schoolmates, join sports clubs and take part in lots of other activities. Others take more interest in the work at Svanholm. Some play on the computer intensely for many hours. Others wander around in their own thoughts and spend a lot of time on their own. At Svanholm there should be room for all these differences. Some children explore nature

and the countryside, building huts in the forest, bringing up hens and rabbits, or riding the horses, while others spend most of their time reading, writing, drawing and playing indoors. We try to offer our children whatever help they need to try something new if they seem very one-sided, but basically we trust that they are able to find their own paths when we offer them a many-faceted social network and a wide range of practical opportunities.

Children play together

Most of all, children play together. So maybe the most important advantage for those growing up at Svanholm is the fact that there are always other children around in quite another way than in the modern nuclear family. Our children play a lot together without adult supervision, even developing complex games over several months, and it would be a great mistake to try to intervene.

Ahead of the times

Today, self-government and respect for children's individuality have both become important issues in the Danish pedagogical debate, and it has been quite an experience for us to observe how problems and solutions that we have been dealing with for years are now entering the discussions on child-rearing. In many ways it seems that education at Svanholm is very modern and fulfils today's requirements and needs in a way and to an extent which can hardly be equalled in public low-budget institutions with very limited space and resources.

Nothing special

How then do we run all this, and how do we come to agreements? Well, of course we do not always agree on everything, but the main outlines of our childcare practice have grown out of the principles and methods of self-government and co-operation which we practice in general. Right from the start there were lots of children and we have had to find ways of taking care of them. Decisions about this were taken at our common meetings just like any other decisions. Every common meeting starts with 'news from the children' and here children can speak up or adults can speak up for them. Parents' meetings are held frequently and discussions on children and child-rearing are ongoing.

Visitors/guest group of Svanholm ecovillage

SCHOOL AT KOVCHEG ECOVILLAGE IN RUSSIA: PARENTS AS THE MAIN TEACHERS

About one third of the residents of Kovcheg ecovillage are children, and most of them were born here. So, by the seventh or eighth year of the ecovillage, the question of schooling became especially urgent and crucial. When they moved to Kovcheg, many ecovillagers started thinking about how to provide their children with school education. All parents understand well the necessity of education for their children. One of the main ideas of moving to an ecovillage in Russia is to strengthen family relations, which presupposes that parents and children live together, so the prospect of sending children to residential (boarding) schools was not taken into consideration. Moreover, the ecovillagers did not want their children to face the threats and hazards commonplace for many of today's young people, such as alcohol, drugs, low levels of formal education or addiction to computers and TV; parents also did not want their children to be involved in consumerist ways of living. The option of driving the children to the nearest state village school every day was also inappropriate because of a bumpy and sometimes almost impassable 13 km road. So most families chose the 'externship' option: this means



Learning music in the common house.
Photo by Irina Popova

children study at home and pass exams several times a year in the state school to which they are officially assigned. Children studied by themselves, parents and those ecovillagers who were competent in different subjects helped them. Parents and other ecovillagers in Kovcheg who could and wanted to teach children began to give classes for pre-schoolers. At the beginning, these classes were not connected with each other; a course of regular classes was formed later. Parents gathered together from time to time and discussed how a school should be; there was a lot of debate but they were not able to come to a common opinion for the creation of the new school. Discussions continued for more than a year until a new family arrived in Kovcheg and initiated the school project.

How did the school appear?

Olga Sidorova, mother of two daughters, had previously worked in one of Moscow's 'alternative education' schools. She simply stated: 'I am starting! You can join me if you want!' A group of parents with children between 5 and 6 did join Olga since they had some time to experiment: 1-2 years until the first official exams in the state school. Olga had a very clear vision of the school and a good understanding of the goals and steps of development. The other parents co-operating with Olga were also very talented and creative. Together, they managed to create a concept of the school.

Concept of the school

The concept was based on a synthesis of German Waldorf and Russian Academician Mikhail Shchetinin schools, both of which are attempts to awaken children's creativity and their ability to observe, think, analyze, synthesize and summarize. The organizers of the school and parents of its first pupils came to an agreement that the meaning of school in general is primarily the formation of the personality of the person who enters the school as a child and finishes it almost an adult; their future life journey is mainly shaped at school. This is why any school has to be clear about its ideology, otherwise it makes no sense. The role of teacher as a personality is quite important in school. Children do not merely study subjects but experience the whole worldview of the teacher. Hence, the personality of the teacher and their own concepts of life are highly significant in education. The concept for the school in Kovcheg can be described as follows: the content of the subjects is based on the worldview or philosophy, while teaching methods and technology are then defined by this content.



Concept of the school in Kovcheg

From the well-known set of tools such as textbooks, exercise books, blackboard, pointer, desk, etc., the ecovillagers moved on to another understanding of teaching: it is a highly creative process of mutual exchange at the meeting point between knowledge-searcher and knowledge-bearer. The parents also become an essential part of a school like this: not only the child but the whole family comes to school.

Practice

The main teachers during the first year of the Kovcheg school were parents of those children who started their education there. They shared teaching duties and were constantly studying the process of teaching together with their children. At the end of every week the parent-teachers planned the next week and made necessary corrections in the programming of the teaching process. For the subjects chosen, they organized joint sessions where parents and children were 'diving into' the subject: these were a few days or one to two weeks of continuous deep study of one subject, during which they reached a general view and deep sense of the subject being studied. The school wasn't separated from general life but became an extremely exciting part of it. In the process of rich and integral learning about the world, school knowledge was learnt as a part of this world.

Great attention was paid to creative work from the very beginning. Various types of art, crafts and musical arts were taught by parents and Kovcheg ecovillagers; there are a lot of musicians and artists living here who are able to teach their knowledge to children and adults. The idea of projects was successful right from the start. All first grade education was centred on the idea of travelling. Geography was chosen as a main theme during one year. At first children explored the house, then the territory near it and the whole village in general. They counted things using mathematics, prepared reports in the Russian language, and then began to research forests, rivers, mountains, seas with the help of maps and books. The class went on trips into the nearby forest and the suburbs. One week was given for each topic. Different books, films, and travel stories were used as material for this week. The result of acquired knowledge was expressed in writing and also crafts: they painted, modelled landscapes in clay, etc.



*A joy to learn new knowledge together.
Photo by Irina Popova*

A lot of attention was paid to the mood of all lesson participants. The teacher had to be in a cheery attitude of mind, while children had to come with pleasure. If the teacher was depressed or upset, the lessons could be cancelled. In the same way, if a little student didn't want to attend a lesson, he was offered the chance to stay out of class that day.

The initial ideas had to be slightly put aside in the second year of education because it was necessary to follow the requirements of the state school more strictly. The method of 'diving' continued to be very successful: little students are concentrating on one subject only for a week or ten days. During this short period the students were able to learn most of the curriculum for that subject which is normally taught over the course of one whole year in the official schools. Sometimes two subjects were taken and alternated week for week: for example, Russian language and reading, or mathematics and environmental studies. In this type of system the students could learn a lot of material during one week and deepen their knowledge more thoroughly than in the usual multi-subject system. The same principles were used in further classes.

The team of parent-teachers widened when the next classes started. They chose their own methods, corresponding more closely to the official school standards. Unfortunately, the initiator of

the school, Olga Sidorova, died during the school's third year, but the school continued working and coped successfully with ongoing challenges, problems and crises. The parents and children are in a constant, creative research process.

Formally all children are affiliated to local or Moscow schools as external students and pass the exams there several times per year.

Antonina Kulyasova

Further reading:

· Shchetinin schools: <http://loveforlife.com.au/node/5173>

· Waldorf schools: <http://www.waldorftoday.com/>

· The European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education: <http://www.ecswe.org/index.php>

CHANGES IN DECISION-MAKING MODEL

In order to create harmonious relationships, good will and a tolerant attitude are not enough: larger communities also need to learn appropriate management techniques. Many of the young ecovillages make decisions only by consensus. However, as the population increases and the common activities develop, the number of solutions required also grows. Ecovillage management by consensus can become complicated if approval is not given by some residents and the decision-making is repeatedly postponed or if a compromise is reached but the chosen alternative seems to be the worst of all options. In addition, not all residents want to look deeply into every decision and spend a lot of time debating it. In situations like this an ecovillage has a choice of three options:

1. Reduce the number and level of activities carried out in common. (This is the worst option, but unfortunately the one chosen most often.)
2. Combine consensus with other traditional decision-making methods and delegate part of the decisions to an ecovillage board or special working groups. (See the case of Solbyn ecovillage in Sweden below and the case studies on self-governance systems in the second chapter of this book.)
3. Explore how to improve the management system by implementing or creating innovative management methods. (Below we present innovative methods of decision-making created by the German ecovillages Sieben Linden and ZEGG. Although the methods were developed in order to improve the management of their own ecovillage, they are versatile and can be applied to many ecovillages where a mature village is facing new problems of self-governance.)

FOUR-CHOICE CONSENSUS METHOD, SIEBEN LINDEN ECOVILLAGE, GERMANY

A few years ago, Sieben Linden Ecovillage near Poppau, Germany replaced their consensus process with a new method they developed – not because people blocked too much, but because they didn't!

Who this helps

Too many people were remaining silent although they didn't like a proposal. They did this because they didn't want to stop others from having what they wanted. This four-choice method seems to help those who want to express their lack of full support for the proposal but not block it outright.

How Sieben Linden's four-choice method works

Sieben Linden members have four options when a facilitator calls for a decision:

1. Fully positive, I support the proposal.
2. Not fully positive, but I'll stand aside.
3. I don't support it, but I won't block it.
4. I'm blocking it.

For a proposal to pass, two conditions have to be fulfilled: 75 per cent of the members present choose 'fully positive', and no-one blocks. If there is no block yet also not enough 'full support' the proposal can be put aside and brought up again in the future.

When someone blocks

Someone who blocks then has to organize a series of small-group meetings with the proposal's proponents.

Where someone does block, the proposal is put on hold for two weeks while the blocking person tries to find at least one other person to also support the block. If this happens, the proposal is considered blocked. If not – no-one else supports the block – the proposal is considered passed. In other words, having to find a second person to support the block functions like 'consensus-minus-one'.

If a second blocker is found and the proposal is actually blocked, these two blocking people have the responsibility to propose an alternative solution to the problem. They have until the next whole-group meeting (four to six weeks later) to meet with others to craft a new proposal that addresses the same issue.

Sieben Linden uses the four-option/three-quarters voting fallback method in whole-group meetings, but not in committees, which decide by consensus.

Diana Leafe Christian

Further reading:

Website of Sieben Linden ecovillage: <http://www.siebenlinden.de>

HOLACRACY AS A NEW STRUCTURE FOR ORGANISATION AND DECISION-MAKING AT ZEGG ECOVILLAGE, GERMANY



Plenary meeting. Photo by Achim Ecker

For many years the community took important decisions by consensus in a plenary meeting. Most members became tired of long decision-making processes due to uninformed participants delaying the decisions and were inspired by a new decision-making model and organisational structure called Holacracy.

In 2009–2010 a 'Holacracy Working Group' looked into how to apply Holacracy best to the 'community with seminar business' – organism that ZEGG is. After one year of preparation the community adopted the new model, which allows the flexible and adaptable operating structures needed for our type of community.

Decisions are still based on consensus but are related more closely to the working areas. Some existing structures were incorporated into the new modified system of Holacracy.

Which decisions are made where at ZEGG?

Social decisions: All full community members come together in a plenary meeting to decide about fundamental social decisions e.g. new members or long-term guests. This usually happens once or twice per year.



