

Ecovillages as a Model of Practiced Sustainability



COMMUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE



ECOVILLAGES

Christiania, Denmark



The **Global Ecovillage Network (GEN)** has its origins in the intentional community movement: places where people could learn and live in experimental ways. Today, established communities play an increasingly important role in GEN as

The ecovillage movement is growing: worldwide, new communities and inhabitants of existing villages and suburbs are consciously choosing the path of sustainable development. In the face of both ecological and economical crises, poverty in the South and social isolation in the urban North, people are coming together to assume joint responsibility for their region, its resources and their social surroundings. In the process they find themselves actors in and creators of their own reality.

they seek to consciously re-adjust their surroundings: citizens who are together seeking ecological or social changes in their village or neighbourhood.

Ecovillages and communities are models of lived sustainability; they inspire their region and pass on their experience. In a very practical form, they show how an ecologically and socially sustainable way of living increases our quality of life.

Their examples make clear points: our ecological footprint can be significantly reduced; it is possible to revitalise regional economic and energy cycles; and this constitutes an important counterweight to globalisation. Ecovillages enrich regions with ecological business and employment opportunities, cultural activities, and enhanced attractiveness for families. They are therefore an active contributor to positive demographic change.



What is an ecovillage?

“Ecovillages are established village communities or intentional communities that are shaped through conscious interaction of all their community members. An ecovillage improves the quality of life for humans and at the same time contributes to protecting and regenerating the surrounding nature. The four dimensions of sustainability – ecology, economy, social issues and culture – are integrated into one holistic unit.”

Ecovillages and communities worldwide combine modern and traditional knowledge with sustainable innovative initiatives in agriculture, energy, resource management, water and refuse management, architecture and social participatory processes. They are making a decisive contribution within our society to the quest for local solutions to global problems.

GEN unites communities from all over the world and links them to members from the sustainability movement in politics, business and science.



Hameau de Buis, France

Highlights from a Global Network:

Did you know?

- The ecological footprint of Findhorn is half the average size of Great Britain.
- The Senegalese government has decided to support 14,000 traditional villages in their journey towards becoming ecovillages.
- Damanhur in Italy has created its own currency.
- The Ecovalley project in Hungary combines 100% self-sufficiency, engagement in social work for the whole region and a religious way of living.
- The first ecovillage in Holland, Ecodorp Bergen, is being built on a former military base.
- In Columbia, indigenous peoples, refugees and small farmers have come together to build peace-loving communities where no weapons, no violence and no alcohol are allowed, in order to counter the violence in the country.
- The ecovillage 'movement' in Latin America is indeed 'on the move': with buses, horses, bicycles and people on foot, the EcoCaravanas educate villagers around the country on ecologically sustainable ways of living.
- The ecovillage Auroville was tasked by the Indian government to compile a development plan for its entire region.
- The government of the Chiang Mai province in Northern Thailand has decided to work with Ecovillage Transition to transform their entire region into an eco-region.

The knowledge and contribution which ecovillages can make to a sustainable lifestyle can be divided into four key areas, or 'dimensions'. These are further explained on the following pages.



CULTURE AND WORLDVIEW



Findhorn

The Findhorn Foundation in Scotland was founded in 1962 and today has over 400 members. It is an ecovillage and an international centre for holistic learning. The founding principles of the Findhorn Foundation and community are:

- deep inner listening, and acting from that source of wisdom
- co-creation with the intelligence of nature
- service to the world.

From their self-description: "Meditation in all its forms – sitting in stillness, singing, dancing, contact with nature, working – all of this puts us in touch with our inner source of wisdom. Before every group activity we tune into each other and into the work at hand. This leads to a feeling for our joint motivation and purpose. In that way we can act in a way that benefits everyone – the individual as well as the group and life itself."

Deep inner listening inspired the establishment of the first Findhorn Gardens, planted by the founders Eileen Caddy,

Peter Caddy and Dorothy Maclean. When they used the messages they received, the garden blossomed. In the end they understood that they were in a partnership with nature: co-creation. It became clear to the founders that the answers for mankind to the challenges of our time had to include our interaction with all life: "By changing our consciousness and listening to our inner source of wisdom, we can bring about the positive and sustainable changes that the Earth needs."

