

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES AND STUDENTS

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

Education for Sustainability

Ecovillages and Academia

Olympic-Sized Community

Teaching Hands-On Workshops

Hard Lessons from the Trenches

Reflections from an Eco-Warrior

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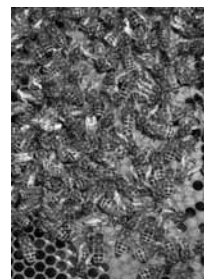
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No Avatars Desired

Surely there must be others, besides myself, who are embarrassed to be seen carrying the last two issues of COMMUNITIES, with back cover exposed. Is it my imagination, or are the postal clerks looking into my eyes for signs that I've fallen prey to some cult-like figure? I am aware that my reaction to individuals claiming to be avatars is extreme and uncompromising: I assume all of them to be nuts and at least potentially dangerous to others. Given that, you must understand my discomfort...and disappointment. I am wondering if, by running these full page ads for Gabriel of Urantia, you are in compliance with your published Advertising Policy?

Gary Heathcote
Pendleton, Indiana

Dear Gary,

The Editorial Review Board and magazine staff have examined the ads for the "Be Aware" 2010 Concert Tour, Avalon Gardens Ecofest, and Teachings on Healing, and we do not believe they violate our Advertising Policy. As we note, we accept advertising because "our mission is to provide readers with helpful and inspiring information—and because advertising revenues help pay the bills." What helps and inspires one person will not help or inspire all, but we

are reasonably confident that knowing about these by-donation events (even if simply for their concept) may benefit some of our readers. We further state, "we are not in a position to verify the accuracy or fairness of statements made in advertisements" and "publication of ads should not be considered an FIC endorsement." Readers need to use their own judgment about advertised products, services, groups, and events. While we will not knowingly run harmful advertising, the ultimate responsibility lies with each individual to choose what to move toward or stay away from. Just as you have made your choice to steer clear of the "Be Aware" concerts and Gabriel of Urantia, we believe it is fair to offer other readers that choice as well (rather than denying it by refusing the advertising). All of this said, we nonetheless appreciate hearing feedback on these and similar issues, and welcome comments on anything that elicits readers' reactions.

*Thank you for writing,
Chris Roth
for COMMUNITIES*

2010 Cohousing Conference

How do we live more sustainably? How are we going to live together? How can those of us who live in community impact the larger society in our ideals?

The 2010 National Cohousing Conference—June 16-20 at the University of Colorado's Boulder campus—will help community enthusiasts and aligned professionals explore these questions with depth. The conference theme of "Sustainability through Community" underscores the connections between the intentional community movement and broader efforts to save the planet.

We've learned a great deal about neighborhood-level community building, as well as how best to design, finance, and build places that support community and sustainability. We've learned about using the energy and interests of a group with a common vision of sustainability. It's time to broaden the base, to reach out to professionals, academics, pro-activists, and all



others with an interest in the role community can and must play in the sustainability of human culture and our planet.

Focusing on this dynamic theme, this year's conference goes deep with the addition of Coho U (short for Cohousing University)—two-day, pre-conference, intensive workshops that will help participants focus on particular, critical aspects of community.

After the two-day Coho U workshops, we'll move into three full days of the actual conference: full of featured speakers, breakout sessions, a Saturday night fundraising banquet, the FIC's community bookstore, and half- and full-day tours of area communities. A highlight will be the keynote address by noted author and climate activist Bill McKibben. His address—"Our Neighborhoods and the Planet: Scaling Our Hopes"—is expected to energize the conference.

As we've seen happen at previous conferences, the gathering is sure to be a time of making new connections and renewing old friendships. To learn more about these and other conference opportunities, visit the conference website at www.cohousing.org/conference.

As humans living on an endangered planet, we have much to gain through community. A healthier, more secure, and more socially satisfying life is the obvious gain. Less apparent perhaps is the empowerment gained by participation in a self-managed neighborhood community with a vision of more responsible, sustainable living. The National Cohousing Conference will be the ideal place and time to connect these two movements. I look forward to seeing you in Boulder!

Jim Leach

Chair, 2010 National
Cohousing Conference
Boulder, Colorado

The Sustainable Human

In working toward sustainability, we as a society have been mostly focused on what's "out there," and not so much on the contributing factors within ourselves and the consumptive societies we have created. We have focused on climate change, energy, the availability of arable land and sufficient usable water, the toxic legacy we are creating with our artifacts, and the like. Yet the health of the planet is linked to the health and the development of the individual. As ecopsychologist Theodore Roszak states, "The needs of the planet are the needs of the person, and the needs of the person are the needs of the planet." Gestalt therapist Fritz Perls and other humanistic psychologists stress self-awareness and self-responsibility in the service of the maturation of the person; as Perls writes, "Every time we stand on our own two feet and don't draw from the environment, we develop our own resources."

The two main characteristics of the sustainable human are the ability to "be with" oneself and the aforementioned "self-awareness." The ability to "be with" oneself mitigates drawing from the environment, which is done, unconsciously for the most part, when we use our automobile to drive somewhere that is in walking distance; when, in the car, we immediately turn on the radio; when, at home and at loose ends, to avoid the emptiness we might be experiencing, we draw from the environment when we call a friend or turn on the TV or grab something to read (this is not to say that these actions cannot also arise out of genuine interest or excitement). We draw from the environment when we feed our emptiness with food (rather than when actually being hungry), and, in subtler ways, when we greet someone with "How are you?" (a request to be fed, perhaps?).

Underlying these behaviors is mainly the need for stimulation, for contact with others, to fill one's emptiness.

I suggest we each ask ourselves: Can I simply be with myself when there is nothing happening of need or interest to me for any particular moment of time? Can I sit with myself and be comfortable in my own skin without having to be other than myself or be drawn out of or away from my Self? Can I turn the familiar mandate "Don't just sit there; do something," to "Don't do something, just sit there!"—or, as spiritual leader Eckhart Tolle encourages us, "to enjoy the fullness of the present moment"?

Necessary for being with oneself is the self-awareness stressed by Perls: knowing what is going on within oneself, at any moment of time. This is the basis for the self-understanding essential for the self-regulation involved in controlling the extent to which we draw from the environment. Being aware at all times of what we are thinking, feeling, seeing/hearing, wanting, and doing allows us to know when we are drawing from the environment rather than "standing on our own two feet." We can then distinguish wanting to eat from emptiness rather than from hunger, and can sit at a red light and enjoy the fullness of those moments.

The problems making our world unsustainable lie both in our individual over-consumption and in the environmental destruction caused by our industrial economy as a whole, both of which emanate ultimately from what is within us humans. As Gandhi advised, we must "be the change we want to see in the world."

Monty Berman

EcoVillage at Ithaca
Ithaca, New York
mberman116@hotmail.com

We welcome reader feedback on the articles in each issue, as well as letters of more general interest. Please send your comments to editor@ic.org or COMMUNITIES, RR 1 Box 156, Rutledge MO 63563. Your letters may be edited or shortened. Thank you!

COMMUNITIES Editorial Policy

COMMUNITIES is a forum for exploring intentional communities, cooperative living, and ways our readers can bring a sense of community into their daily lives. Contributors include people who live or have lived in community, and anyone with insights relevant to cooperative living or shared projects.