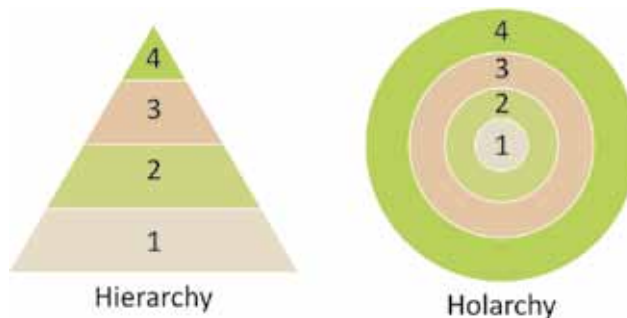
*On the path towards a decision.
Photo by Achim Ecker*

Significant **financial and planning decisions** (e.g. those over 20,000 euros or concerning what kind of buildings we want to build) are made by a circle of 'stewards' (in German, Träger). This is a special group of committed full community members who decided to take on full responsibility for the financial affairs. In return they enjoy slight financial advantages but they also 'carry' the responsibility of raising money to cover deficits if the accounts do not balance. This is a group of about 30 ZEGG members and they make the major financial decisions by consensus. New members are accepted into this group by consensus if they apply and fulfil the conditions. One financial condition is making a loan to the community of €3000. This circle of stewards meets regularly, at least twice a year and in between if issues are pending.

All **other decisions** are made by a Management Team or are taken directly in the Circle (see below) related to the specific work area. These Circles operate with Holacracy.

What is Holacracy?

Holacracy is a complete operating system for an organization, embedding flexibility and adaptive capacity in the heart of the organization. The name refers to governance by 'holarchy', or the natural structure of the organization itself.



There are three main elements to ZEGG's Holacracy model:

- The organizational structure based on self-governing Circles.
- The governance structure process which distinguishes between the tactical and strategic meetings.
- Dynamic flexible control or steering, based on an emergent approach.

Self-governing 'Circles' cover particular work areas or other aspects of the community. We looked at the different work fields in the community and made clear distinctions about responsibilities. Now

work areas are organized as 'self-governing Circles' with a high degree of independence to take their decisions for the benefit of the community and to fulfil the purpose of each Circle.

The existing working areas are:

- Supply Circle (kitchen, purchasing, garden, harvest and food storage)
- Seminar Business Circle
- Site Team Circle (maintenance of buildings, site, infrastructure)
- Finance Office & Managing Director Circle
- Social Circle.

These Circles meet regularly once a month and have defined aims, roles, and accountabilities. Most of them also have sub-circles. The meetings use the methods of integrative decision-making and dynamic steering. Each meeting is clearly scheduled as either an operative, strategic or steering meeting.

The top-level operational organ (implementation organ) is the Management Team. Each Circle uses integrative elections to choose a representative who represents the context and interests of the Circle in the management team: this is the 'rep link'.

A second link person, the 'lead link', is responsible for ensuring that the intentions of the broader management team are carried into the Circle. In Holacracy this link is determined by the management team, in ZEGG we often have this role also chosen by the Circle itself.



Small group discussion. Photo by Achim Ecker

The management team takes decisions which are beyond the responsibility of one Circle. Wider-ranging financial decisions are made, current developments are reflected upon and strategic decisions are prepared. If we have very general decisions to be taken, the management team calls for a plenary of the stewards or of all full members. The most significant decisions are then taken by the full community by consensus.



Holacracy model

Some more details about how we work with the different elements of Holacracy

Self-organization is run by means of the governance structure process, which distinguishes between the operational and strategic (policy) processes: the former is focussed on getting the work done, the latter is how we organize ourselves to get the work done. Distinguishing between tactical and strategic meetings enables a more focused and effective decision-making culture, which boosts the quality of both operational and policy processes.

Operationally, each Circle holds a weekly tactical meeting, allowing the Circle members to coordinate their work by exchanging information and taking operational decisions.

In addition to the weekly tactical meetings, the Circle assembles less frequently (e.g. each month) for a strategic meeting. This meeting is about formal policy decisions, roles and responsibilities, which are created, changed or dropped through 'Integrative Decision-Making'.

Appointing roles and responsibilities can be made using 'Integrative Elections': this encourages voting for someone due to their competencies and not out of friendliness. In the first round nominations are spoken out loud so that everybody involved can listen to the reasons why each person believes their nominee is competent for this job. Then there is a second round where everyone 'integrates' the information they just heard, considers who they now want to vote for and indicates their final vote. The person who receives the most votes is then elected, if he/she agrees to accept the outcome (since no one 'stands for election' it can occur that someone is suggested and elected without actively choosing to be nominated).

The advantage is that you can hear why people vote for you – it creates more transparency and trust. The community likes this new way of election and we use it often in the Circles, although more rarely in the full community.

Another element of Holacracy is the practice of 'dynamic steering'. This is a form of the 'emergent approach'. The goal is to find a workable decision for the moment, not necessarily the 'best' decision. The best decision emerges over time, as new information is integrated into the decision. The goal of this principle is to arrive at the best solution in the long run, by always looking for a workable way forward during meetings and by continuously integrating new information as it becomes available over time. This serves to eliminate a lot of 'noise', and helps the organization take quick, workable decisions that are steered dynamically over time on the basis of real tangible situations.

The aspects of the ZEGG's Holacracy model described here directly affect the agility and productivity of our community because decisions can be made much more quickly when the goal is to make a workable decision. Previously we were often blocked by the attempt to find the best decision once and for ever. In addition, these principles result in qualitatively better solutions in the long run. The model can be understood as a practice of organization and communication which leads to:

- More efficient decision-making.
- More clarity as to who is responsible for what.
- The replacement of hierarchy and plenary-based democracy with self-organized Circles (holons) that can have either very specialized or wide-ranging scopes.
- Clear information flows between the working areas (Circles and links).
- Remembering the community's vision at all times as the foundation of its actions.

During the community's 'intensive time' in January 2011 we elected the 'highest organ' in the holacratic structure, the Vision Council. Its scope is not operational. Instead, members of the Vision Council are entrusted with the role of adopting a transpersonal view of ZEGG. It explores the questions:

What does ZEGG want to give to the world? What does the world want from ZEGG? It then formulates appropriate tasks which it delegates to the Management Team.

We have the following roles represented in our Vision Council:

- Ecology and sustainability
- Economy
- Research and education
- Community, children and elderly people
- Spirituality, love and relationships
- Regional outreach
- International outreach.

Three of the members of the Vision Council have never lived at ZEGG; having external members in this body offers an important outside perspective.

Our community has been implementing this model for two years now and the process is still not finished. At the moment we can say Holacracy made our decision-making process more fluid and more clearly connected to the responsibilities that people actually have.

On the other hand, the Holacracy model was designed for hierarchical companies who want to flatten the pyramid of hierarchy. It was not designed for intentional communities. Our task is to adapt it to our needs and to incorporate the community with all its social aspects into a business-oriented structure such as Holacracy. This is not easy and is an ongoing task for us. For example, in a Holacracy-governed business, the normal idea would be that all staff members are part of one Circle and thus represented in the decision-making structure. However, ZEGG has many members who are self-employed or who work outside of the community: these are not yet part of any Circle. So the question of representation and information flow is not yet fully solved. Nonetheless, we are confident we can develop the next steps by walking further along the path.

Ina Meyer-Stoll, Achim Ecker, ZEGG community, Germany

MAKING DECISIONS IN A MATURE ECOVILLAGE: SOLBYN ECOVILLAGE, SWEDEN

Decision-making in ecovillages is often a determinant of their ability to handle the inevitable community crises and to ensure the viability of the ecovillage. Solbyn ecovillage, as one of Sweden's oldest and largest ecovillage, has managed to survive and deal with decision-making in a way that most residents have found sufficient, but with the possibility of improvement.

Solbyn ecovillage gradually grew out of a decade-long planning process conducted by potential inhabitants, although many of these then never actually moved in. A group of environmentally-interested friends met in Dalby to discuss the idea of an ecovillage in October, 1978. In 1979 the group invited architect Krister Wiberg, from Lund Technical University, to the discussions. The result was a 50-household ecovillage; it was Sweden's second ecovillage and is still one of the country's largest.

Solbyn has developed a more complex organization around decision-making than seen in other, smaller and younger, ecovillages. This has been evolved in order to ensure a combination of the formal ability to govern (the board), the attractiveness of the main decision-making process (monthly

community meetings) and additional inclusiveness efforts (questionnaires sent out by email) to involve low-participating residents in community governance.

Board meetings are quite formal with 'fixed' agendas to be followed. The model board meeting agenda is provided by HSB Swedish Tenant-Owner Cooperative Housing Association and the Solbyn board does not feel it can diverge from this model. The board meetings are led by a chairman and documented by a secretary. The chairman and secretary of the board are elected every two years. The type of decision-making model changes and there is no special rule for how a decision is arrived at. Both consensus and majority voting are used. Minutes from meetings are carefully written down and posted for all to read.



*Greenhouse in ecovillage Solbyn.
Photo from Solbyn archives*

Community meetings are less formal and sometimes have been considered 'too anarchistic' by residents. Everybody living in Solbyn can participate in the meetings. These community meetings also have structured agendas, and they strive to follow these but do not always succeed. Every community meeting has, similar to the board meetings, a chairman and a secretary. The community meeting chairman and secretary change each month because the responsible hosting household, which organizes the meeting, rotates each month. The hosting household at Solbyn provides coffee and cakes for the community meeting, and this has proven to be important for improving attendance to these Sunday afternoon meetings. The type of decision-making model at

the community meeting can change with each agenda item, with either consensus or voting being used. Residents point out that decisions in Solbyn are based on social and ecological criteria. When making decisions, residents consider mostly what would be good for the community and good – or rather not harmful – for the environment. Solbyn residents find that financial and legal restrictions as well could serve as criteria for making decisions in the community. Minutes from the community meetings are also carefully written down and posted.

In Solbyn questionnaires are sent to community members to prepare for community discussions and provide more time to reflect on up-coming discussion topics. Because not everyone attends community meetings, questionnaires offer a means for all residents to participate. Even so not everyone answers the questionnaires. Questionnaires are used for major issues and are emailed out to all residents a month in advance of the big meeting. This enables everyone to receive and read through the questionnaire report prior to the big meeting.

Information about decisions made is distributed via agendas and minutes printed out and hung on the bulletin board of the common house as well as through specific posted announcements so that the entire community can see them.

People assess decision-making processes individually and subjectively and their satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, can be reflected in their voting (or not voting) for a board member's re-election at the annual meeting. Furthermore, participants of the annual meeting can show their opinion by supporting or resisting implementation of common projects, or simply in participating or not participating in regular community meetings. Questions can always be posed spontaneously at meetings. Residents can ask questions concerning where specific money went or question the investment in a particular item. The answers should be noted and posted in the minutes, which are accessible for everyone. Thus any resident can bring an idea or objection to the monthly meetings and there is always a question

session at the big meetings. Solbyn once tried to use a facilitator to solve a community disagreement and it was appreciated and needed. But using facilitators is not common as the non-hierarchical structure in the ecovillage is informal, making it difficult for the group to accept a facilitator.

There is always a danger that enthusiasm in the governing of the ecovillage will eventually decrease, resulting in an insufficient number of community members feeling responsible. Several years ago there was one of these low points in Solbyn, when fewer and fewer people came to the community meetings. At the monthly meetings, held on Sunday afternoon, less than half of the households were usually represented. As a result of being a mature ecovillage, some people who have lived in Solbyn for a long time are of the opinion that they have already put their effort into the community for quite some time; for them, actively participating in community governance is not as important as it was in the beginning.

Robert Hall

Further reading:

· Website of Solbyn ecovillage: <http://www.solbyn.org/>

· Yilmaz, Delfin; Kazbekov, Kirill and Titiz, Merve (2011). *Decision Making for Strategic Sustainable Development in Selected Swedish Ecovillages, Ecovillages for Sustainable Rural Development Social Case Study 1:2011*. Link: <http://goo.gl/rFFleB>

TEST OF ECOVILLAGE SUSTAINABILITY

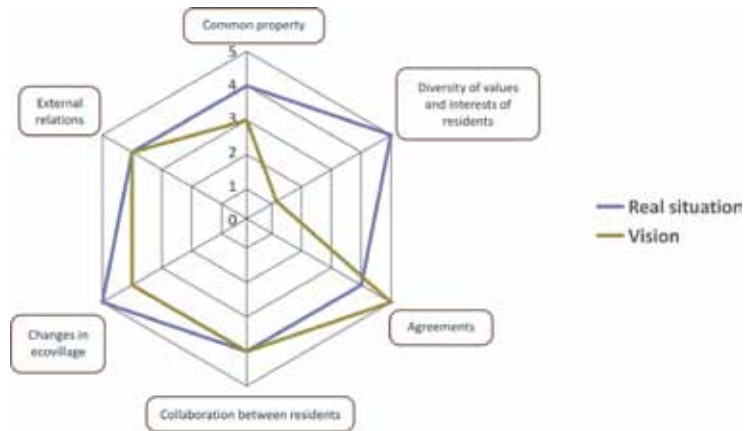
Below you will find the test of ecovillage sustainability created during the international project 'Ecovillages for rural development'.