More: www.findhorn.org



Ecovillages can be found with a wide variety of different cultures and world views, but there is always at least one value in common: respect for life. Responsibility and active involvement with the Earth and all its inhabitants are the basis for a culture of sustainability. This ethic transcends all cultures and religions.

The lived communal experience is a permanent school, teaching us to relate to all life. In this way, we learn responsibility, friendship and tolerance, even towards those beings with different appearances, feelings, thoughts or beliefs. In order to express and fill life with our connection to Earth and its creatures, different ecovillages take different paths, create a variety of rituals, and reactivate old traditions. Even communal living itself can be treated as a path to greater awareness, incorporating daily chores, mutual help and service in harmony with Creation.

The Community in Schloss Tonndorf – Culture in the Midst of Life

The intentional community in Schloss Tonndorf brings together families and individuals who have been living together since 2005 on this property, situated to the south of Weimar. All of the members share a desire for a self-determined, meaningful life, with mutual support in day-to-day activities and a stimulating, social atmosphere.

These “self-selected kin” are testing liveable alternatives together: a freely chosen and non-dogmatic group of

the elderly in the day-to-day activities, or creative exchange and mutual support in the realisation of professional visions.

Thomas Meier, co-founder and architect explains: “We offer regular tours through our site, between building containers and bobby cars. Participants are school children staying at the Tonndorf school hostel or hiking groups from the vicinity. We also organise and host public festivals and

concerts, readings, exhibitions and markets, attracting some 7000 visitors each year. Every month there are Info Café afternoons for visitors wanting to find out more. And recently Weimar’s and Erfurt’s tango enthusiasts have been regularly sighted floating through the castle foyer.”

More: www.schloss-tonndorf.de



people that can be certain of mutual solidarity. For their residence, they chose an abandoned listed building with the ‘cultural landscape’ surrounding it – a feature which often presents rural district leaders with difficulties.

Communal life in Schloss Tonndorf offers a chance to shape different aspects of life together in an independent way: interaction with children, support for single parents, inclusion of





THE ECOLOGICAL DIMENSION



Ecovillage Sieben Linden – Saving Energy with Sustainable Construction

With some 100 adults and 40 children, Sieben Linden in the Altmark region of Germany sees itself as a model socio-ecological project.

Some of its principles:

- Construction criteria with strict ecological standards – low-energy and passive houses
- Heating exclusively by means of wood and solar energy
- Photovoltaics supply a large part of the power consumption
- Ecological gardening – c. 70% self-sufficiency for fruit and vegetables
- Own constructed wetland sewage treatment

Most of the low-energy houses in Sieben Linden are straw-bale constructions. Each of the new buildings is a research project for this new way of building, which is also the topic of specialist seminars held by the ecovillage. The external rendering on the buildings is mostly clay sourced on-site.

The energy requirement for heating is one-third lower than the German average thanks to good insulation, passive solar, and the use of solar thermal collectors and geothermal energy. If the warmth from the sun is not enough, wood-fired heating is used, fuelled mainly from the ecovillage's own woodlands.

Through its cooperation with the ecovillage, the village Poppau, where Sieben Linden is located, has once again become an attractive, active and growing community with lots to offer families and young people.

More: www.siebenlinden.de



Ecovillages show that water, food, building materials and energy can be obtained in sufficient quantities in healthy regional lifecycles, all without having to sacrifice our quality of life.

Energy autonomy: The ecological footprint of any community can be reduced substantially with ecological building techniques and thermal insulation, passive and active use of solar energy, as well as the replacement of energy intensive forms of transport.

Water: Water consumption and sewerage quantities can be reduced significantly by means of rainwater harvesting and storage, constructed wetlands for wastewater treatment, separation of drinking water and greywater, and compost toilets.

Food: Most ecovillages produce their own food and use their own fruit, vegetable, grain and animal products. The most important principles in this area are: companion planting, diversity, no artificial fertilisers or pesticides, use of own seeds, and freshness.

Construction: An increase in the quality of life and environmental conservation is made possible with the use of regionally sourced, natural building and insulation materials such as clay, paper, straw and waste.

Waste: Nature's example is to be followed here as ecovillages reduce their waste by means of closed cycles, composting and reuse.