Through fact, fiction, and opinion, we offer fresh ideas about how to live and work cooperatively, how to solve problems peacefully, and how individual lives can be enhanced by living purposefully with others. We seek contributions that profile community living and why people choose it, descriptions of what's difficult and what works well, news about existing and forming communities, or articles that illuminate community experiences—past and present—offering insights into mainstream cultural issues. We also seek articles about cooperative ventures of all sorts—in workplaces, in neighborhoods, among people sharing common interests—and about “creating community where you are.”

We do not intend to promote one kind of group over another, and take no official position on a community's economic structure, political agenda, spiritual beliefs, environmental issues, or decision-making style. As long as submitted articles are related thematically to community living and/or cooperation, we will consider them for publication. However, we do not publish articles that 1) advocate violent practices, or 2) advocate that a community interfere with its members' right to leave.

Our aim is to be as balanced in our reporting as possible, and whenever we print an article critical of a particular community, we invite that community to respond with its own perspective.

Submissions Policy

To submit an article, please first request Writers' Guidelines: COMMUNITIES, RR 1 Box 156, Rutledge MO 63563-9720; 660-883-5545; editor@ic.org. To obtain Photo Guidelines, email: layout@ic.org. Both are also available online at communities.ic.org.

Advertising Policy

We accept paid advertising in COMMUNITIES because our mission is to provide our readers with helpful and inspiring information—and because advertising revenues help pay the bills.

We handpick our advertisers, selecting only those whose products and services we believe will be helpful to our readers. That said, we are not in a position to verify the accuracy or fairness of statements made in advertisements—unless they are FIC ads—nor in REACH listings, and publication of ads should not be considered an FIC endorsement.

If you experience a problem with an advertisement or listing, we invite you to call this to our attention and we'll look into it. Our first priority in such instances is to make a good-faith attempt to resolve any differences by working directly with the advertiser/listener and complainant. If, as someone raising a concern, you are not willing to attempt this, we cannot promise that any action will be taken.

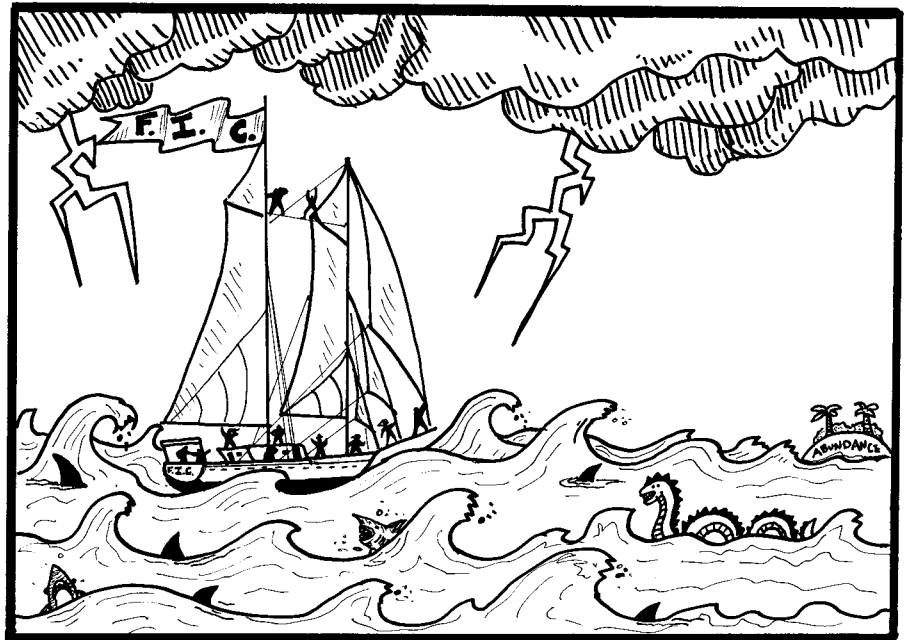
Tanya Carwyn, Advertising Manager, 7 Hut Terrace, Black Mountain NC 28711; 828-669-0997; ads@ic.org.

What is an “Intentional Community”?

An “intentional community” is a group of people who have chosen to live or work together in pursuit of a common ideal or vision. Most, though not all, share land or housing. Intentional communities come in all shapes and sizes, and display amazing diversity in their common values, which may be social, economic, spiritual, political, and/or ecological. Some are rural; some urban. Some live all in a single residence; some in separate households. Some raise children; some don't. Some are secular, some are spiritually based; others are both. For all their variety, though, the communities featured in our magazine hold a common commitment to living cooperatively, to solving problems nonviolently, and to sharing their experiences with others.



PUBLISHER'S NOTE BY LAIRD SCHAUB



Ethnan Hughes

Afloat in Choppy Seas Though Our Support is Hot, Our Profits are Not

For the 10th year in a row, this periodical's finances finished below the waterline. So far, every year we've been able to pump enough support into the magazine from the success we've enjoyed in other FIC operations, that we're collectively staying afloat.

As the publisher, FIC has long managed its project areas—*Communities Directory*, *COMMUNITIES* magazine, *Events*, *Community Bookshelf*, and our family of websites—as independent vessels, where we expected each to make economic way under its own sails. It has become increasingly clear, however, that this approach is not working. Just like communities themselves, we are in this together, and at the end of the day, the only thing that truly matters is not what each individual project contributed, but that our organization has a black number at the bottom of the page.

In this world of sound bites and electronic media, it gets harder every year to turn a profit from publications, and our magazine is not the only area leaking money. These days our Directories barely cover print costs—even as demand for the same information on our searchable online Directory has surged to 1500 unique visitors daily, where each one asks for an average of more than seven pages. And revenues from our web services fall way short of covering the labor costs for maintaining them. Even though demand for our information has never been stronger, there's increasing resistance to paying for it. It's a dilemma.

Tacking into the Wind

Over the last decade, the Fellowship has gradually embraced a business model where we've continued our dedication to staying the course with our flagship publications—our Directory, our websites, and this magazine—by depending on subscribers and FIC members to contribute support above and beyond the fees for steerage passage

services. Their steadfast willingness to bump up their support has allowed us to make headway against the prevailing wind of our financial statements.

When we pore over last year's numbers to discern the underlying patterns, there are some good portents. Most notably, overall expenses shrunk three percent, and income rose four percent. Clearly that's a good trend, but the wind is not yet behind us. Despite the incremental gains, there remains a substantial leak in the boat—we still lost more than \$10,000 last year, despite supporters having floated us more than \$10,000 in earmarked donations.

For a detailed look at the charts, see the table at the end of this report. Our biggest concerns are the whirlpools that have sucked down distributor income (off 23 percent from the year before) and advertising revenue (down a whopping 40 percent). To some extent, we can blame these on the cyclonic weather that has plagued the whole economy. Nonetheless, our top navigational priority in 2010 is to move our advertising and newsstand sales out of the doldrums.

Buy a Buoy

For all you landlubbers out there wondering how you can help from a distance, there's plenty you can do to shore up our finances! Here are a handful of ways to immediately buoy our bottom line:

- **Buy gift subscriptions**

We know there are many times more people who would love to receive the inspirational information we pack into every issue of COMMUNITIES than are currently getting it. Why wait passively for inspiration to strike? Consider offering gift subscriptions to friends and loved ones, gently nudging them along on the path to Eureka!