The test is a tool for:

- Formation of a sustainable ecovillage vision
- Diagnosis of an ecovillage's real situation
- Assessment of the gap between vision and reality
- Identification of the aspects of the ecovillage governance that need to be improved.

The test is based on Spidergap analysis which makes it easy to measure the gap between the real situation in the ecovillage and the desirable situation, as analysed on six main ecovillage dimensions that are important for ecovillage sustainability. The gap is measured by completing the questionnaire and each answer is evaluated using a 5-point scale.

You can fill out the questionnaire online <http://www.balticecovillages.eu/ecovillage-sustainability-self-evaluation-test> and receive the results shown as a 'spidergap' chart.



Spidergap chart

In this example, most scores for the ecovillage's current governance (red line) are not significantly different from those for the vision (green line). If the results show something very different, the ecovillage should take the next steps:

- 1) Find which dimensions have the biggest gaps.
- 2) Try to find ways to move the real situation towards the desirable direction, e.g. organize trainings on how to avoid disagreements and integrate different attitudes of different community groups of ecovillage inhabitants or implement additional governance measures oriented to the special community groups.
- 3) Check how realistic and balanced your ecovillage vision is and discuss possible corrections in the ecovillage model and life organization.

Below you will find the questionnaire for short analysis with 12 questions.

QUESTIONS FOR DESIRABLE SITUATION

Should the life of an ecovillage be arranged so that its residents hold as much common property as possible?

<i>Answers (Choose one of them)</i>	<i>Score</i>
Hardly any common property should exist in an ecovillage	1
Only specific objects agreed during the ecovillage establishment should be common property	2
Some of the property should be common but the need for objects of common property should be under continuous revision	3
Immovable property should be common property	4
Immovable property and a large share of individual cash incomes should be common property	5

Should bringing ecovillage residents together in collaboration require similar values and interests?

<i>Answers (Choose one of them)</i>	<i>Score</i>
People could be connected to each other despite any differences	1
Values and interests of the residents could be different, tolerance should be the key to collaboration	2
Diversity of values and interests among the residents helps collaboration if special techniques are used to integrate different attitudes	3
Congruity of the key values of the residents is necessary	4
Values and interests of the majority of residents should be similar and these should be taken into account for the admission of new members	5

How many agreements between inhabitants are necessary to ensure the functioning of your community?

<i>Answers (Choose one of them)</i>	<i>Score</i>
Community functioning can be ensured without any agreements	1
A number of agreements may be achieved if a perpetual conflict arises	2
Agreement on rules regulating the main aspects of ecovillage life are necessary during the ecovillage establishment	3
Agreement on rules regulating the main aspects of ecovillage life are necessary during the ecovillage establishment and new rules should be created on demand	4
Maximum amount of rules, regulations and procedures regulating all aspects of ecovillage life are necessary	5

How close should the communication and cooperation between ecovillage residents be?

<i>Answers (Choose one of them)</i>	<i>Score</i>
Meetings should be organised only when required in order to discuss ecovillage management or manage the ecovillage territory	1
Meetings should be organised periodically in order to discuss ecovillage management or manage the ecovillage territory	2
In addition to meetings regarding ecovillage management issues, regular communication should be maintained during leisure time and various social events should be arranged	3
In addition to regular communication during leisure time and meetings regarding ecovillage management issues, communication should be maintained by means of mutual assistance, e.g. taking care of children, assisting with installations in buildings, gardening	4
Joint businesses and mutual assistance for the entire ecovillage or for a resident group should be arranged, and maximum communication during leisure time should be pursued	5

How often should changes in the ecovillage governance take place?

<i>Answers (Choose one of them)</i>	<i>Score</i>
Ecovillage governance rules should be stable, those dissatisfied with the rules should leave the community	1
The only reason for changes should be matters which can destroy the community	2
Changes should take place in response to persistent disagreements about ecovillage governance	3
Improvements in ecovillage governance should result from any valuable idea regarding the way of achieving such an improvement	4
The ecovillage governance model should be under periodical revision and continuous improvement	5

Should your ecovillage actively promote the ecovillage movement's ideas in society?

<i>Answers (Choose one of them)</i>	<i>Score</i>
No	1
Active participation of an ecovillage in ecovillage movement organizations should suffice	2
An ecovillage should spread the ecovillage movement ideas in society (e.g. by media, open events for the public in the ecovillage, consultations and internships)	3
The ecovillage community should spread ecovillage movement ideas in general society and in non-governmental and political organizations	4
An ecovillage should become an ecovillage movement centre supported by various non-governmental and political organizations	5

QUESTIONS FOR REAL SITUATION DIAGNOSIS

How much common property do you have in your ecovillage?

<i>Answers (Choose one of them)</i>	<i>Score</i>
There is no common property in the ecovillage	1
Common property comprises several specific objects as agreed during the ecovillage establishment	2
The number of objects of common property increases/decreases as a result of the revision of the list of agreed objects	3
Immovable property is common property	4
Immovable property and a large share of individual cash income is common property	5

Do differences in values or interests between the ecovillage residents cause disagreements in the community?

<i>Answers (Choose one of them)</i>	<i>Score</i>
Differences of values or interests of the residents often cause disagreements in the community	1
Values and interests of the residents are different but they are tolerant towards each other	2
Values and interests of the residents are different but they succeed in integrating different attitudes	3
Disagreements in the community are seldom a result of differences in values or interests	4
Values and interests of the majority of residents are similar and do not cause disagreements in the community	5

How do you make agreements for the ecovillage community functioning?

<i>Answers (Choose one of them)</i>	<i>Score</i>
There are no agreements in the ecovillage	1
Agreements are elaborated when a problem arises	2
We agreed on rules regulating the main aspects of ecovillage life during the ecovillage establishment	3
We agreed on rules regulating the main aspects of ecovillage life during the ecovillage establishment and we create new rules on demand	4
We agreed on rules, regulations and procedures regulating all aspects of ecovillage life during the ecovillage establishment and they are under periodical revision	5

How close is the communication and cooperation in your ecovillage?

<i>Answers (Choose one of them)</i>	<i>Score</i>
Meetings are organised only when required in order to discuss ecovillage management issues or manage the ecovillage territory	1
Meetings are organised periodically in order to discuss ecovillage management issues or manage the ecovillage territory	2
In addition to meetings regarding ecovillage management issues, regular communication is maintained during leisure time and various social events are arranged	3
In addition to regular communication during leisure time and meetings regarding ecovillage management, communication is maintained by means of mutual assistance, e.g. taking care of children, assisting with installation in buildings, gardening	4
Joint businesses and mutual assistance of the entire ecovillage or of a resident group is arranged, maximum communication during leisure time is being pursued	5

When do changes in your ecovillage governance take place?

<i>Answers (Choose one of them)</i>	<i>Score</i>
Ecovillage governance rules are stable, those dissatisfied with the rules should leave the community	1
The only reasons for changes are matters which can destroy the community	2
Changes take place in response to persistent disagreements on ecovillage governance	3
Improvements in ecovillage governance result from any valuable idea regarding the way of achieving them	4
The ecovillage governance model is under periodical revision and continuous improvement	5

Does your ecovillage actively promote the ecovillage movement ideas in society?

<i>Answers (Choose one of them)</i>	<i>Score</i>
No	1
The ecovillage participates in ecovillage movement organizations	2
The ecovillage takes certain initiatives promoting ecovillage movement ideas in society	3
The ecovillage is represented in non-governmental and political organizations and in other ways promotes the ecovillage movement ideas towards the public	4
The ecovillage is a centre promoting ecovillage movement ideas towards society and is supported by non-governmental and political organizations	5

This questionnaire and the questionnaire for more detailed analysis with 36 questions can be found at: <http://www.balticecovillages.eu/ecovillage-sustainability-self-evaluation-test>.

Use the online tool and receive the test results by e-mail.

ADVICE FOR MATURE ECOVILLAGES

(based on the experience of Baltic Sea region ecovillages)

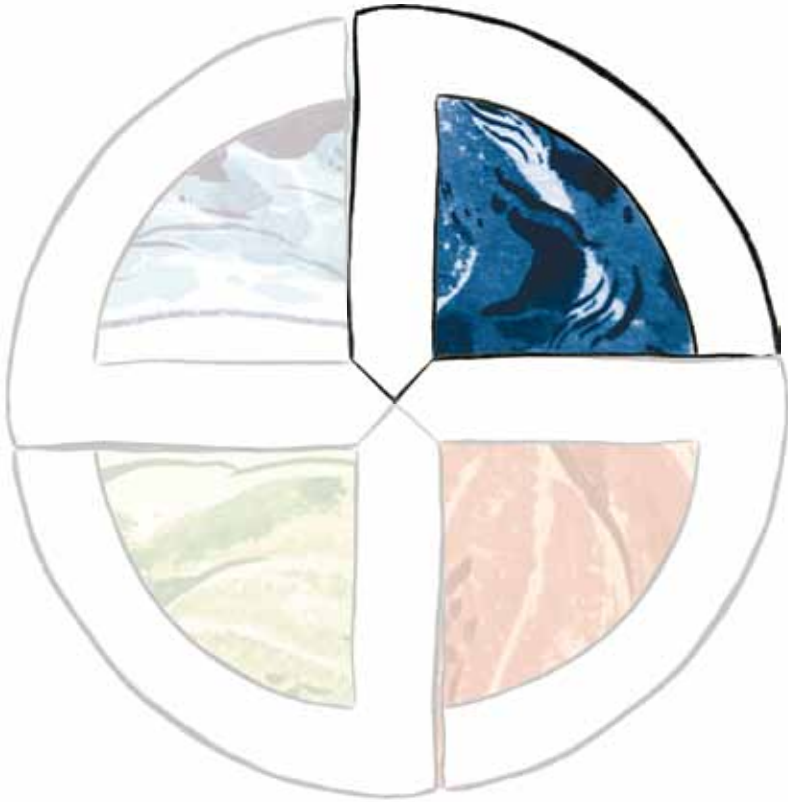
- Periodically check the gap between your vision of your ecovillage and its real life. If you find a big gap then it is time to think about the sustainability of the ecovillage. There are two ways to find a balance: 1) Move the real situation towards the vision; 2) Rethink the vision and agree with community members on a new version of the ideals in your ecovillage model.
 - The process of improving a self-governance system in the ecovillage needs to be permanent, in order to avoid stagnation and the failure of the system to reflect popular will.
 - Pay careful consideration to children's involvement in the ecovillage life and their education, based on the ideas and experiences of the ecovillage movement.





Stage 4

WATER SEASON



Do not sail downstream, become a current yourself.

Extract from the Ecovillage Folk:

A STORY ABOUT COOPERATION

A teacher was once preparing for a lesson in which he had to explain the differences between heaven and hell to his class. He really did not wish to scare the children with stories of the devils in hell. He also could not come up with a story about the pleasures waiting in heaven which would be understandable for children. So he went to bed very distressed that evening. During the night he had a dream in which he was visited by an angel who offered to organize a trip to heaven and hell. The teacher agreed happily, hoping to get the required information.

– Now we are in hell, said the angel.