Picture credit: GEN Archive



Dyssekilde, Denmark



Kibbutz Lotan, Israel – Commodity Cycles in the Arabah Desert

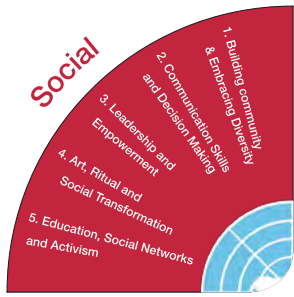
The progressive Kibbutz Lotan was established in 1983 by young Israelis and Americans. Some 150 people make a living here from agriculture, ecotourism and workshops. The community's own Centre for Creative Ecology is a research and education facility for permaculture, alternative building and sustainable technology.

"Reduce-reuse-rethink" is the slogan for the commodity cycle in the Kibbutz Lotan. With a lot of engagement and specialist knowledge on composting and recycling, the community has over the last few years reduced its waste by 70%. A large part of the recycled waste is used in alternative building projects throughout the Kibbutz. By means of workshops and seminars, the community shares their ecological knowledge with thousands of people.

For its high-yield garden in the desert, the community does not use any artificial fertilisers or chemical pesticides: instead, they ensure effective composting of all kitchen waste, straw and cow dung. A water-saving alternative to water closets is compost toilets, which the community has developed to fulfil high hygiene and technical standards.

More: <http://www.kibbutzlotan.com>





THE SOCIAL DIMENSION: COMMUNITY



Healing Biotope 1 Tamera - Portugal

The peace-research community Tamera, with 150 residents, was established in 1995: as a model for a culture that relies on trust and contact in all aspects. The site was in the process of desertification, which could be halted by means of a permaculture-based water landscape and thus converted into a food-rich biotope. A stone circle at Tamera is an artistic expression of cooperation with the Earth. Tamera's main research area is the dissolution of the inner structures of violence and war – especially in love.

One of Tamera's guiding principles: "There will never be peace on Earth as long as there is war in love. We are searching for a togetherness where the affection of one person for another person never results in a third person feeling anger or jealousy or the fear of loss."

Tamera (amongst other communities) develops and uses the "Forum":

a communication form where all issues, including the most intimate affairs, are talked about in the circle and heard by all in the group. This leads to a climate of transparency and trust, which supports the community development.

Tamera's community has three ethical ground rules: truth amongst each other, responsible participation, and mutual help.

More: www.tamera.org



Another vital factor in sustainability is the art of living together: it is no use having the best farming or energy systems, organic houses, and closed water and recycling cycles if community members are constantly arguing.

Human beings are communal creatures. Complimenting each other, sharing and living together, even quarrelling and conflict: these all belong to our species. Our ancestors overcame challenges together as clans, tribes and extended families; the modern, isolated lifestyle in single households does not suit most people.

Nevertheless, many communities fail due to jealousy, competition and power struggles. Some communities that overcame their crises and gained valuable experiences in doing so are now offering their knowledge to new initiatives, including advice on methods of communicating in large groups, conflict resolution and participatory decision-making.

Experience and Advice from Communities:

- Diversity is the essence of every community. Unity needs to exist in its underlying vision.
- Art and everyday life: A community should clearly organise its daily routine, leaving enough time for art and culture, vision-building and games, spirituality and meditation.
- Transparency: Sweeping things under the carpet which everybody can feel but nobody talks about – this can be deadly for the sense of community. Forms of communication are needed in which all members are heard and constructive criticism and feedback can be offered. Humour is helpful here.
- Leadership: Decisions that affect everyone need to be made and supported by everyone. The decision-making structure of communities cannot be a hierarchical pyramid but has to be a circle. Nonetheless, grassroots democracy needs to be intelligently organised. Even communities need people with leadership qualities, who dare to tackle and talk about the most difficult things.
- Children: An African proverb says: It takes a whole village to raise a child. Looking after children together represents an increase in the quality of life for children, parents and childless community members alike.
- Gender roles: Gender dynamics exist everywhere where men and women interact. If we are aware of this together, we can easily overcome gender roles and discrimination against women. Women's and men's circles are helpful here.