- **Buy a lifetime subscription**

For a one-time cost of \$500 you can receive every issue COMMUNITIES—for as long we're both around.

- **Advertise in the magazine**

There's no better time than now to inform folks interested in cooperative living about the product or service you or your group has to offer the world. Help

For all you landlubbers wondering how you can help, there's plenty you can do to shore up our finances.

yourself and us at the same time.

- **Sponsor an issue**

The fall issue will be on Power and Empowerment; the winter issue on Elders. If either of these topics floats your boat, write us a check—it will help keep *our* boat afloat. We'll gladly salute your generosity in that issue (unless you tell us you'd rather keep your name below the horizon), hopefully inspiring others to follow your example. Long-time supporter Ron Miller did this for the issue you're now reading. The theme of Education for Sustainability is dear to his heart and his \$2500 earmarked donation had a profoundly cork-like effect on our quarterly report.

- **Pre-purchase copies of upcoming issues**

If you're excited about the theme of an issue coming up, but maybe aren't in a position to be a sponsor, you can still help by purchasing 10 or more copies in advance. If you make your purchase at least a month ahead of the publication date we can factor that into our print run. We'll sell them to you at a discount and you can then either hand them out as gifts or sell them and recoup your money. Everybody wins!

If any of these ideas inspires you, please

use the Order Form on page 57 or visit our website: communities.ic.org/support. The more oars we have in the water the better!

Man Overboard

Last, here's a word about our crew. For the last couple years, we've been steering the ship with a three-person complement: Editor Chris Roth, Art Director Yulia Zarubina, and Business Manager John Stroup.

While we've been very pleased with the trio that's comprised our Production Crew, there were not enough pay days for John to continue as Business Manager, and he stepped down with the completion of the production cycle for the spring issue. After a focused search we signed Tanya Carwyn (hailing from Earthaven Ecovillage in Black Mountain NC) as John's replacement. Welcome aboard, Tanya! ♦

Laird Schaub is Executive Secretary of the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC), publisher of this magazine, and cofounder of Sandhill Farm, an egalitarian community in northeast Missouri, where he lives. His blog can be read at communityandconsensus.blogspot.com.

COMMUNITIES Magazine 2009 Financial Statement			
Expenses		Income	
Printing	\$21,023	Subscriptions	\$27,552
Office overhead	5,498	Single issues	895
Production labor	31,867	Back issues	2,726
Fulfillment	11,646	Distributor sales	8,603
Office expenses		Advertising	10,319
(postage, phone, copying)	424	Royalties	322
Travel	0	Donations	10,900
Marketing	1,283	Total Income	61,317
Total Expenses	71,741	Net Profit (Loss)	(\$10,424)

Striving to live sustainably?

Be part of a community where you:

- Reduce your ecological footprint by using renewable energy
- Help the environment by eating local and organic food
- Use fewer resources easily by car sharing, and much more!



Dancing Rabbit is a growing ecovillage whose members are dedicated to sustainability and social change. We're especially seeking natural builders and people with leadership skills.

Go to join.dancingrabbit.org to arrange a visit.

1 Dancing Rabbit Lane • Rutledge, MO 63563 • 660-883-5511

Miller Keeps the Gears Turning

COMMUNITIES has a small, but dedicated readership. We are able to keep operating—despite losing money nine years out of 10 (see the Publisher's Note on page 6 for more about that)—because of four things: a) our Production Team has mastered the art of making do; b) we compensate contributors so meagerly that Scrooge might be embarrassed; c) the FIC Board loves the magazine and won't let it die; and d) we have supporters with deep pockets. One of those is Ron Miller from Shelburne VT, and he's the hero for this issue.

Every now and then, someone steps forward to underwrite the finances for producing an issue, and Ron did that for us this time. Education for Sustainability is one of his passions, and he contributed \$2500 to help make sure that this issue happened. If we had someone like Ron backing every issue, we could stop writing about operating deficits in our annual financial report.

If you are inspired by Ron's example and would like to consider being the benefactor for a future issue, get in touch. We promise to do our best to find the sweet spot where our editorial objectives intersect with your excitement.

—Laird Schaub

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Education for Sustainability on Community Bookshelf



Culture Change

Civil Liberty, Peak Oil and the End of Empire
by Alexis Zeigler

2007; 136 pages; paperback
Culture Change challenges us to think outside the box about the issues that face our society.

The book provides inspiration to seek solutions by taking a quantum leap in thought and action.



Ecological Design and Building Schools

Green Guide to Educational Opportunities in the United States and Canada
by Sandra Leibowitz Earley

2005; 160 pages; paperback
Ecological Design and Building Schools offers a current and comprehensive resource covering

the scope of offerings available for those wanting to further their education in the areas of natural and green building. It covers every type of course from hands-on workshops to more formal college and university programs.



EcoVillage At Ithaca

Pioneering A Sustainable Culture
by Liz Walker

2005; 256 pages; paperback
Human scale, accessible, and inspiring, the example of EcoVillage At Ithaca will help readers imagine fresh alternatives to "life as usual." It will appeal to all who

want to learn about successful working models of a more sustainable approach to living with each other and the environment.



Ecovillage Living

Restoring the Earth and Her People
edited by Hildur Jackson and Karen Svensson

2002; 216 pages; paperback
Ecovillage Living is multi-faceted in its approach to its subject.

It could be a textbook for the wealth of data, practical real-life examples, and additional resources presented. The remarkable compilation of full-color photographs contained in the book enable the reader to journey to many of the ecovillages around the globe. This visual variety and global context should give those interested in this lifestyle stimulation to translate their dreams into action.



Ecovillages

A Practical Guide to Sustainable Communities
by Jan Martin Bang

2005; 288 pages; paperback
Packed with tips, useful insights, sage advice, and a wealth of resources, *Ecovillages* will appeal to a broad range of people interested in living in community or planning to do so. The book is enhanced by full-color case studies of ecovillages around the world.



Ecovillages

New Frontiers for Sustainability
by Jonathan Dawson

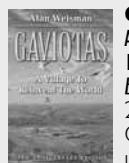
2006; 94 pages; paperback
Ecovillages: New Frontiers for Sustainability does an excellent job of providing an overview of the development of ecovillages from their beginnings to the present time. It also provides insight into its actual and potential contributions to a more sustainable world.



The Findhorn Book of Community Living

by William Metcalf

2004; 128 pages; Findhorn Press
From one of the most successful and well-known intentional communities, Findhorn, comes a well-written introduction to community living that will interest everyone searching for a satisfying alternative to mainstream society. It provides reliable guidance, information, and resources for the community-seeker. Much in this book will be of use to those who are already living in community or who have some knowledge of this lifestyle.



Gaviotas

A Village to Reinvent the World—10th Anniversary Edition
by Alan Weisman

2008; 256 pages; paperback
Gaviotas the village is surprising, uplifting, extraordinary. *Gaviotas* the nonfiction book is as compelling as a novel, as educational as a textbook, as inspirational as the biography of a great person.



Passion as Big as a Planet

Evolving Eco-Activism in America
by Ma'ikwe Schaub Ludwig

2007; 219 pages; paperback
This engaging book gives those wishing to translate their core beliefs to the wider community around them excellent guidance and support. It shows how to combine personal growth and spiritual exploration with social and political activism.