The teacher looked around. Hell seemed bizarre. As in the traditional stories, there were huge bubbling boilers covered in flames, but the sinners were not being cooked alive in these pots. Instead, they were standing around making some kind of weird movements. Smells of delicious food were coming from the huge pots. The teacher saw that all the inhabitants of hell had enormous ladles and were trying to get some stew out of the pots. However, the ladles were so heavy and had such a long handle that it seemed impossible to get any food at all out of the pots. Everyone kept trying again and again but the stew kept falling back. Sometimes it seemed that a few people could successfully lift up their ladle, but eventually they ran out of strength and the food slipped back into the pot, splashing boiling sauce onto the other sinners. Everyone seemed extremely irritable and hungry.

– And now we are going to heaven, said the angel.

Looking around him, the teacher saw another space full of boiling pots. In fact, the only difference to hell was that in heaven the people were sitting in groups next to the pots and chatting merrily with each other. The teacher looked at the boiling pots and saw that they had the same enormous heavy ladles. However, the people seemed full and happy.

– Why don't they want to eat? - the teacher asked the angel.

– They have just eaten, answered the angel.

– But how could they do that? The ladles are just as heavy as those in hell!

– It is very simple, the angel answered. They do not lift the ladle alone, but in groups. Then they can share the food.

STAGE 4 OF THE ECOVILLAGE LIFE CYCLE: COLLABORATIVE CREATIVITY - HOW CAN WE TRANSFER OUR ACCUMULATED EXPERIENCE TO SOCIETY?

'Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds you plant.'

Robert Louis Stevenson

Each ecovillage is individual and unique but this does not prevent best practices being shared and copied. The experience accumulated during an ecovillage life cycle becomes an important source of knowledge for other ecovillages and society at large. An ecovillage should also be interested in spreading ecovillage-generated knowledge itself because attempting to teach others is an especially powerful way to learn yourself: becoming a knowledge centre provides the residents an opportunity to 'learn by teaching others'.

At the beginning most ecovillages spread their knowledge to the residents of other ecovillages and later to members of various non-governmental organizations or individual experts. Gradually the 'teacher-student' relationship can develop into a partnership as the hierarchical nature of the relationship changes into a dialogue. The next step is a partnership which involves the creation of new knowledge as well as the exchange of existing knowledge. When an ecovillage joins the partnership-based creative knowledge development process, this provides an opportunity to go beyond criticism of the current way of life with its harmful effects on the ecological situation on the planet and offer the public new solutions which could change the current mainstream systems with regard to energy, nutrition, agriculture, residential construction, space planning, education and other issues.



Main elements of the 4th stage of the ecovillage life cycle

LEARNING BY TEACHING AND ORGANIZING PUBLIC EVENTS

A number of ecovillages were established in order to create residential locations remote from the unacceptable lifestyles of mainstream society. Here frequent visits by outsiders are considered as a threat to the established lifestyle during the first stages of the ecovillage life cycle. However, over time ecovillages become more open to the public. Mature ecovillages usually wish to convey their accumulated knowledge to the more general public. This is expressed in a variety of forms, such as training, internships, discussions, cultural and social events or consulting services. In order to continue to develop, it is important to realize that teaching others and organizing a variety of events is also a self-improvement process. Training, communication and discussion with people who think differently can deepen and clarify the villagers' current knowledge, reveal new possibilities and further the development possibilities for the whole ecovillage movement.

THE GERMAN ECOVILLAGE ZEGG AS A SEMINAR CENTRE



Living and learning centre ZEGG.
Photo by Achim Ecker

ZEGG's long history as an intentional community started in 1978 and as an ecovillage in 1991. The ZEGG community developed a culture of open-hearted communication that is often praised by their guests. Step-by-step the ecovillage became a seminar centre that offers programs based on its own experiences in the area of communal living, sustainability and communication.

Four large festivals and numerous seminars take place in ZEGG each year. Special areas of expertise are community building and communication (see the story on ZEGG Forum in Chapter 2), arts and creativity, permaculture and sustainability as well as love and relationship issues.



Communal dining outdoors. Photo by Achim Ecker

Participants in the community building training courses learn about how people come together as a team in communities and projects. 'To me, community building is a real adventure' said one of ZEGG's participants last year. 'Being so closely together in a group also brought up new sides of myself.' You learn about yourself in social interaction and receive tools for dealing with group processes. The seminars are designed for everyone looking for meaning and profound experiences in their life. They are particularly valuable for project initiators

and anyone in the 'people-work' professions. Participants can broaden their personal leadership qualities, develop empathic communication skills and improve their ability to establish and lead teams and groups in a cooperative way.

Additionally, the community offers guests the chance to come and work alongside its members, learning about gardening, soil improvement and providing a direct and tangible experience of community in action. These working programmes provide opportunities to stay and work in ZEGG for free or lower



Silent meditation. Photo by Achim Ecker

fees. Guests can experience community by working together, become aware of group dynamics, and practice clear communication. Their work also gives them direct insights into permaculture, ecological gardening and building as well as organic food preparation.

Ina Meyer-Stoll

ACTIVITIES IN THE SOCIETY 'UNDINE', LATVIA

The society 'The Green Order – House of Fairy Tales 'Undine' (further in the text – 'Undine') is a legally registered eco-community active in the urban environment in Dubulti (Jurmala). The community working area is divided and used both as an interactive public area and an amateur cultural centre. It has become a symbolic, almost unbelievable success story for many people. 'Undine' serves as an example of how even a small amount of resources are sufficient to develop a facility for our cultural environment which is able to operate long-term, attract people to take part in discussions and inform themselves, facilitate studies and artistic expression. Sociological research has provided evidence that a high-quality and meaningful public communication area contributes to our emotional attraction towards our land and country.

The aim of 'Undine' is to preserve and renovate fairy tales, ethical values, national customs, healthy ways of life, respect for life, fair and creative work for its country and people.

The daily life in 'Undine' may be considered to be a non-stop cycle of interactive events, where each visitor becomes a participant, draws, creates clay sculptures, paints on walls, furniture, fabrics or other things, creates installations, environmental objects and practical things. All this creates a very special environment in 'Undine' and its neighbourhood: a pleasant and mysterious mood comes to the world in the moment where very different people come together and simultaneously have the legal opportunity to build their dream palaces – professional artists and children who are just starting to walk, older people and teenagers, hippies and people from official delegations, flower growers, walkers in the forest and those who are staring into computers, punks and doctors of science, astronomy fans and those who worry about fish – people who were always waiting for something extraordinary.

All of the events named usually take place on Saturdays, as a part of the Middle Earth Magic Game. One whole cycle of the game is approximately 11 months and at the end of each cycle, at the beginning of August, the Festival of 'Undine' is held. 'Undine' is open to all members of the community and any interested parties.

'Undine' was developed as an alternative environment with alternative events, rules and feelings. Involvement in this environment led to a wish for an alternative system of counting the time. Several variants were developed, looking for a suitable system of counting time. The initiators of 'Undine' had a chance to select any of 100 or 1000 calendars, since there are many different systems of counting time in the world, but the solar calendar seemed to be the most interesting one. In this system the sun is a factor having more impact on human life than the moon. Another reason in favour of the solar calendar was that this system of counting time is much more orderly, internally justified and logical than the traditional system of counting time. The Gregorian calendar, for example, developed as a



*Decoration of Undine yard for Eater celebrations.
Photo by Daina Saktiņa*

result of political factors and it is distinguished neither by its astronomical accuracy nor symbolism nor internal order. It is difficult to say whether the solar calendar is the best available; nonetheless, Latvians have preserved a great deal of information about it. All the surrounding nations had a similar system of counting time during the pre-Christian period. Maybe it was the particular historical situation, such as the lack of statehood, which led to more information about the solar calendar being preserved in Latvia.

In order to develop Latvian traditions following the solar calendar system and uniting participants in the 'Undine' community, the tradition or festival 'The Sun – 9' was introduced. Since the time of introduction, the festival has been organized regularly. 'The Sun – 9' involves eight events marking one whole year of the solar calendar.

The distribution of a year according to the solar calendar

Four ecliptic periods divide a year into quarters:

Winter and summer solstices:

Christmas – the shortest day, the longest night of a year

Midsummer Day – the longest day, the shortest night of a year.

Spring and autumn equinoxes:

Easter – day and night are of the same length

Michaelmas – day and night are of the same length.

Every quarter is then divided into half, corresponding to the climatic changes in nature:

Shrovetide – between Christmas and Easter

Usins' or St. George's Day – between Easter and Midsummer Day

Mara's Day – between Midsummer Day and Michaelmas

Martinmas – between Michaelmas and Christmas.

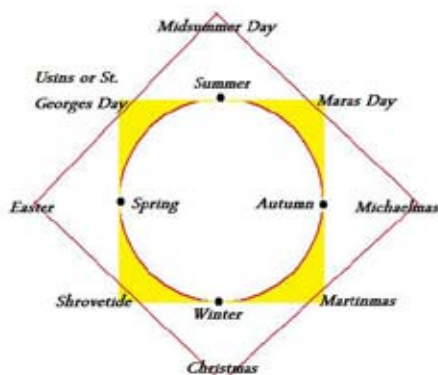
There are eight events in a year associated with the four ecliptic periods caused by the increasing or reducing light of the sun and amount of warmth received. Latvians refer to these eight events in the year as Gads-karta (an annual increment).

The Gads-karta is a sequence of important events in the solar year which repeat from year to year with a constant precision. The festival of the annual increment can be considered as an important element to revive ancient time counting because it enabled the constant precision of the solar rhythm to be incorporated into the ancient calendar.

Within the scope of the festival 'The Sun – 9' organized by 'Undine', the following festivities are celebrated:

Shrovetide

According to the ancient solar calendar, Shrovetide is the beginning of every new spring: the last and therefore the brightest, loudest and merriest Masker Day.



The solar calendar

The maskers (callers) of Shrovetide are the children and 'Shrovetides'. This day is when the goddess Laima gives presents both to children – the symbols of the New Year – and Shrovetides – the wishers of happiness and bringers of blessings. The small children receive the presents from the hands of adult members of the household during the Shrovetide games and plays, but Shrovetides get them from the hands of masters of the village. A Shrovetide tradition says the further one walks on a masker day, the better it is.

Spring Equinox (Easter)

The Great Day or Easter, also referred to as Lieladiena, Lindina, Leudina, and Leldina (in various Latvian dialects) is the Sun Festival, symbolizing the victory of light and life over darkness and death when the dark forces of winter draw back to leave some room for the light and warmth, bringing life to the land and plants.

In Latvian folk traditions, Easter marked the spring period when the day becomes longer than the night. At the Spring Equinox, the sun rises directly in the east and sets directly in the west. This line between these points is called a path of the Sun and in nature special marks can be found in the form of a brook flowing in the direction of the sun on Easter morning. Latvians have long attributed powers to increase magic, health and beauty to the water from these brooks.

There are many ritual activities to be performed on the Great Day in order to ensure that the next period is one of alignment with nature's rhythms.

Usins' Day (St. George's Day)

According to ancient, pre-Christian mythology, Usins is the god of light – the victory of light and warmth. Rituals related with water, horses, bees are performed on this day, as well as other magical and even simply very practical activities. Some are performed on the previous day or to welcome the sunrise on the morning of Usins' Day. In the fairly recent past this was still deeply connected with the purity of souls and symbols of immortality.

Usins' Day marks the beginning of summer, when the daylight increases along with feelings and energy; there is a heightened sense of the joy of living in both nature and people.

Summer Solstice (Midsummer Day)

Some people say the oldest name of this summer solstice festival was the Day of Herbs, not Midsummer Day or St. John's Day. The celebration time is on June 21 or 22, depending on the solstice date of a particular astronomic year.

On the solstice day, the life-promoting forces are most intensive: in plants, animals, people and nature in general. Also, a human being can come as close as possible to the magic source of energy of nature.

Midsummer night is short; therefore we should learn to spend it appropriately. It helps us recognise that human life is short and should be lived consciously.