Schloss Tempelhof

The “Community and Future-Workshop Schloss Tempelhof” has flourished since September 2010 on a 32-hectare site in Hohenlohe, a district in Baden-Württemberg, Germany. There are 80 adults and almost 30 children living there. They operate a forest crèche, a free school, and a seminar business with a guesthouse. There are also carpentry, construction, building, caravan manufacturing, garden and agricultural operations.

The community's fundamental values are solidarity, diversity, ‘all leaders’, a culture of relationship and communications, responsibility for oneself and the whole, an economy that promotes potential, and sustainability in social, ecological and economic behaviour. Decisions are made by consensus. Structuring meetings are public.

From the founding paper “Caring for each other”: “We give each other a basic promise to help each other when someone is sick, can't work anymore or is in existential difficulties. In a newly understood ‘contract of the generations’, those that are capable of being economically active should support those that are incapable of being economically active (children, elderly and sick).”

More: www.schloss-tempelhof.de



THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION

The Federation of Damanhur

Damanhur is a spiritual community in the North of Italy. It was founded over thirty years ago, stretches over numerous villages and has approximately 1000 citizens. It is well known for its underground temple.

The economic system in Damanhur combines entrepreneurial thinking with communal solidarity. The wealth of Damanhur expresses itself in its houses and properties, schools and services, art and gardens, forests and meeting places, as well as in the feeling of belonging together, safety and awareness of each individual.

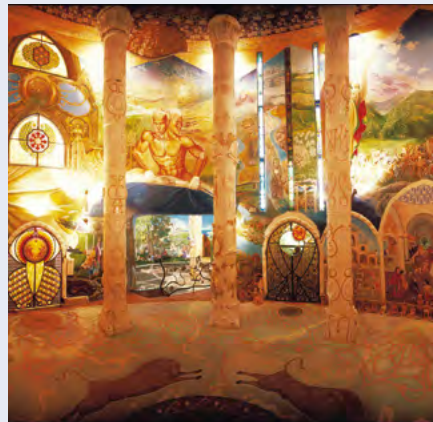
The citizens of Damanhur are responsible for their own income. They run their own enterprises, are freelancers, or work in Italian companies. People that work full-time in the communal social services are supported by their fellow members. The same holds true for people without income, the old, the sick and those studying.

Every citizen supports the common projects according to his desire and ability. These would include the purchase of new property, educational programs and artistic works. All citizens dedicate a portion of their time to the community.

The *credito* is a regional, complimentary monetary system. It started 30 years ago and supports economic

advancement and development, including start-up enterprises. In Damanhur you can find money exchange machines which change *credito* to Euros or vice versa.

More: www.damanhur.it



Fair, just, in solidarity, transparent and interest-free – these are the hallmarks of a sustainable way of conducting business. Regional and local economic cycles need a corresponding finance system that retains value in the region.

Residents of ecovillages are conscious consumers, producers and traders – mainly of local goods. Within their community and in the region, they are establishing models for a new economy. Here small-scale economic experiments can take place, on the basis of trust and pioneering spirit: from communal savings cooperatives to regional currencies, from barter trade circles to community banks and gift economies.

There are many questions when it comes to the economy. And they

have different answers, from different ecovillages. In which way do you divide the entire property? How do you reflect that legally? Do you have private and/or communal businesses? Is work for the community paid? Do individuals have separate incomes or does everything get paid into a communal kitty? What funds are organised communally? How does the community care for its members if they get sick, old or weak? Or if they wish to leave the community?

Regardless of the specific form a community chooses: trust, communication and feedback within the group are essential for the system to work.



The gASTWERKe Intentional Community in Escherode

The gASTWERKe is a living and working community with about 40 people near Kassel. Decisions that affect everyone are made by consensus. “We consume with care, take part in social and political exchanges, respect and

live different worldviews, which all have respect for each other’s values as a foundation.”

The community buys its buildings and properties together and transfers ownership to a non-profit organisation. The members live together in a common economy. “We contribute into one account, from which we then draw the money we need for satisfying individual needs. Some of us do not have our own income because we work on-site for the community. Others have well-paid jobs and others earn their money in the various companies within the community. The surpluses made by these companies and the wages of the workers flow 100% into the common economy account, which we all have access to.”