Plan C

Community Survival Strategies for Peak Oil and Climate Change
by Pat Murphy

2008; 304 pages; paperback
Plan C is about cooperating instead of competing for the remaining supply of fossil fuels. It is also about each of us taking responsibility for curtailing our energy usage on behalf of the human community that exists in the present and the one that will exist in the future.



The Post-Petroleum Survival Guide and Cookbook

Recipes for Changing Times
by Albert Bates

2006; 286 pages; paperback
The Post-Petroleum Survival Guide and Cookbook is a blueprint for moving into a changing energy future. It distills the essentials for small-footprint living, leavened with deep wisdom, a wide variety of wonderful recipes, juicy quotes, and reminders to enjoy life as we power down.



Radical Simplicity

Small Footprints On A Finite Earth
by Jim Merkel

2003; 288 pages; paperback
Existing work on sustainability, resource justice, and escaping the consumer lifestyle has opened the door to the possibilities of a simpler life. *Radical Simplicity* invites the reader to step through the door and follow the path to realizing the possibilities such a lifestyle change offers.

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Chris Roth

Would you trust this joker (middle) in your group meeting?

Open Meetings: Worth the Risk?

Q: *Our group is committed to education and to sharing our lives in community openly with others. We frequently host visitors, and also offer regular workshops and courses. We have traditionally welcomed visitors and program participants to attend our weekly community meetings, believing it gives them even more insight into how we work as a group. We have been able to establish good boundaries about when their verbal input is welcome, and have generally encountered few problems with that. Some members have felt self-conscious in the presence of outside observers, and suggested that we not invite them to our meetings, but usually we've decided that the educational benefit of including them outweighed some of our personal preferences to have more privacy and intimacy. Members always have the option of*

calling for "closed session," although this has rarely been invoked.

Recently, however, one short-term visitor used information gleaned in a community meeting to attempt to blackmail the community (on questionable grounds, but it cost us considerable time and worry), and two other disgruntled program participants started spreading damaging rumors in the local area, based on dynamics they observed while we talked as a group. These experiences have made many of us skittish about allowing outsiders to observe our meetings, and moreover we don't feel able to freely discuss this troubling dynamic in the presence of visitors. We have held one closed meeting about this issue already, and that itself had repercussions and started curious visitors talking. How can we balance these competing needs and concerns?

**Beatrice Briggs responds:**

Although in theory, I support the idea of open meetings, I cannot see the benefit if (1) outsiders are converting what they see and hear into grist for the local gossip mill and (2) this is causing community members to feel inhibited and uncomfortable in their own meetings. In addition, I

imagine that the effort going into dealing with the situations precipitated by the open meeting policy is detracting from the time and energy available for addressing other pressing issues.

I suggest that you declare a one-year moratorium on open meetings to let things settle down. No need to explain to the outside world why this step has been taken. If asked, just smile and say, “We are on an extended retreat” or something along those lines. During this period, observe carefully whether the sensitivities uncovered by the visitors’ behaviors diminish and group members begin to speak openly and honestly again in meetings. If some people are still acting inhibited, the problem probably goes beyond the visitor factor. There may be underlying issues that are not being addressed. At the end of the year, revisit the open meeting policy.

Beatrice Briggs is the founding director of the International Institute for Facilitation and Change (IIFAC), a Mexico-based consulting group that specializes in participatory processes. The author of the manual Introduction to Consensus and many articles about group dynamics, Beatrice travels around the world, giving workshops and providing facilitation services in both English and Spanish. Home is Ecovillage Huehucoyotl, near Tepoztlán, Mexico, where she has lived since 1998. bbriggs@iifac.org; www.iifac.org.

**Tree Bressen responds:**

Have you traveled by airplane in the past decade or so? If so, you’ll undoubtedly have noticed more than a few “security enhancements.” Taking off your shoes, getting patted down or scanned with a metal-detecting “wand,” being prevented from bringing a full water-bottle through

security, that kind of thing. I personally had a small, sealed bottle of horseradish confiscated last year. Was my horseradish dangerous? Maybe if thrown at someone’s head, but basically, not really. So why was it taken? Because ever since Sept. 11, 2001, the US and other countries have been making changes to airport security based on worst-case situations. At the time of this writing, banning all carry-on baggage is seriously being discussed.

If you have strong relationships with your neighbors, they’ll be a lot less likely to believe any damaging rumors.

That’s kinda like closing the barn doors after the cows are gone, but it happens all the time. And i’ve seen it a bunch in communities, where after a bad incident, legislation (policy) is passed in an effort to help everyone feel safer and more secure.

Of course groups need to learn from their mistakes, and change is not always bad. Particularly if a similar situation crops up more than once, the universe—in the form of your members (or in this case, visitors)—might be trying to tell you something, in which case it could be a good time to put those finely honed listening skills to use. And on certain occasions, even once is enough to insist that change needs to happen, like when an agricultural commune relying on visiting volunteer labor changed a few of their procedures to increase physical safety after a terrible accident. But no matter what kinds of changes you make, bad luck’s still gonna crop up sometimes.

If you are unfortunately hosting the kind of person who would attempt blackmail or spread damaging rumors, they’d probably start mischief of some kind whether they attend your meetings or not. Which doesn’t mean you need to make it worse by inviting them: visitors need to understand that attending community meetings is a privilege, not a right. And i think your group should feel fine about holding closed meetings to explore this particular issue if that’s what you need.

However, my experience has been that the most damaging things that happen to communities happen from their own members, not from visitors. Internal lawsuits, embezzlement by a community accountant, or just really nasty interpersonal conflicts that stew for years. While many of us may have ideas on what forms of membership screening are more effective than others, i don’t think any group has discovered a sure-fire method for screening.

So if you accept that bad things are going to happen occasionally, then i think the key question becomes: *How can you build and maintain resiliency?* For example, if you have strong relationships with your neighbors because you are constantly helping them out with chores, riding with the volunteer fire-fighting squad, or singing in the local church choir, then they’ll be a lot less likely to believe any damaging rumors that might come their way. Particularly if they’ve known you for 20 years compared against a random newcomer who just wandered in.

In the aftermath of a negative incident, making changes like these—changes that take time for their effects to grow—might not address the part of your brain that’s crying “Alarm!,” but they might best serve your community’s well-being in the end. If you’re not sure, then it’s probably a good time to invoke the Quaker practice of “seasoning” a potential decision for a month

before moving ahead.

Tree Bressen is a group process consultant based in Eugene, Oregon, who works with intentional communities and other organizations on how to have meetings that are lively, productive, and connecting. Her website, www.treegroup.info, offers extensive free resources on consensus, facilitation, and more. (Tree uses a lowercase “i” in her writing as an expression of egalitarian values.)



Laird Schaub responds:

My basic advice to groups is to be as open as you can stand. There is a basic principle that applies here about how information flow is related to trust: the more information is shared (so long as it is accurate), the greater the tendency to trust; the more information is restricted, the more trust is impaired. It's that simple. Thus, I applaud the group's historic approach to open meetings. And the benefits go beyond that. In addition to trust building and the educational component named by the narrator, I have found that encouraging (not just permitting) visitors to attend meetings is a great way to assess the social skills of non-members.