Crowns are one of the most characteristic, significant and even mandatory ritual elements of the Latvian summer solstice. A circle is one of the most important elements of magic; it can be used to dissociate oneself from something or to concentrate specific energy. You can increase your power by making circles. The site for a ritual is always enclosed within a circle. The dwelling sites of the ancient Latvians were always bordered by a fence in the shape of a circle. A circle is also a symbol for the sun and a Midsummer crown is a tangible form of this symbol. It is created using the power of various herbs. There is a surprising conformity of opinions in Latvian folk songs as to the materials



*Decoration of Undine yard for Eater celebrations.
Photo by Daina Saktiņa*

crowns should be made of. For men it is easy: oak twigs. For women there is more variety: they are made of blossoming wild flowers or oak leaves with interwoven flowers for St. John's mother. Crowns are made of stems of grass for girls and flowers and green grass for adult girls. All married women wear crowns made of oak twigs and flowers. A great variety of creatures and objects were crowned with Midsummer Day's crowns on St. John's Day by the ancient Latvians: people, domestic animals, walls and windows of residential buildings, stockyards, barns, cattle-sheds and tools. This confirms the deep magical meaning of crowns for the rituals of this day. A Midsummer Day crown symbolises an understanding of the togetherness of human beings and nature; it represents a desire to be part of the picturesque wonder of summer in a merry way. It is self-decoration arising out of an emotional uplift and at the same time also creating the emotional uplift and a sense of uniqueness. Crowning someone is a gesture of generosity, sincerity and friendship. Crowning can be accompanied by

specific folk songs with ancient magic formulas expressing strong aspirations or prayers for a man's life and his practical activities. The St. John's crown made of plants gathered in faraway lands is like a magic circle protecting against misfortunes, diseases and evil-wishers when worn on someone's head.

Summer solstice marks the middle of summer; it is the time of herbs in nature. It is the date when half the solar year has passed. It is believed that on Midsummer Day the soul had a chance to get to the afterworld, provided that it had finished everything it had to do on Earth.

Mara's Day

It is the end of summer, ripeness, the festival of agriculture. It is also the maturity of a human being in a symbolic way: the internal fire of life. The power of life is celebrated. Fire is brought to the house or threshing barn in the form of a bread oven, since the grain harvest is intrinsically connected with fire and the process of bread-making. During the long transition period, grains become weather-beaten ears that are milled and turned into loaves of bread. In a symbolic way this represents a human life from birth, through growing up and life's tests to the acquired insights of the age of maturity.

In August, Mara – a protector of the material world – becomes the most important deity, taking care of the house and family and its material stability. In particular, Mara watches over mothers and their children, and the health and wellbeing of families and households. Mara, as the Great Mother or the Prime Mother, has different expressions. Above all, she is the head of all the elements: the Fire Mother, the Soil Mother, the Wind Mother and the Water Mother.

Autumn Equinox (Michaelmas)

Michaelmas is the day of thatching or bringing the harvest home – the last day of the harvest period, when magical rituals are performed to ensure success in the coming year and obtain the benevolence of Jumis – a spirit of the fields.

For a short period of time, the ratio between light and darkness is in balance. The harvesting period is in progress. Jumis is praised for fertility; the spirit is a personification of the soil's degree of fertility and is related to the underworld. For this reason, the harvest time is followed by a period of feeding the souls of the dead. It was also the time of alluring the souls of the dead, so that a soul had a chance to return to Earth. Of all human desires, eating delicious food was always considered to be the strongest desire, which we can hardly resist.

In the ancient system of counting time, Michaelmas marks the autumn equinox, when the sun has waned to the point where a day and a night are of the same length again. In the Northern hemisphere the sun shines over the land less after Michaelmas, the days become shorter and nights longer. A Latvian legend about the sun tells how the sun's daughter was drowned in a spring: the light diminishes because the sun is crying in sorrow about her daughter.

Martinmas

Martinmas brings the period of the souls of the dead to a close. It is the beginning of winter: a time of silence and frostiness in nature. It is the time of masquerade, when there is a chance to turn into someone else while still remaining what you are. People who are not fond of winter make do by simply existing, rather than living vigorously.

According to Latvian traditions, Martinmas is primarily related to the end of a working year. It is also the end of the pasture period and the culmination of wildlife's preparation for winter.

Latvians considered Martinmas to be the last day of autumn and the first day of winter. It was the day when all the autumn tasks were to be finished, the last parts of the harvest threshed, and the soil ploughed. After this day, the soil takes a rest and should not be disturbed by ploughing, otherwise no harvest can be expected on this soil in the coming year.

Martinmas is often mentioned in relation to Usins' or St. George's Day. If the former bids farewell to autumn and welcomes winter, then the latter bids farewell to winter and welcomes spring.

Winter Solstice (Christmas)

Christmas is the fourth and the last of the festivals connected with the solstices and equinoxes – it is the time when the day is shortest and the night is longest. After Christmas the sun starts returning and the days grow longer. The solstice day is on 22 December. However, according to the Latvian folk songs and other materials, Christmas was celebrated for 3-4 days starting from 20-21 December.

It is the festival of the slow returning of the light. It is the wedding time of the sun's daughter. Preparing for this festival should be started in good time: tidying the yard, decorating rooms with various ornaments made of straw, dried flowers, wood shavings, feathers of birds and wool. Puzuri were especially popular at Christmas – they were hanging ornaments that were usually made of small pieces of straws or reeds, threading them on worsted yarn, as well as small suns made of straw and reed pierced into potatoes.

Special meals and drinks were also prepared. Christmas was even referred to as the Evening of the Pig's Snout because a pig's snout (smeceris, kukis or koca in various dialects in Latvian) was considered a special delicacy for Christmas dinner, as well as beans, peas, black puddings, pies and some types of beer.

The special activity of pulling a log took place on Christmas Eve, which was also referred to as the Log Evening. This involved pulling a previously prepared large oak log from one home to another (sometimes around the yard of one house) and burning it when the last house was reached. Some people were of opinion that the log symbolizes the sun; the people are pulling it up and encouraging its return; others thought that by pulling the log from one place to another they are collecting all the troubles and misfortunes, which are then eliminated by burning at the end.

Selection of themes for events and the frequency of events

The solar calendar festivals ('The Sun – 9') are scheduled according to the rhythm of the solar calendar. The content and performance of each festival changes depending on the available artists and the ideas of the organizers.

The open days in 'Undine' take place every Saturday with no exceptions. The programme for all these Saturday open days is selected according to the weekly events and current needs of the community.

Dissemination of information to the public about events

Information about events is disseminated on the homepage of 'Undine', sent to the e-mail addresses of the community's members, advertised in other local sources of information and placed in various groups created by the persons holding the same views in the social portals, as well as being disseminated by word of mouth.

'Undine' is very popular on Saturdays and everybody finds something to keep them busy. The solar calendar festivals are also very well visited and it is quite common for them to be visited by people who do not belong to the community of 'Undine'.

Those who have been to 'Undine' once usually come again and invite their friends and then even take part in further event organization. All events are free, everyone is welcome. However there is one strict condition: no alcohol, Coca-Cola or smoking are permitted in the territory of 'Undine'.

Information source: <http://www.undine.lv/eng/>

WORLD PEACE DAYS IN DĄBRÓWKA, POLAND

Most of the people living in the ecovillage Local Alternative Society (L.A.S.) are artists, musicians, painters, designers, and architects. Once a year the L.A.S. organizes a public event – World Peace Days (further in the text – WPD). Hundreds of people from Dąbrówka and nearby villages (and a few from all over the country and world) gather together to attend music concerts, promote ecological lifestyles and strengthen social ties with each other. These people are connected by similar social characteristics and shared views for or against particular aspects of life, activities, products etc.

Where do the guests stay?

The WPD are organized in summer, when the guests can stay at a semi-wild camping site, located in the area around the Słomiński family's property. It is the best solution for such a large number of people and it also concurs closely with an ecological lifestyle – being close to nature and to other like-minded people.

What do the visitors eat?

The food is also an expression of a very close relationship involving the villagers: in this case between the organizers and visiting guests. The food is prepared by local residents and by visitors, too. As at normal fairs, the food stands are conveniently placed, near the concert area, and everyone can buy what they wish to eat. The food is served on cabbage leaves instead of plates, as befits the ecological lifestyle promoted.

What does 'buying' mean in this content?

In order to avoid many problems connected with taxes, the organizers (Słomiński family and the neighbours from Dąbrówka) produce paper bricks as a kind of local currency which then supports the association's activities. Each visitor to WPD buys a contingent of these bricks and then the bricks become a means of payment during the WPD. At the last event, the cost of one brick was 2 Polish zloty, i.e. around 0.5 euro. This is the best solution for both sides – the organizers receive funds for their

activities, and the visitors feel safe while no normal money is in circulation. The possibility of theft has been minimized this way and – what is more – the concept of money and its huge impact on people has been eliminated. The only thing that counts here is living close to nature. The bricks are called 'falemka'. To sum up: During the WPD only 'falemki' are valid, no other currency is accepted.

Common thoughts and beliefs

WPD isn't only a music festival but also a tool to bring together activities and propagate ecological lifestyles. For example, in 2012 in Poland protests were commonplace against genetically modified organisms (GMO) and ecovillage residents are strongly engaged in that movement. The World Peace Days 2012 were mostly focused on the danger posed by the possibility of introducing genetically modified organisms onto the Polish market. Most of the attendees had been participating in protests against the Polish President's adoption of the law on GMOs. Beliefs and lifestyle approaches such as this constitute a strong connection between the organizers and visitors at WPD. They set common aims and behaviour.

In connection to the WPD

Each WPD event is connected with related activities. In 2012 the Słomiński family and the neighbours from Dąbrowka organized the 'Days of traditional Polish village' as a preparation for WPD. The programme included a 'Clothing Party' as an initiative for clothes exchange ('from one wardrobe to another'), an acrobatic show by people from Dąbrowka, screening of films and a presentation by the campaign 'Stop GMO'.

When Mr Słomiński was asked why the WPD are not more widely promoted in the country he said that people who want to know will know; additionally, he does not feel they could manage the WPD organization for thousands of people.

It is certain that the people from Dąbrowka are infecting others with their good faith, lifestyle and beliefs. This seems to be the phenomenon behind the 'World Peace Days' in Dąbrowka.

To get more information about WPD it is possible to see the film from the concerts available on website: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LI-cut3cfp8>, and many more other films also visible via YouTube.

Gabriela Górewicz

COLLABORATION

Various forms of collaboration with other ecovillages and organizations or individuals are an essential part of the ecovillage movement. The first steps were taken by the Gaia Trust, founded by Ross and Hildur Jackson in 1987 with the aim to promote their opinion that it is time for human beings to decide upon a new approach on how to live. The main issues were new concepts on how to organize our way of living with each other and with the natural world; from this basis technologies and economies could be developed that are supportive of this new system. Consequently, Gaia Trust took the initiative: in 1993 it initiated the first national ecovillage organization, a Danish network of ecovillages and an international counterpart, the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), was created shortly afterwards in 1995 when over 350 persons from ecovillages in 40 countries around the world gathered at Findhorn. Today GEN has representatives in all parts of the world, with numerous national networks and ecovillages as its full members. In 2000 GEN gained United Nations Economic and Social Council

(ECOSOC) consultative status and is represented at regular briefing sessions at UN Headquarters. At the same time, a lot of independent networks connecting ecovillages on the regional level exist.

In the 21st century new networking forms appeared in the ecovillage movement. The networks became decentralized, gathering people for teamwork with an aim to create something new. Most of them are two-sided or multi-sided and bring inhabitants of ecovillages together with others. The new-generation networks are based on a platform and connect different groups of members associated with that platform. Each group benefits from the other's presence in the network. For example, a network based on a natural agriculture platform connects growers and consumers of vegetables and fruits grown by natural agricultural methods (see the story about the Lithuanian natural agriculture network in the next chapter). New-generation networks contribute to promotion of the ecological lifestyle and also help to create new economic, social and cultural ways of doing things which change mainstream systems and offer the opportunity to increase harmony in relationships with nature and with oneself.