In this way, the community is an example of social justice, redistribution and practical solidarity. The communal organic gardening company, Wurzelwerk, operates together with the garden of the neighbouring Niederkaufungen Commune – according to the principle of community-supported agriculture: a group of people commit themselves to pay a fixed amount in advance to the garden every month. The company then operates with that amount and distributes the harvest amongst the group. In that way responsibility, risk, cost and yield are shared by all.

More: www.gastwerke.de

ECOVILLAGES INTERNATIONAL

A STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT WORLDWIDE



GEN International is a global network. It connects projects of the north with the south in a joint movement of learning from one another regarding sustainable development: permaculture, solar energy, natural water management and building with regional raw materials, as well as social knowledge around the issue of decision-making, the strengthening of women, and conflict resolution. In the global north these are all issues which can improve the quality of life; in crisis areas they may even be issues which decide whether a region survives.



Africa: Antidote to urbanisation

Every year, almost 14 million African men and women move from the countryside to the city; 70% of these end up in slums. Ecovillage communities can offer people new opportunities: employment and education in ecological technologies, food independence with organic farming methods, cooperatives and social entrepreneurship, Fairtrade deals with the global north, joint action against poverty, violence, rape and destruction of nature, as well as empowerment of women. Members can benefit from the experience of ecovillages in the global north and return

the favour with their traditional knowledge. In this way, development aid takes on a new, mutual meaning. More about GEN Africa: www.gen-africa.org

Asia: Ecovillages as civil protection

A few ecovillages and transition villages serve as centres of excellence for the prevention of natural and environmental disasters. Faced with typhoons, floods and nuclear reactor disasters, knowledge of earthquake-proof construction methods using local building materials, reforestation with indigenous trees, natural water management and social competence can often decide whether a

region would survive a natural disaster or not. Ecovillages in the Philippines, Japan, India, Thailand are practicing and teaching these techniques and also offer direct relief in their particular regions.

Latin America: Ecovillages on the move

By bus, on horseback, on foot or in mobile homes, the EcoCaravanas travel all over the South American sub-continent. In remote villages they invite people to festivities with dance and music. During these festivals they also teach ecological agriculture methods, show how to construct solar cookers and compost toilets, exchange seeds with locals, promote the planting of trees, and hold video workshops with

children and youth. They connect knowledge, stories and messages from countryside dwellers and pass them on, contributing in a very welcome way to the active spreading of the message that we need to live sustainably.

The GEN network in Latin America is called CASA (Consejo de Asentamientos Sustentables de las Américas: <http://casa.ecovillage.org/>

GEN International

GEN International connects the ecovillages of the north with the south and maintains contact to other social movements, developmental organisations, state institutions and non-governmental organisations. It performs public relations work to promote ecovillages

and develop joint strategies, including fundraising work. Partnerships with a range of social organisations and participation in international conferences and training courses within the Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) framework all serve knowledge transfer from and for ecovillages.

In this way, a social movement is forming. Although it is still rather inconspicuous, it is nonetheless very effective, with real potential for change for the many peoples living in our one world. More about GEN International:

www.ecovillage.org

Senegal: A Government as Midwife for 14,000 Ecovillages

The government of Senegal has recognized the benefits which ecovillages offer the country: in August 2008, the Environment Ministry issued an aim of supporting every second village to transition into an ecovillage. That would be 14,000 villages. In the same breath, the Environment Ministry also changed its name to the Ministry for Ecovillages and Sustainable Development. GEN International has been accompanying this development since 2002. Today, there are already 100 villages in Senegal who are members of GENSEN (GEN Senegal):

More: www.gensenegal.org





ECOVILLAGES AND SOCIAL CHANGE



“At present, we are stealing the future, selling it in the present, and calling it GDP.” Paul Hawken, environmentalist, entrepreneur, bestselling author, USA.



“Ecovillages may be compared to yoghurt cultures: a small, dense, rich concentration of activities whose aim it is to change the environment that they are in.” Jonathan Dawson, former GEN President



“One of the strongest resources available to humanity is the good intentions and creativity of citizens wanting to be part of the solution instead of the global problem. GEN helps to free up this potential by showcasing best practice examples.” Kosha Joubert, President of GEN International.

“As ‘Oberndorfer’ we do it together!” Oberndorf on the Oste – a Small Village Trying Out Collaborative Democracy

In October 2010, the village Oberndorf started a village development process, which was supported by the Oldenburg based institute for Participatory Design.