Over the 35 years that my community has been around, we've found that screening prospective members for communication skills is the surest way to predict a good fit. We figure that very few people get to us without already having sorted themselves out for a reasonably good value match, and thus, when it comes to what our ongoing relationship with them might be, we look closely at things like: how well they listen; how well they can articulate their feelings; how easily they can switch perspectives to see another person's viewpoint; how well they can distinguish between personal preferences and what's good for the collective; how they work with conflict.

By having them observe a meeting (and use their judgment about if and when to speak) we get a lot of valuable information in a short time. We try to debrief with the new person right afterwards to hear their impressions and answer questions, the better to understand how they saw things, and to nip any misinterpretations in the bud. This is enormously valuable as a screening tool.

All of that said, there's no doubt that bad things can happen when you trust strangers to use appropriate discretion with privileged information. While my overwhelming experience with extending trust is that it leads to benign results, it doesn't always. Now what?

In the two examples given (one of attempted blackmail by a

My basic advice to groups is to be as open as you can stand.

short-term visitor; the other of spreading negative rumors by unhappy program participants), I think it's better to focus on how the group handles conflict than on who it allows to attend meetings. The root issue is that relatively new people had a problem with something that was happening in the group and chose to act on negative conclusions outside the group rather than work it out internally. That's not good.

If, as I was suggesting above, the group was checking with non-members after meetings to see how they were doing with what they'd observed, then I think it would have been obvious that the new folks were having a bad reaction, and/or laboring under a misunderstanding. Forewarned, the group would then have had an opportunity to address this (Luke, there's a disturbance in the Force) well before it evolved into blackmail or rumor mongering.

To be fair, handling conflict effectively is a sophisticated skill, and not all attempts end well. Nonetheless, it's well worth developing that ability and I recommend that the group look first to how it can do a better job of processing tension, rather than considering structural changes (restricting access to meetings) to better contain the potential negative consequences of poorly resolved conflict.

Finally, I want to address the situation where the group feels it's necessary to hold a closed meeting. As the narrator suggested, there may be times when the members' desire for safety and full disclosure trumps the commitment to openness. While I agree that this should be an option, I think it works best (that is, minimizes negative repercussions) if the group commits to providing everyone who was excluded from the meeting with a summary of what was discussed. This offers a middle ground between full disclosure (an open meeting) and a secret meeting (where no one knows what was talked about if they weren't in the room). For this to work well, it's important that the summary be as complete as possible and delivered as shortly after the closed meeting as can be done. ♦

Laird Schaub, a member of Sandhill Farm community in Missouri, has been doing consulting work on group process since 1987. A longtime activist in community networking, he has lived in community since 1974 and been involved with the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC) since 1986; he is currently its Executive Secretary. laird@ic.org; 660-883-5545. Laird authors a blog which can be read at communityandconsensus.blogspot.com.

Do you have a question for our Cooperative Group Solutions panelists? Please send it to editor@ic.org.

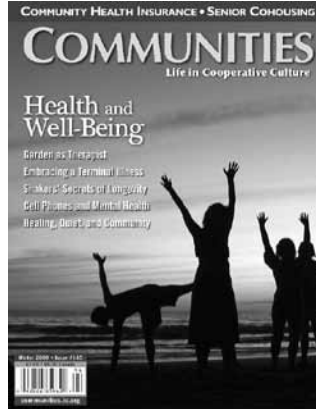
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#146 Family

An Abundance of Dads; Second Family; When an Ecovillage is Raising Your Child; Parenting in Community; Exploring Family; Being Almost Two Years Old - Again; A Community Newcomer Finds Her Rhythm; Nudging at Boundaries; G8; Asperger's; Together and Apart; Family Dramas; Problem Solving in Community (Winter '09)



#145 Health and Well-Being

Earthaven Culture; Health and Community; Embracing a Terminal Illness; Garden as Therapist and Community Organizer; Cell Phones, Education, Farming, and Mental Health; Gut Health; Shakers; Artabana; Healing Biotope; Asthma and Allergies; Senior Cohousing; High Wind; Health and Quiet; PEACH Health Care Plan; Bullies. (Winter '09)



#144 Community in Hard Times

Emergency Community; Hard Times at Orinda; Shared Living; Birthing a New Order; Building Community in Hard Times; Throwing in the Founder's Towel; Somerville Ecovillage; The Transition Initiative Comes to Cohousing; Food Security; Gardens of Gratitude; Svanholm Goes, Carbon-Neutral; How Collaboration Falls Short. (Fall '09)



#143 Ecology and Community

Sharing and Climate Change; Revolutionary Communitarianism; Cars and Rabbits; Ecovillages, How Ecological Are You?; Findhorn's Incredible Shrinking Footprint; How Ecology Led Me to Community; Reindeer Herders of Northern Mongolia; Water is Life; Environmental Activism. (Summer '09)

#142 Festivals and Gatherings

Festivals at The Farm; FIC Events; Adventures in Temporary Community; Burning Man; Comin' Home to the Rainbow; Network for a New Culture Camps; Sandhill Sorghum Festival; Celebration as a Way of Life; Festival of the Babas; Currents Community; Relocalization; Poetry in Community. (Spring '09)

#141 Scarcity and Abundance

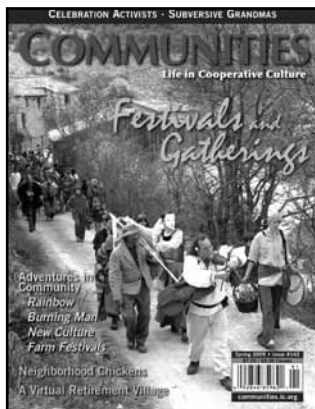
All We Have Is All We Need; Ecobarrios; As Is: Secrets to Having Enough; Free to Serve: Notes from a Needs-Based Economy; From Car and House, To Bicycle and Tent; The Richness of Giving; Potlucks; When Community Land Is Privately Owned; Nashira Ecovillage. (Winter '08)

#140 Politics in Community

We Refuse to Be Enemies; Every Politician Should Live in a Commune; Email, Politics, & Permaculture; Searching for Elephants in the Community Living Room; Ecological Citizenship; Politics on Open Land; A World of Possibility: Communities and Global Transformation. (Fall '08)

#139 Green Building

Building Connection through Natural Building and Community; The Marriage of Natural Building with Conventional Building; A Strawbale Village in Denmark; Micro-Infill Cohousing Without Cars; Zero-Waste Chicken Tractor; Battling the Bureaucracy in Israel. (Summer '08)



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#147



NOTE FROM THE EDITOR BY CHRIS ROTH

Chris Roth



Sarah Wilcox-Hughes and Keren Ram make beeswax candles at the electricity-free Possibility Alliance Sanctuary outside La Plata, Missouri.

Education for Sustainability

I'm listening to the rain fall on the roof of Karma, the passive solar residence at Sandhill Farm where I'm staying this spring. In these first few weeks of March, I've helped with and learned about peach tree pruning, maple syrup production, vegetable growing in northeast Missouri, food fermentation, and how best to navigate snowy, then muddy rutted farm roads by foot and by bicycle. I've seen and heard new birds nearly every day, deciphered some of the branching patterns on still-leafless deciduous trees, and (at the electricity-free Possibility Alliance Sanctuary, where I stopped for a few days before arriving here) learned some of the nuances of beeswax candle-making, bathing in a basin of woodstove-heated water, and accompanying a singing bilingual two-and-a-half-year-old on guitar.