Two models of cooperation are presented below. The first story is about the Swedish ecovillage network, which is organized in the traditional way. After the establishment of an association, a group of enthusiasts engaged in spreading of information, training, organization of general events and representing interests of ecovillages at the political level. The second story presents the network organized by the Melkys ecovillage in Lithuania. This is based on a new-generation decentralized networking model, aiming to establish links between the various organizations and individuals and encourage them to contribute to relevant projects of the ecovillage movement by teamwork.

SWEDISH NJORD: A NETWORK WITH A FOCUS ON REPRESENTING THE ECOVILLAGES OF SWEDEN

Sweden has had a long history of an ecovillage movement which parallels the international movement. Yet Sweden had not been able to organize a strong national organization to serve the development of ecovillages. Recent efforts have revived Njord as a distinct representative of the Swedish ecovillage movement. There is now a Swedish national ecovillage association that can bring together the movement and support the development of individual ecovillages.

Njord was started in 1987 by Marylin Mehlmann. Njord is named after a Nordic mythological god with certain ecological aspects. Furthermore, when the name is pronounced, it resembles 'en jord' which in Swedish means 'one earth'.

In 1987 eco-municipality initiator Torbjörn Lahti organized an ecovillage seminar in Sweden's first eco-municipality, Övertorneå, where the best expertise in the country gathered. Here Njord received a significant boost and several new ecovillage projects were initiated. Njord organized seminars and tours about eco-building and water management and published its own newsletter. Njord also sent two representatives to the 1995 Findhorn meeting to found GEN and assisted GEN at its first public appearance, exhibiting at the UN HABITAT conference in Istanbul in 1996.

Njord wanted to be an umbrella organization for the ecovillages in Sweden but never managed to attract their inhabitants. Many of the villagers didn't perceive their form of housing as an ecovillage and many didn't regard the activities undertaken by the organization as useful. So instead, Njord became an organization for aspiring ecovillagers and dreamers, resembling an urban and academic

eco-construction network more than being a representative for existing ecovillages. With no clear profile anymore, all Njord's activities ceased in 2002.

After eight years the idea to restart Njord surfaced in conjunction with the start-up of the Sida (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) and GEN-funded project 'Learning for a Healthy Baltic Sea Lifestyle' (HBSL). During the HBSL meeting in Estonia 2010, the revival was initiated together with 59 people from ecovillages, permaculture projects and the transition and urban gardening movements from 10 countries around the Baltic Sea. In the months prior to and after this meeting a small group of ecovillage enthusiasts worked to revive Njord as an association with a new focus. Njord was now to concentrate completely on representing the ecovillages of Sweden, assisting ecovillages and potential ecovillagers, and linking up with GEN. Therefore it was a proud moment when, in July 2011, Njord was able to present itself to the General Assembly of GEN Europe, Africa and Middle East that took place in Tamera, Portugal and be accepted as the Swedish National Network for GEN. On 18-20 November 2011, some 45 ecovillagers gathered at Njord's national workshop at Hågaby ecovillage as part of the EU Baltic Sea Region programme 2007-2013 project 'Ecovillages for sustainable rural development'. At this historic meeting ecovillages were able to share experiences, gain new contacts and see the immediate need for a national community of ecovillages, in order to help each ecovillage with their individual needs.



Swedish national meeting. Photo by Alica Ferliková

The next annual meeting was held in Järna in March 2012, where a new board consisting of five persons was elected, with many board members being ecovillage inhabitants. The network also changed its name to 'Ekobyarnas riksorganisation (ERO)' (National Ecovillage Association) and new projects were planned and initiated. Today there are many more ecovillages and aspiring projects in Sweden than during the eighties and nineties; it is anticipated that ecovillages from all over Sweden will attend and work to create a coordinated network and resource bank of knowledge and experience. The aim of ERO is to facilitate the creation of new ecovillages by means of networking possibilities, information and resources, aiding the growth of existing ecovillages, and speaking as a consolidated voice to interact with the rest of society and advocate the views of the ecovillages of Sweden. So far the association has been run on a voluntary basis: the only income is the membership fees and the surplus from the annual meetings and other organized events. By partnering in joint projects, for instance with municipalities, it is sometimes possible to create paid work; this is the long-term ambition for the association.

Robert Hall and Kalle Randau

Further Reading:

- Website of the network: www.ekobyar.se
- Website of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN): www.gen-europe.org

THE NEW WAY OF NETWORKING: STARFISH-TYPE NETWORK INITIATED BY MELKYS ECOVILLAGE, LITHUANIA

The inhabitants of Melkys Ecovillage place more emphasis on the implementation and dissemination of their ideas in society than increasing the welfare of their village. So in order to pass their knowledge to the public, they developed intensive networking.

A modern networking form called a starfish network was chosen after discussing a number of other possible forms of cooperation. According to those involved, a starfish network best corresponds to an atmosphere of friendship and team spirit in the village. The inhabitants call the network a 'social cluster'.



A starfish network is organized according to the same mechanisms used by the sea creature of that name. At first glance, a starfish's movement seems chaotic when it moves on its limbs, but everything is actually very systematic. At the moment when a starfish needs to turn or move from one point to another, independent limb movements begin to obey the general aim and rhythm. The limb that is in the best position takes a leader role. (Here it is important to emphasize that none of the starfish's limbs are stronger than the others, so the choice of limb depends on the specific situation at a given moment.)

At the same time, the movement is assisted by vibration of nap (tiny hairs), which covers the limbs. Starfish do not have a head; the five limbs coordinate their movement by means of a constant exchange of information relating to the direction of nap oscillation.

A networking organization can act in a similar way. The main principle of the model is decentralization: a boss is not required, since a starfish has no head, and network activities can be implemented by thematic working groups.

Creating the Melkys ecovillage network, its founders consistently applied this principle to establish all the elements necessary for a starfish network. As with starfish limbs, there are five:

1. Circles. The circles are working groups with a non-hierarchical structure, where all participants are equal. The Melkys community initiates the development of a circle when a catalyst (see below) proposes a new idea. For example, in 2011, a hemp cultivation circle was established. Members of the group encourage the cultivation of this traditional Lithuanian plant.

2. Catalysts. A catalyst is a generator of ideas. In this case, the idea generator is mainly Zinaida Gineitienė – the founder of Melkys ecovillage and Professor of Social Sciences at Vilnius University. She generates new ideas and conveys them to newly established working group members for development and implementation. Sometimes new ideas come from members of other circles; new network participants also come with new project proposals. A new network circle is then formed to launch a project based on the proposed new topic.

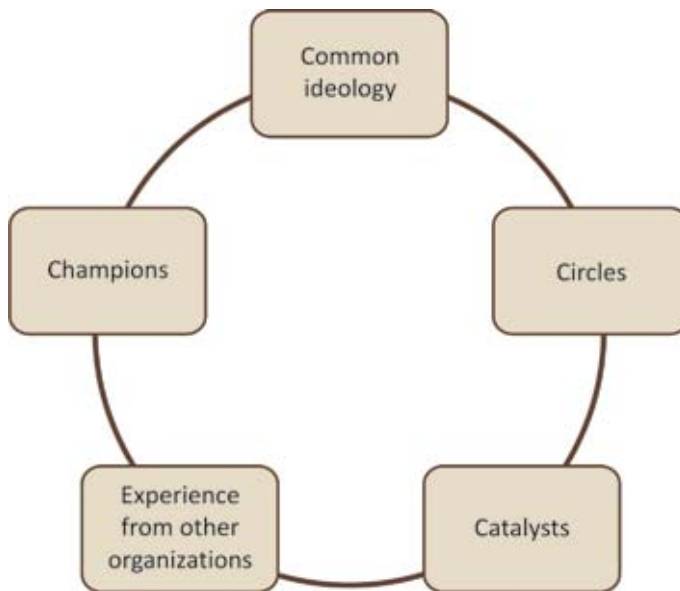


*Founder and network catalyst Zinaida Gineitienė.
Photo by Zivile Gedminaite-Raudone*

3. Common ideology. Each Melkys ecovillage network circle has its own ideology, which is associated with its specific topic and the implementation of its idea. However, all the network circles follow the general ideology of Melkys community, which is based on the belief of the importance of transferring local historical and cultural heritage from generation to generation.

4. Experience from other organizations. The majority of Melkys ecovillage network members are active members of various non-governmental organizations. For example, the circle for straw and clay buildings includes members of the Straw House Builders Association. The cultural heritage circle includes members from a variety of historical clubs, artists' groups, and religious organizations. Although these organizations are often related to the idea of the circle, the members are not limited by the activities of their organizations.

5. Champions. Champions take all the necessary steps to implement the ideas suggested by the catalyst (who is the initiator of a circle). Sometimes members of Melkys community act as champions, but most often people from outside are involved. The main slogan of the Melkys network champions is: 'Don't do anything half way'.



The main elements of a starfish-type network

The most active Melkys ecovillage circles are:

- Circle for hemp cultivation.
- Circle for women entrepreneurs and managers.
- Circle for straw and clay buildings.
- Circle for cultural heritage, taking care of the preservation of local history and sharing knowledge through summer camps, festivals and other social events.
- Circle for organic farming, and also techniques for ancient crafts and ecological construction.
- Circle for supporting vulnerable groups in society, which takes care of Melkys area orphans, disabled and elderly people who are not supported by their children, poor families, and those addicted to drugs or alcohol.

- Circle for the village economy, which is responsible for the inclusion of local unemployed people or those living below the poverty line into organic farming and other economic activities in the ecovillage. The main tasks are development of their skills and assistance to earn some extra income.

Melkys ecovillage community welcomes this starfish-type organizational structure. They say it helps to create a friendly community and a creative attitude; it is also flexible and helps them adapt quickly to changing situations. The chosen organizational structure has led to the successful operation of the network and has helped include not only members of the community but also public-spirited people from all over Lithuania, including teachers and university professors, monks, representatives from various social institutions, and business people. Most of the Melkys ecovillage network members do not actually live in the village, but they do often visit it. Members of the network see the starfish-type network as one which works much more efficiently than a traditional association with a president and board.

Dalia Vidickienė

Further reading on Starfish networks' organizational structure:

Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom (2006). The Starfish And the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations, Penguin.

CHANGING MAINSTREAM SYSTEMS

After reaching a certain level of maturity, some ecovillages set ambitious goals of changing mainstream thinking and organizational systems. First, they test new alternative ways in their ecovillage, develop them, and make sure of their effectiveness, and then they try to promote them in wider society. The following stories present ecovillages' contributions towards changes in mainstream systems relating to agriculture, food consumption and education.

PERMACULTURE GARDENING PROMOTION BY LOCAL ALTERNATIVE SOCIETY, POLAND

Having your own garden might be a challenge for some people. Lost in 'civilisation', many individuals have neither the time, nor disposition to shape the place they live or spend a few minutes every day with something that is alive: plants.



*Butterfly on a flower.
Photo by Monika Podsiadła*

The Local Alternative Society in Poland is a very active user and promoter of gardening according to permaculture principles. The most important factors here are the ethical attitudes which have been formulated in the permaculture 'bible': 'Permaculture. A Designer's Manual' by Bill Mollison:

1. Taking care of the Earth, the natural environment and ecosystems. This means paying attention to productivity, non-infringement of the existing ecosystems, not pouring any chemical substances into the ground or environment, and generally minimizing our negative

effects on nature. We need to reflect on the limits of our own needs and strive for a conscious reduction of these needs.

2. Taking care of people, ensuring harmonious development of society and security of basic needs. Sharing what we produce and what we can make. Work on a voluntary basis instead of compulsion. Cooperation instead of competition. Taking care of the development and needs of all the age groups in society. Mutual interest in each other and friendly relations between neighbours. Strengthening bonds with meetings and cooperation. Tolerance for other religions and worldviews. Eliminating destructive attitudes and behaviours by showing how benefits arise out of choosing cooperation instead of stigmatisation or punishment. Self-development instead of consumption or getting rich at the expense of other people.

3. A fair distribution of produced goods. Local production and local distribution of produced goods instead of energy-consuming distribution systems. Sharing surpluses. Giving back to the environment what we do not need. Strengthening ecosystems.