A “village workshop” was organised for everyone who wanted to actively take part. In the beginning there was an inventory: What do we have? What do we want? A village in Lower Saxony with a population of about 1500, school, kindergarten, doctor, village shop, bank branch, many clubs – but meagre funds in its account.

Oberndorf founded a co-operative with the aim of earning money through tangible projects and generating a

surplus for redeveloping the village. A photovoltaic plant on three community-owned roofs has been bringing in profits ever since.

People interested in village development meet on a specific date every month in a forum: a place to exchange ideas openly. At present there are many Oberndorfer projects: the planting of an orchard meadow with old fruit types, the revival of the village pub, a biogas heating plant, and more.

More: www.die-oberndorfer.de



A quiet revolution is presently occurring on our planet. Outside the major conurbations – in villages and town neighbourhoods – citizens are joining together to assume responsibility for their surroundings, for the nature around them, for social themes, and for their ecological and economic behaviour. In living rooms, in bars and around kitchen tables, ideas are discussed and initiatives are born which are practical and directly reduce CO₂ emissions, revive communities and create job perspectives.

With a great deal of private initiative and from the grassroots up, agricultural operations and neighbourhood centres, seed markets, urban permaculture, barter schemes and local currencies, collective photovoltaic facilities, free schools, self-governing village banks with microcredits, and many other projects are arising. Many of these initiatives are inspired by examples from ecovillages and the long-term experience of intentional communities – and many are even receiving tangible support and know-how from them.

This number of the groups is growing. The more they network and recognise each other as part of a wide-reaching and very diverse movement, the more power for massive change they develop.

Permaculture networks, the Transition Town movement, and the Global Ecovillage Networks are three important carriers of this global movement. In many areas they help to coordinate knowledge transfer, public relations work, and communication with policy makers.



Los Angeles Ecovillage



Güneşköy: Bridge to Sustainable Living in Turkey

The ecovillage Güneşköy sees itself as a bridging project to sustainable lifestyles in both rural and urban areas. It was established in 2001 on a 74-hectare property in the vicinity of the traditional village of Hisarköy, 65 km east of Ankara. The property was treeless and severely eroded. Since then, the community has started its organic agriculture, planting vegetables and other products and then selling them in Ankara. The neighbours from Hisarköy have been helping them right from the beginning, and five families have also now switched to organic agriculture.

Güneşköy supported the establishment of two organic markets in Ankara and inspire numerous other activities relating to healthy nutrition, urban agriculture and ecotourism. Together, Güneşköy and the community Çankaya in Ankara organised a seed-exchange festival in the centre of town, as well as workshops on permaculture. Güneşköy and GEN have already held three Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) workshops for the exchange of students and young people from Turkey and other countries.

Training:

The global education program of GEN – The Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) is now offered in 35 countries on all continents and offers international participants experienced knowledge on sustainable development. More on EDE courses: www.gaiaeducation.net

Publicity:

The GEN Europe conference lasts a number of days and is held in a different ecovillage each year. It is open to all its members as well as interested public.

More: www.gen-europe.org, www.gelebte-nachhaltigkeit.de, www.facebook.com/gelebtenachhaltigkeit

The GEN International Newsletter with news of hope from all continents is published four times a year and is sent out to 12000 subscribers.

More: <http://gen.ecovillage.org/>

Online Tools:

GEN makes the experience of ecovillages accessible worldwide with online tools.

Ecovillages as well as relevant events around the world are listed and described in a comprehensive database with easy-to-use, interactive maps. This platform integrates forums and other modern social media tools, offering users the possibility to inform, exchange and make connections worldwide.

<http://sites.ecovillage.org/> or <http://db.ecovillage.org/>

In the Solution Library, anyone can publish tried and tested solutions to the issues of sustainable living.

More: <http://solution.ecovillage.org>

NextGEN:

NextGEN is the 'next generation' of the Global Ecovillage Network: a very lively and active initiative from the under-30s in the movement. NextGEN unites youth and young adults from all continents who are searching for new perspectives and who wish to be the solution they want to see for the world. More: <http://nextgen.ecovillage.org>



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Place of the Children in Tamera