In both of these communities, I've met and gotten to know people for whom education is not something they did in school, then were finished with. Life in these rural, land-based communities is an ongoing learning experience—and it's shared with others. It happens through direct experience and personal connection—a combination of conscious instruction, mentorship, osmosis, projects undertaken together, and the organic unfolding of daily life in these settings. It involves how we relate to one another and to ourselves—not simply physical living skills or knowledge about the world “out there.” It involves multiple generations of people, most of whom are not blood-related but who consciously create a family feeling as a community—who eat together, meet together, share work, help and support each other through personal challenges, and learn from one another. Some are long-term members, some (like me) exploring, some intending to stay just for the growing season as interns, some simply visiting. Without exception, from what I've witnessed thus far, they are inspired by what they are doing, valuing and valued for their roles in these communities, and involved in an active quest to help a more community- and earth-focused world emerge. They not only embody it themselves, but they share their lives with others who are also sincerely interested in and called to this path.

No one here is stuck in a rut, resigned to the “grind” of a formulaic existence, counting the days to retirement (or too overwhelmed even to count). The only serious ruts in which people seem to get stuck are in the roads, but then they pull each other out or flag down a helpful neighbor.

For most of the past quarter-century, I've been fortunate to be part of such settings—places where I can hear the rain fall on the roof (not drowned out by traffic), get my hands in the soil, and learn about others and myself on much more profound levels than those allowed by merely superficial interactions. I have

almost no memory of much of what I studied in my academic schooling, but what I've learned through direct, experiential engagement with rural life, ecological living, ecology, and community doesn't even need “recalling”—it's part of who I am. True, I have learned, then at least temporarily forgotten, many plant species names—but what's really important on this learning path doesn't fade away with time, but just gets richer. I feel more able to deeply appreciate community, life on the land, the natural and human worlds, and learning itself than I ever have.

Lately, I am particularly happy to be reminded of the power of small-scale educational programs—the internships, apprenticeships, and mentorships carried out by countless intentional communities, small organic family farms, and other groups trying to live more sustainably and create a better world. Personal connection, individual attention, a valuing of the whole individual—these are priceless gifts when they accompany an educational experience, and they are natural outgrowths of a healthy community setting. They lead not only to better learning of sustainable living skills, but to ongoing, sustainable and sustaining, human relationships. They lead to generations of people who feel more connected, and therefore who are more likely to care and act to assure that future generations have a livable world to inhabit as well.

While intentional-community-based sustainability education programs come with their share of challenges (many detailed in this issue), ultimately every one of them has a tremendous amount to teach its participants—all of whom, whether nominally facilitators or students, are in reality both teachers and learners. The increasing integration of more traditional academia with intentional community (also described herein) offers great promise as well. The alternative to a fragmented world is one which becomes more whole, and it will require an integration of community and a holistic approach to education.

As Pete Seeger points out, the world cannot be saved by impersonally large groups following a single formula, or by homogeneous, one-size-fits-all projects, no matter how nobly conceived. “I'm convinced that if there is a human race here in 100 years, it's not going to be big things that do it; it's going to be millions upon millions of small things.”¹ Small projects which deeply touch the lives of those who participate in them inspire further connections, more teaching and learning, continued evolution in our individual and collective understanding of what constitute sustainable ways of living and social organization—and more direct experience of the hopeful reality that one person at a time, one step at a time, from the ground up, the world does change. ♦

Chris Roth (editor@ic.org) edits COMMUNITIES.

1. Interview with Jeremy Smith, published November 9, 2007, www.chud.com/articles/articles/12479/1/EXCLUSIVE-INTERVIEW-PETE-SEEGER-PETE-SEEGER-THE-POWER-OF-SONG/Page1.html.



Live and Learn: O.U.R. Ecovillage Builds Learning Community

By Elke Cole with Javan Kerby Bernakevitch

My name is Elke Cole and I am a communitarian...no, wait, strike that, that's a little vague...I'm a natural builder...ummm maybe not quite it, I'm not just a builder...I, I, well I live in community.

That's not a bad start to describe the way I live. I live and learn. Or is it that I learn and then I live? Maybe it's both. And I dance learning and living every day here at One United Resource (O.U.R., or OUR for short) Ecovillage on Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

Here on the island we can live outdoors from late April to mid October. This means that a large part of the on-site programs I'm involved in are conducted during this time, as off-site learners can come and camp in fine favourable weather.

Those of us who live here year-round occupy conventional and natural buildings, yurts and trailer spaces in winter, and some join the camp as soon as weather allows. I am fortunate to have my living and work space in what we affectionately call the Art Studio, destined to be an "artist in residence" accommodation complete with gallery space and studio. Here I am

able to plan programs, complete all necessary computer work, and work on my personal design projects. Come sunshine and summer, I'm outside wearing the teacher and program leader hat. My living space then becomes the private refuge from being "on." Taking a break from the public hats of teacher and leader, I can step from the public realm into my own personal space, where I recharge, reload, and relax from work. Besides removing myself from others, I've found another way to let people know that I'm on time off: I put on a skirt!

There is a great appetite in the world for examples of sustainable land use, and in our "show me it in action" world, seeing really is believing. We share examples of natural homes, permaculture in action, composting toilets, greenhouses full of greens in April, ponds for irrigation, chickens, ducks, sheep, pigs and most importantly how all of us people live and work together!

I understand that tours and public inquiry form part of my agreement here: raising awareness and promoting our workshops support my work as designer and teacher. There is a business side in all of this: we intend to make a living right



Photos by Elke Cole



Opposite page top: Author's sleeping alcove. This page top left: Garden with cob lovenest and greenhouses from the art studio. Top middle: Setting up camp at O.U.R Ecovillage. Top right: Plaster fun in the village. Bottom left: It's all about food. Bottom right: Father and daughter relaxing.

here. Some of us have small individual businesses here, and the nonprofit organization operates accommodation and food services as well as the school.

Living in the middle of a demonstration site means living under observation. So when the public tours come through, I make my living space look good for the pictures and then... go for coffee.

There are about a dozen of us sharing the ebb and flood of seasonal activity. Living here means holding space for those who come to lend a hand to the site.

There's always more work than hands, and the core group of people struggles to find time for deeper connection. We have families and partners, meetings and work, and everybody needs some quiet time. As much as we respect personal space and time, it's often not easy to claim. What keeps us here is a sense that what we do is important on a larger scale. There's a greater calling that brings us into community to live and to educate ourselves and others.

For OUR school (TOPIA: The Sustainable Learning Institute) every season is another adventure: I personally don't want to get stale by teaching "on automatic," so I continually look for ways to do things differently. At the same time I understand that invisible structures carry us through our work. These structures consist of agreements that govern how we work and live together. We organize ourselves in teams: the kitchen team works closely with the garden team to feed us all. I start with this team because good food is at the heart of every successful workshop!

OUR kitchen also processes a lot of the produce for winter consumption by drying and canning. The ongoing challenge is to provide good food on a tight budget, and try to work with all the different politics that come up when we discuss sustainable food issues. One response to that is "OUR Food Manifesto," written in 2008. This document helps to educate visitors, interns, and potential residents

of OUR approach to food and its transformation through our kitchen. As our garden becomes bigger every season, so does the percentage of food harvested on site.