Permaculture strives to meet all the material, cultural and mental needs of people and society by means of cooperation with nature and respecting its rights. It achieves these goals by implementing the following rules:

- Rational designs for self-sufficient settlements, farms, larger villages and towns, which do not violate the existing natural ecosystems. In fact, they should even enrich these ecosystems.
- Imitating nature, which leads achieving maximum effects by minimum energy consumption (effort).
- Multiple functions for the constituent elements of the system. One element plays many roles or can replace many elements.
- Cooperation with nature, instead of acting against it.
- Remembering that system productivity is unlimited. Only our information supply or imagination creates these limits.
- Every part of nature has an influence on the ecosystems where it functions. Everything is connected in a net of mutual correlation and influence.
- Positive, creative thinking. Every problem has a solution. It depends on us to find it. Simple solutions are usually the best.
- Using renewable energy instead of fossil fuel sources.
- Creating closed cycles of energy, for example: recycling, waste composting and renewed integration into the natural system.
- Creating local social groups and bonds on a basis of cooperation, friendship, and understanding.
- Local economies. Striving for economic self-sufficiency of farms, villages, and settlements. Building up independence from external systems.
- Respecting the rights of life, happiness and freedom for all living beings.

Permaculture gives us examples for solutions no one had heard about until recently. You can have your garden everywhere: on the balcony, on the window sill, on the wall, in the flowerpot, in a PVC pipe, in a shoe, on the roof, in a barrel etc. This may sound ridiculous but it is actually true: all of these ideas have been implemented successfully.

An inspiration to join the 'green education' movement came to Andrzej Młynarczyk after a long stay in the Findhorn Foundation ecovillage in Scotland in 1996. When he came back to Poland he



*Dense greenery.
Photo by Monika Podsiadła*



Community members at work.
Photo by Monika Podsiadła

changed his garden using 'permaculture methods' with impressive results. Mulching the soil has changed it from a barren plot into a fertile and blooming garden.

In 2001 Andrzej had the opportunity to participate in a three-month course in permaculture and alternative design at the eco-centre 'Folkecenter – Thy' in Denmark. After Andrzej and his partner Monica returned they started to conduct permaculture workshops and educational courses for children and teenagers. These workshops take place in their garden and many different locations in Poland. During the workshops they pass on basic knowledge about permaculture. Besides theory, the focus is on practical knowledge and skills development for the young workshop participants.

The benefits of permaculture gardening:

- Instead of consuming highly modified and chemical food, you eat fresh and healthy produce.
- Many households are searching for possibilities to save money. As a result, ever more small gardens incorporate edible plants, where there was previously only flat lawn.
- Having a permaculture garden based on natural processes does not require any additional expense from the people who take care of it. A fully established garden system with help of techniques and methods copied from Nature is stable and provides many benefits. There is no need to do too much work, in contrast to conventional gardens. Thanks to ingenious permaculture solutions home-grown food are available for practically everyone, offering chances to become independent of unhealthy, modified products.
- Permaculture and bio-dynamic gardening can also bring together people of different cultures, religions and interests. Sharing food or eating together in a larger group is still a good way to celebrate the day. Knowledge about how a seed transforms into a luxuriant plant which then becomes food for us, before returning into the cycle of life – these insights seem almost mystical.
- Having home-grown food not only grants us certainty about its origin: we can also discover a new contact to nature – even in highly urbanized areas. The true joy this can give us is intensified by the aroma, taste and freshness of our vegetables and fruit. Produce lands directly on our plate without losing precious vitamins and minerals; no chemical experiments are involved; and it has not been carried thousands of kilometres to our door.
- Living among greenery can keep us calm and quiet. Home-grown plants teach us respect for life and for nature – we should not waste any of the treasures it blesses us with.



Dense greenery.
Photo by Monika Podsiadła

We have helped to set up many different gardens in Poland. Our permaculture activities and methods constitute an inspiration for many people. More and more people come to us for advice, knowledge, and plants. We can observe an increasing interest in Polish society in the cultivation of edible plants. Many loudly proclaim how home-grown food can save money. They are searching for cheap solutions without too much expense or work.

Monika Podsiadła and Andrzej Młynarczyk

Further reading:

Website of Monika and Andrzej on permaculture: www.permakultura.com.pl

LITHUANIAN NATURAL AGRICULTURE NETWORK

Agricultural methods which can help us grow higher-quality, healthy products without harming nature are becoming ever more popular. 'Natural agriculture' is at the top of the list according to these criteria. Inhabitants of Lithuanian ecovillages have established a national network to bring together enthusiasts of natural agriculture methods.

	WAY OF GROWING		
	Conventional	Organic	Natural
Mechanical ploughing	Yes	Yes	No
Plant growth regulators	Synthetic insecticides and herbicides	Natural insecticides and herbicides, crop rotation	Mulch

Key differences between conventional, organic and natural agriculture methods

What is natural agriculture?

Natural agriculture is different from conventional or organic farming because it is based on purely natural processes. In conventional and organic farming, the soil is continuously being emaciated and destroyed, whereas in nature the fertile layer of soil is constantly growing due to the yearly weed 'harvest': weeds die and fall onto the soil to be decomposed by various microorganisms and become natural fertilizer and food for the agricultural plants. The surplus is then conserved as humus. In contrast to conventional farming, natural agriculture employs no digging hoeing. This lets the soil develop its own natural structure, which ensures good air circulation, humidity and a beneficial environment for living microorganisms. Nature's processes can be imitated by covering the soil surface with mulch: old organic materials such as dry grass, leaves, sawdust, etc. Balancing humidity and weakening weeds are actually only the side-effects, not the main reason for mulching. Bacteria and fungi involved in the decomposition of the organic covering layer release carbon dioxide into the soil. CO₂ is heavier than air so it is absorbed by the soil, where it is broken down and becomes fertilizer for the plants. This method of agriculture ensures a better quality of products and a healthier environment. Moreover, the harvest in these areas should eventually become higher than in ploughed areas. Finally, there is no need to buy fertilizers, insecticides or pesticides, since the balance of microorganisms in the soil creates a barrier to plant diseases and pathogenic organisms.

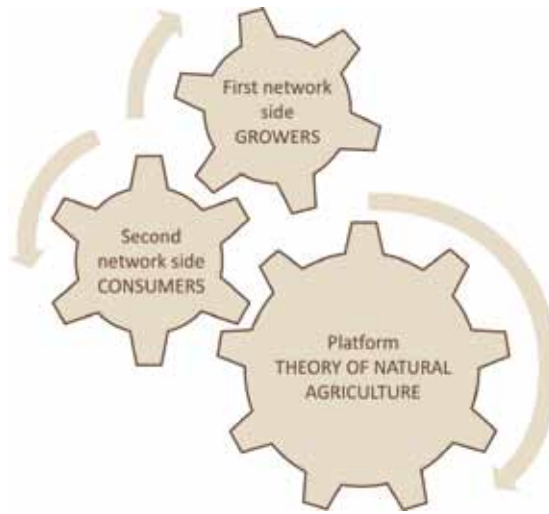


Natural agriculture garden plots cultivated by Laimis. Photo by Zivile Gedminaite-Raudone

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Need for collaboration between natural agriculture enthusiasts

In 2008 a new-generation network was created by members of the Lithuanian Ecovillage Movement. It is a decentralized two-side network connecting producers and consumers of vegetables and fruits grown by natural agricultural methods.



Two-sided network of natural agriculture

The first step was creation of the website www.gerazemdirbyste.lt as the platform of the network and the forum of natural agriculture enthusiasts in ecovillages. Then the number of network members grew rapidly due to the wider society's interest in natural and healthy vegetables and fruits. Now the majority of new network members do not identify themselves as members of the Ecovillage Movement. For some, natural agriculture is beneficial in financial means since growing your own food is cheaper than buying it. For others, the quality of the food is the main issue: it makes a significant difference if you buy products in shopping centres and markets or grow it by yourself using natural agriculture methods. Many of the latter group not only care for their health and eating habits but also want to live in a sustainable manner, by ceasing to violate nature's law and by supporting the Ecovillage Movement's ideas.



*Laimis expanding their garden by the pond using bulrush for mulch.
Photo by Zivile Gedminaite-Raudone*

Activities of the natural agriculture network

During informal virtual communication between people who strive to use the techniques of natural agriculture, it became clear there was a need for seminars where practitioners could exchange knowledge and share their experiences. Lectures and practical workshops began to be organized, as well as consultations, where the natural agriculture experts come to a certain village, explain the principles of natural agriculture, and help the villagers adapt them to the local particularities. These are proving very popular, so several inhabitants of the ecovillages can expect these seminars and consultations to become their main activity and livelihood in the future.

Collaboration between network members helps to gather best practice examples and experiences of natural agriculture, improve techniques, convert theoretical knowledge into practice, and adapt it to Lithuanian conditions. According to one of the initiators of this network, lecturer Saulius Jasionis: 'People who want to use new agricultural methods are scattered all over Lithuania but when they come together they have a possibility to share their experiences. When all the experience and best

practice examples are put together, analysed and systematized, results can be achieved much faster. Additionally, for some people it is more convenient to follow known and tested techniques than to conduct their own experiments. The network helps them with lectures and practical workshops.'

In the beginning, natural agriculture enthusiasts in Lithuania relied on books by N. I. Kurdiunov, which propagate gardening without working the soil. Gradually, experimenting, gathering knowledge and adapting his advice led to the new unique theory which supplemented N. I. Kurdiunov's teaching and recommended the techniques most suitable for the Lithuanian climate.

The network serves not only for collaboration and communication among users of natural agriculture methods and products but also as an informational tool for those who want to buy natural agriculture products. In 2011, the **commerce system of natural agriculture products** was established and growers have started to use it to sell their products. Information about the sellers is provided on the website.

Network members have prepared requirements for product certification, including obligatory growing conditions, strict agro-technique control and product expiry dates. According to these natural agriculture certification rules, products should be sold within a period of 24 hours from picking. Most of the products are sold on-site, where berries, vegetables and fruits can be picked only when the actual customer comes. This helps to ensure that the product is as fresh as possible; this is especially important if we take into account the fact that berries lose part of their vitamins and other bioactive elements after a few minutes and other fruits after only one hour. Some vegetables stay fresh for a longer period but on the whole it is not possible to buy genuinely fresh vegetables in shops since they have lost their freshness and part of their valuable goodness while being transported, stored, distributed, packed and sold to the end user.



*Vegetables ready for the customer.
Photo by Ieva Luciuonaite*

Members of this network are continuously searching for new attractive ways to spread knowledge on natural agriculture. As an example, they organized a **'tasting feast' for natural agriculture products**. The idea was suggested by one of the Lithuanian ecovillage representatives Laimis Žmuida. He wanted to select the most delicious potatoes for future planting and started to compare the taste of 13 different kinds of potatoes he had grown. So he boiled them and fried them, comparing the tastes and making notes: 'I loved the process of tasting, so I thought that it would be a good idea to share such experiences with others and to organize a public event.' The first Tasting Feast in the 'Gurmė' restaurant in Kaunas was organized with doubts, excitement and a little anxiety – what if nobody likes it? However, the feast went well; its participants were interested in natural agriculture and cared about what they eat. These people could therefore easily distinguish between different potatoes. Nine different kinds of potatoes were prepared for tasting, with participants being served nine pieces of boiled and nine pieces of fried potato. Potatoes were cooked and fried without any salt or oil to reveal the real taste of the potatoes. Even though the main aim of this event was to discover the natural taste of the product, the participants could later try these potatoes with spices or butter as well. The tasting feast lasted around three hours. It helped its participants to choose which potatoes are the best and worth growing in the future and also to gain valuable knowledge in this field. During breaks between tasting sessions, three specialists gave lectures. The initiator of natural agriculture



*Different kinds of potatoes for participants of
'Tasting feast'. Photo by Roberta Sabaliauskaite*

in Lithuania, Saulius Jasionis, talked about the origins and history of potatoes, and different ways of growing them. The host of the event, Laimis Žmuida, told stories about special kinds of potatoes and the owner and head chef of the restaurant, Nerijus Vasiliauskas, shared advice on how to taste food in order to sense its particular taste characteristics. Since the event went well, network members are going to create a tradition and organize more Tasting Feasts with potatoes and other produce, such as carrots, peas, salads, tomatoes and radishes.