The garden team cares for the growing area that's protected by an eight-foot deer fence (with perimeter expanding!) and includes two large greenhouses. In 2009 the gardens were filled with song. The Sustainable Food Production team strongly believed what our ancestors knew instinctively—song is part of a strong work ethic. Their voices carried throughout the land, giving the other teams an opportunity to pause and question, "What does work entail?"

Questions our garden looks to answer are: how do we feed the number of people on site in a climate that has most output late in summer, while programs are heaviest in early to mid summer? How do we continue to keep and build soil while obtaining and improving yields?

(continued on p. 74)

Teaching Hands-On Workshops in Community

By Michael G. Smith

As the sun sets on the last day of the workshop, some of the students pack up their campsites, offer heartfelt gratitude and goodbyes, and drive away. We can still hear two of them hammering away on the roof of the new building, installing rafters in the fading light. Several others cook up an impromptu evening meal; they've decided to stay an extra day to work with me tomorrow on the first layer of the earthen floor. My friend Margaret is exhausted but ecstatic. In the last five days, with the help of 20 former strangers, we have almost completed the walls of a new guest cottage in her backyard. One of the walls is made of strawbale, now plastered inside and out with a thick clay base coat; another of cob with a sculpted altar and inset stained glass windows; a third of slipstraw; and the last of wattle and daub. The students learned each of these techniques, as well as basic soil analysis, ecological clay harvesting, the fundamentals of passive solar design, and much more. We also found time to tour the other strawbale buildings in the community (Maxwellton Creek Cohousing in Washington), to harvest wild cherries and bake them into pies, to sing and play music around the campfire.

In these moments, so many things I love come together in one place: sharing good food, fire, and stories with



The author (center) supervises the construction of an earthen oven during a one-day workshop.

Anne Frobeen



Top: A two-month apprenticeship gives students time to learn complex building skills. Above: At Emerald Earth's Natural Building Intensives, students get to experience a wide range of techniques; here, cordwood masonry with cob mortar.

new friends, feeling sore in all my muscles but satisfied in my heart. This workshop achieved many goals at once. It provided training and knowledge in natural building to a diverse group of students; it created a beautiful example of low-cost construction using local materials; it went a long way toward getting my friend a place for her children and grandchildren to sleep when they visit; it gave me a good excuse to spend time with her and her family, and some income as well; it supported the development of another intentional community. Beyond those immediate effects, more subtle influences on the students, the community, and myself will emerge over time.

I've spent most of the last 11 years at Emerald Earth Sanctuary, a rural intentional community and learning center in northern California. During that period and the previous six years, I've been involved in planning, coordinating, and teaching well over 100 workshops, ranging from one day to two months in length. Most of these have been hands-on trainings for adults on natural building techniques, but other topics have included permaculture, local foods, and appropriate technology, and I've also worked occasionally with children. Besides Emerald Earth, I've taught at 10 other intentional communities in western North America. I realized recently that this experience teaching in so many different communities could allow me to make some general observations about workshops in community settings,

and perhaps to offer useful advice to communities wanting to start on-site educational programs.

Intentional communities and education are a natural fit. Many communities consider part of their mission to educate the public, at least about community structures and processes such as consensus decision-making. People who wind up at communities often have knowledge and experience related to health and sustainable living, making them potential in-house instructors for programs on these subjects. Workshops, camps, conferences, and other events can provide much-needed income in a way that harmonizes with community values and goals. Communities often have the infrastructure necessary to host groups; they also frequently have members with good skills in planning and coordinating events.

Educational events in communities also present unique challenges. Workshops, especially longer ones, can exert a big impact on long-term residents. Typically, some community members are more involved with a workshop than others. Those most involved shoulder the great majority of work but also reap the most benefits, including income, professional development, and the rewards of direct interaction with the students. Residents taking a less active role in the program will still feel the impacts, including the noise and mess created by a large group of visitors, possible rescheduling of mealtimes and meetings, and being bombarded by questions about what it's like to live in community, where to dump the compost, and so on.

It's critical that all community members be supportive of the educational mission. Usually this is not a problem in theory, as a desire to educate and share is common in community. However, resentments can build up if members feel saddled with tasks and impacts that they didn't agree to. Make sure that all responsibilities are clearly defined and assigned beforehand. These include publicity, registration, menu planning and shopping, cooking and cleaning,



*Students and staff
at the completion of
a week-long Natural
Building Intensive
at Emerald Earth.*

Work parties have a significant side benefit: they let community members develop teaching skills in a low-pressure setting.

curriculum development, project planning and coordination, guest facilities, dealing with money, and site cleanup. Make clear agreements up front on the use of common facilities, how income will be distributed, and any other aspects of the workshop that will affect residents.

Workshops can be structured in many ways, each of which is more appropriate for certain topics than others. Even primarily hands-on learning programs can vary a lot in their length and formality. These variations obviously create different benefits and challenges for the community. What follows is a brief description of the formats I'm most familiar with, along with some observations about how each of them benefits and challenges the hosting community.

Work Parties

Between four and six times each year, we host public work parties at Emerald Earth.

These weekend events (some have been up to a week long) are part open house, part free workshop, part networking opportunity for sustainability enthusiasts and community seekers. Each work party typically includes four three-hour work sessions, an extensive tour, a sauna and/or fire circle, and a talk about our community history, decision-making process, membership, and financial structure.

These events funnel many first-time visitors into pre-arranged times when we know we will be available to orient them and answer their questions. We usually host between a dozen and 30 people each time, which is much easier for us to manage than the same number of visits spread over a couple of months. Visitors appreciate the opportunity to visit a community and learn some skills practically for free (we ask only for a small donation to cover food costs) and we feel good about opening our doors to anyone who can get here, being a resource for people to learn about community and sustainable living, and at the same time getting some needed help with on-site projects.

During each work period, we like to have three different projects happening simultaneously to allow visitors a range of choices and to let us make efficient use of their help. We tend to save up projects that can benefit from a number of unskilled workers directed by one community member: things like turning garden beds, mixing cob, or digging swales. Almost every session becomes a mini-workshop, starting with a basic introduction to the task at hand and how it fits in with the bigger picture of living on our land. With tools distributed and the work underway, the explanation often continues in more depth, or else morphs into a more free-ranging discussion.

Work parties have a significant side benefit: they let community members develop teaching skills in a low-pressure setting. We also host formal workshops in which students pay for instruction in natural building and other skills. To run high-quality workshops, the instructors must first have practice not only with the workshop topic but also