The event for exchanging seeds and sprouts has become an annual tradition. The idea is for network members to exchange seeds and sprouts of good quality, examined and grown in their own gardens. Sometimes people offer to exchange imported seeds unknown to most Lithuanians. Seeds are the main currency in the market and only in rare cases are desirable seeds offered for 'real' money, since all participants want to exchange their seeds to gain some new plants for their garden.

Dalia Vidickienė

Further reading on natural agriculture methods:

- Курдюмов Н. И. (2012). *Умный сад и хитрый огород, Владис.*
- Fukuoka M. (2001). *The One-Straw Revolution, Other India Press (Eight impression).*
- Hart R. (1991, 1996 revised). *Forest Gardening: Rediscovering Nature and Community in a Post-Industrial Age, Green Books (UK).*
- Website of the network : <http://www.gerazemdirbyste.lt/>

FAMILY SCHOOL MOVEMENT IN THE PIEBALGA ECOCOMMUNITY, LATVIA

The enthusiasts of the Piebalga community came up with the idea of establishing their own family school in Jaunpiebalga based on European and American experience with similar schools and observations regarding the educational solutions for children offered by the traditional education model. This family school can be considered as an alternative to the current education system in Latvia. Founders of the school are of the opinion that the current education system in Latvia is inappropriate for the provision of general education to children; this does not mean that they disapprove of educating children.



Learning old craftwork. Photo by Daina Saktiņa

The idea of the Eco School/Family School is oriented towards the phenomenon of children acquiring their knowledge voluntarily without any pressure. Intellectual and mental activities are directed towards self-education in the community, which means that the environment promotes lifelong learning. A child's everyday life should provide the opportunities they need to receive the knowledge they can apply in their life. Children's initiatives, their involvement in the decision-making process, and their participation in public life are all encouraged and supported.

The establishment of the school is still at the planning stage: there are discussions about the school premises and how to present the idea to the public, and the school concept is also still being developed. The school establish process is based on:

1. The community members' sense of what and how it would be better for children and for themselves.

2. Consultations with families who already educate their children at home.
3. Generalizing the experience and effective examples from similar schools in other countries.

As of 2012, 14 adults and 17 children were involved in the development project of the Eco School.

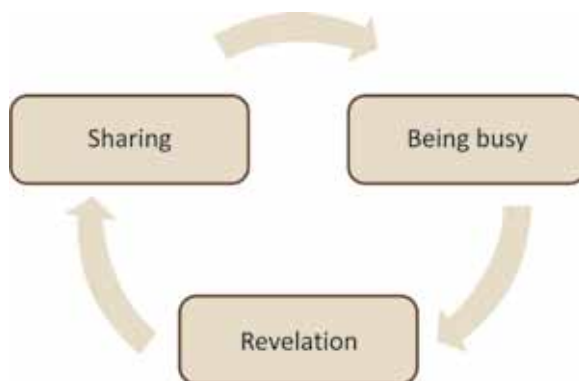
Curators of the Eco School Idea

The idea of the Piebalga Eco School is promoted by the association 'Piebalga Ecologically Sustainable Self-Sufficient Community'. Implementation of the Eco School idea was the reason for establishing the association, seeing that a legal entity such as this opens up the possibilities to operate and present their ideas to broader society.

The aim of the association is: To create a new kind of society of families and individuals who hold the same views, where every person lives according to the full extent of their abilities, engaging in relations based on wisdom and love, viewing another person as a change in their life given by God, becoming genuinely happy.

The Eco School (Family School) concept

The concept is embodying or renewing the divine principle of creation in the world, starting with yourself and your family, expanding the cultural environment of wise love. This process is put into action by implementing the basic principles of: being busy, revelation and sharing.



Basic principles of Family school

In order to make these principles work, the following methods are applied in the school:

- Direct perception methods (concentration, meditation, prayers).
- Specific problem solving to achieve concrete goals in life as a response to opportunities or challenges.
- Development of individual solutions for mental/intellectual activities or developing a plan to implement your life mission.
- Celebrations, seasonal rituals, revelation circles and joint work or communal actions, e.g. organizing and animating events.

Teaching observes the following principles:

- Ecological lifestyles and Latvian national traditions
- Human beings in their entirety (physical, vital, emotional, mental, spiritual)
- Lifelong education
- Human pedagogy (pedagogy of love).

The basic element of family school is the family workshop, which is run by a process manager, who cooperates as a partner with the workshops of other families (development of products, revelations of the world, product exchange), ensuring sustainable self-sufficiency. The process manager is a source of inspiration for the creation of a family workshop.

The 'study material' is acquired by focussing on nine workshops, which take the place of conventional study disciplines. A child makes a selection and knows what topic is of interest to him or her. The workshops are not planned to be taught at certain times – in other words, there is no study schedule. The cognitive process of learning covers all workshops during daily life. The model of nine disciplines consists of the following:

1. Revelation from God (yoga, meditation, esoteric insights, etc.)
2. Arts
3. Social relations
4. Nature relations
5. Ecological technologies
6. Ecological construction
7. Trades and crafts
8. Fruits (everything obtained as the fruit of looking after the nature)
9. Looking after the nature.

The organizers of the Eco School work on the body of issues to be studied and the methods. In general the aim is to cover all the study disciplines.

There is no classification according to age groups at the Eco School; the school offers lifelong education which means that a child, a youth or an adult all learn all the time. It is considered that the learning process of every human starts with the moment of their conception and ends with their death.



*Garden design on family farm.
Photo by Daina Saktiņa*

Teachers of the Eco School are parents who share their experience with their children. Learning takes place individually in every family (children, father, mother, grandfather and grandmother, etc.) and the Eco School is not a place where you bring your child for a certain period of time to study some specified subjects.

Training takes place in the form of discussions all day long, since it is considered that a child starts the learning process as soon as they wake up. The principle of the Latvian solar calendar is observed, which means the school starts active work right after Christmas; this links the processes of learning to processes in nature at the time of awakening. The end is planned for November on St. Martin's Day, when the acquired values (knowledge, skills, personal and mental development, etc.) of every participant of the school during the last year are evaluated. The week (savaites in Latvian) is observed (a week of 9 days – Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, the Seventh Day, Half Fiesta, Fiesta).

There are no teaching periods or examinations at school. It is the self-esteem that is important, pupils evaluate themselves and others.

Some final recommendations on development of education by the association 'Piebalga Ecologically Sustainable Self-Sufficient Community':

- At first, free the Child from the sense of private property; after that, give them some knowledge. This will be their education.
 - At first, insulate the Child from evil; after that, bring them closer to some knowledge. This will be their education.
 - At first, reduce envy in the Child; after that, draw their attention to the knowledge and then sharpen this attention. This will be their education.
 - At first, plough the identity of the Child; after that, sow the knowledge in them. This will be their education.
 - At first, bring up the Child; after that, teach them. This will be their education.
- For the time being, the developers of the Eco School are still planning how to attract more parents and publicise the idea of the school.

Alvis Zukovskis – Piebalga Latvian Society, a member of the association ‘Development JP’

Further reading:

• Website of the school: http://www.philos.lv/Gimenes_skola.html

The concepts of Family Schools:

• <http://www.familiesinschools.org/about-us/mission-history/>

• <http://www.syvfamilyschool.org/Welcome.html>

On humanitarian pedagogy:

• Амонашвили Ш.А. (2010). Как любить детей (опыт самоанализа), Донецк: Изд-во ‘Ноулидж’.

ADVICE FOR ECOVILLAGES STARTING THE STAGE OF COLLABORATIVE CREATIVITY

(based on the experience of Baltic Seas region ecovillages)

- Make use of the process of teaching as an opportunity to learn.
- Learn about new-generation networking models and use them in practice.
- Use all possibilities to collaborate with political, governmental, business and non-profit organizations to spread Ecovillage Movement ideas in the wider society.
- If your ecovillage or eco-project has valuable ideas, services or products to offer to a broader public, join a virtual international network – the Ecovillage Road. More information about the Ecovillage Road is available at: <http://www.ecovillageroad.eu>.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The team responsible for the 'Ecovillages for sustainable rural development' project within the Baltic Sea Region programme (2007-2013) would like to thank the European Union for the opportunity to implement this project and to share ideas and results with the wider society. The project aim was to foster the development of ecovillages as a more sustainable way of living in rural areas of the Baltic Sea Region. The project has been implemented by project partners from Lithuania (the Lead Partner), Finland, Latvia, Poland and Sweden; in addition the project has involved associate partners from Belorussia, Finland, Germany, Russia and Sweden. The duration of the project was from 2010 to 2013.

The main outputs of the project include three manuals based on case studies from ecovillages, located mainly in the Baltic Sea Region. This manual, entitled 'Living in harmony: inspiring stories from ecovillages', covers guidelines for ecovillage establishment and governance, and for social aspects of ecovillages. The other two manuals 'Inspiring stories from ecovillages: experiences with ecological technologies and practicess' and 'The enterprising ecovillager: achieving community development through innovative green entrepreneurship' focus on eco-settlement practices and environmentally friendly technologies, as well as ecological business cases practiced in or by ecovillage communities. The other key outputs of the project include: an online socio-economic sustainability assessment tool (see www.balticecovillages.eu/ecovillage-sustainability-self-evaluation-test); the 'Ecovillage road' for the Baltic Sea Region (see www.ecovillageroad.eu/); and recommendations for decision makers concerning the development of ecovillages.

A great number of people have contributed to the work captured in the pages of this manual. The project has involved a large and diverse pool of ecological expertise, including researchers, national ecovillage networks and ecovillage inhabitants. In our role as editors of this manual we want to express our gratitude to all the ecovillage inhabitants and experts who have kindly shared their experiences about eco-technologies and practices, either as authors of stories or in their role as interviewees and informants. We also want to thank the authors of the case studies from the country teams of the 'Ecovillages for sustainable rural development' project who have participated in the making of this manual.

The contents of the cases and stories in this manual are the sole responsibility of the authors and reflect their experiences and opinions. Hence, even though the information reported herein is believed by the editors of this manual to be reliable, we can offer no guarantee as to accuracy or completeness.

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We wish our readers inspirational moments with the stories! For further information about the project, please visit the website: www.balticecovillages.eu.

Vilnius, 02.09.2013

The project team



Lead partner

Lithuanian Institute of Agrarian Economics, www.laei.lt

Project partners



MTT Agrifood Research Finland, www.mtt.fi



Latvian State Institute of Agrarian Economics, www.lvaei.lv



Suderbyn cooperative society, www.suderbyn.se



The West Pomeranian Business School, www.zpsb.szczecin.pl

Associated project partners



www.zegg.de



www.ftacademy.ru



www.gen-europe.org



www.slu.se



www.ecohome-ngo.by



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www.cbss.org



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BEN (Baltic Ecovillage Network)

GEN-Finland
(www.rihmasto.fi/skey)

www.balticecovillages.eu www.ecovillageroad.eu



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Living in harmony: inspiring stories from ecovillages. Editor: Dalia Vidickienė. Vilnius:
BMK leidykla, 2013. – 124 p.
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Nowadays, an increasing number of people are starting to think about creating lifestyles that do not endanger their harmony with the Earth and other people. The ecovillage movement provides lots of answers to the questions that arise in this regard. This book presents the most interesting and effective practices to be found in the ecovillage movement in Europe, particularly in the Baltic Sea region. If you read the book from start to finish, you will feel as if you are participating in a virtual tour of European ecovillages. You will get to know the stages of the ecovillage life cycle: the formation of a vision and initial establishment of the village; settlement and the first years of living in a new community; developmental changes in the community and their management; and the ecovillage becoming a centre that actively spreads knowledge about the ecovillage movement. If you are looking for particular solutions, please feel free to treat the chapters of the book as Lego bricks: read the paragraphs covering specific topics you are interested in and select the solutions that best fit your needs and values.