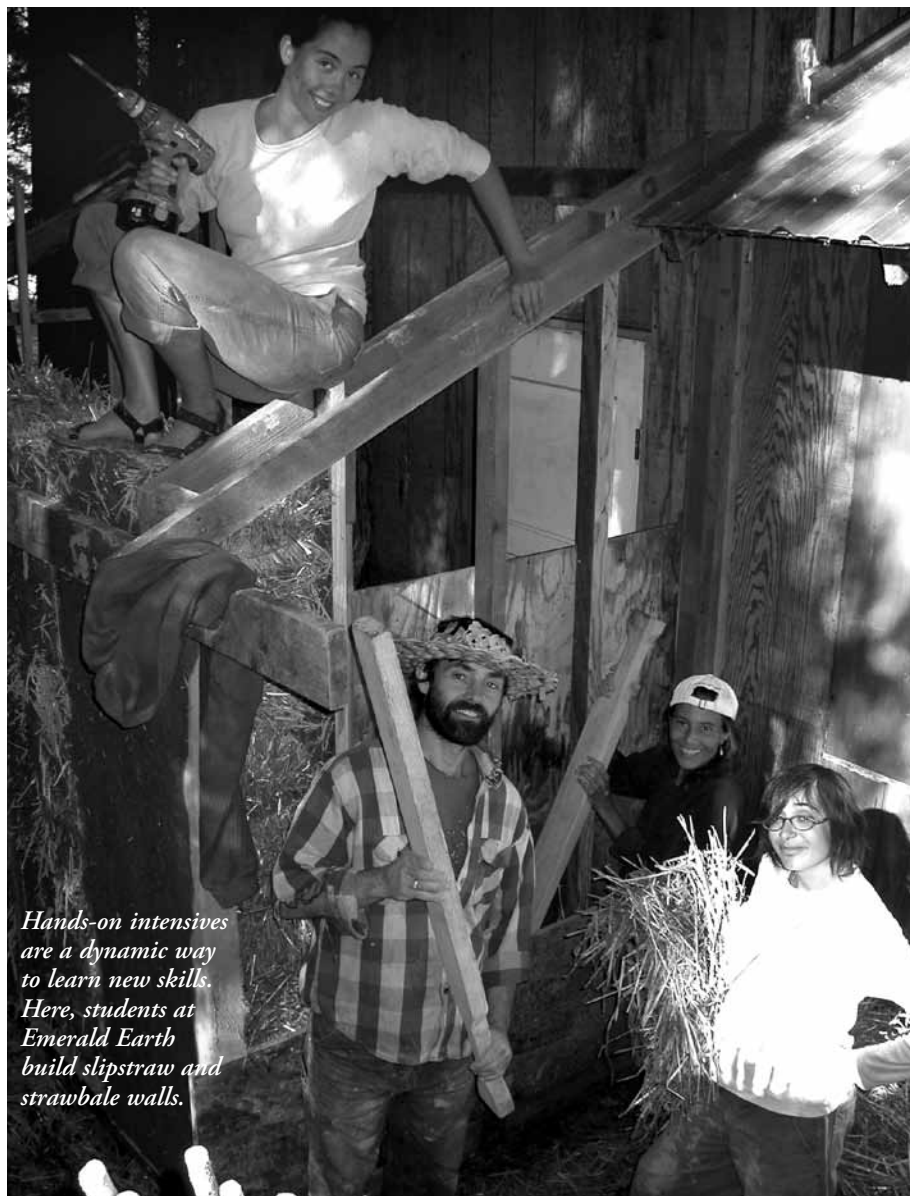
with demonstrating and explaining it. Work parties help solve the dilemma that teaching skill comes largely from practice, but that it seems a bit unethical to charge people for inexperienced instruction.

One-Day Workshops

For communities looking to grow an educational program, a series of one-day workshops is a great way to start. Daylong workshops allow you to focus most of your energy on the educational mission, without so much investment in meals, facilities, and other responsibilities that come with longer events. A short workshop allows you to try new things and develop skills and experience with minimal stress.

One-day workshops are most appropriate for general introductions and for simple hands-on topics. Boiling down the essence of a complex topic (permaculture, for example, or intentional community itself) into a series of concise presentations and exercises can be a valuable challenge. I find one-day workshops best suited to teaching a single practical skill, such as making cordage or building an earthen oven.

Usually people are less willing to travel far for a one-day as opposed to a longer course. At Emerald Earth, we get a higher percentage of students from our local community in one-day workshops than in any other educational format (except for children's summer camps). Offering inexpensive learning opportunities to our neighbors feels good. However, I have also been surprised at how far people will drive for a daylong class. Last November, several students drove between three and six hours to attend our one-day Acorns for Food workshop. Because we're in a remote location an hour from the nearest budget accommodation, we decided to let workshop participants stay with us the night before the class, which in turn made us take on serving breakfast. This is an example of how hosting events becomes more complex when you attempt to accommodate diverse needs. Before another workshop last year, we put in about a day of extra work to make



Hands-on intensives are a dynamic way to learn new skills. Here, students at Emerald Earth build slipstraw and strawbale walls.

our facilities accessible to one student in a wheelchair. In my opinion, this was well worth the effort, but it added to the predictable stress of last-minute preparations.

Two-Day to Two-Week Intensives

To teach a more complex skill or set of concepts requires longer than a day. I've led dozens of cob and natural building workshops lasting around a week. The length of the workshop should be tailored to the learning goals, and it's a good idea to make these goals clear beforehand, both to the organizer/teachers and to potential students. In a few days, you can teach someone how to mix and build a cob wall; learning to build a house take a lot longer. We've taught a couple of Introduction to Carpentry workshops lasting three or four days. Everyone gained a basic understanding of wood-working tools and methods, but I noticed that the level of confidence that people left with corresponded to the amount of experience they had when they came. To develop trust and comfort with a new set of technical skills takes most people a long time.

Project-based classes like natural building workshops require a huge amount of preparation up front. For our Natural Building Intensives at Emerald Earth, we usually spend between one and two days of prep time for every day of teaching. We spend this time working out designs and construction details, acquiring and preparing tools

and materials (sharpening chisels, soaking clay, cleaning buckets), organizing the site so that a large group of students can work safely, and so on. This does not include the many hours devoted to course publicity, inquiries and registration, menu planning, shopping, cooking, campsites, and facilities. Running the same class year after year on the same site can eventually become a matter of routine, but successful classes are rarely if ever pulled together at the last minute.

So what's the payback for all this investment? Intensive workshops can be a reasonable source of income. Typical prices these days for residential workshops in sustainable skills run between \$75 and \$100 per day; sometimes much more. With 15 students in a weeklong workshop, you might bring in \$8,000 to \$10,000. Even if the workshop requires six weeks of paid work (let's say two full-time teacher/coordinators, one full-time cook, a week or two of preparation and organization, and a week or two of administration) plus expenses (food, materials, advertising, site use fee or community tithe), everyone should be able to make a living wage. You will have to decide how many paying students you need to make the accounts balance. We offer a discount for early payment to encourage people to sign up in advance, so that if we have to cancel due to low enrollment, we can do that with plenty of notice. Students may be buying airplane tickets, taking leaves from work, and lining up house-sitters; I prefer to give them a month's notice if the class is going to be canceled.

The building workshops that I teach are usually organized to contribute useful work to a project. I've seen many small buildings get started in short workshops; walls can go up quickly with a large group of excited students. But I've never seen a building completed in a workshop. It's easy to overestimate the amount of work that will be accomplished. When students are paying to learn, the primary emphasis needs to be on education rather than on production. I suspect that if I were to put all the hours I spend planning and organiz-



Linda McElwee

Students taste samples prepared from seven species of oak at Emerald Earth's Acorns for Food workshop.

ing courses into building instead, I would usually get just as much built. Obviously, getting work done is not the main goal of the workshop; my point here is that it should not be, or everyone is likely to end up disappointed.

An experienced teacher learns to accommodate different learning styles and to provide instruction appropriate for each student's level of experience. Having two or more instructors present is always helpful. Sometimes one of us will lead the majority of the group while the other works with stragglers who are not yet comfortable with previously introduced concepts or skills. Or one can direct the more advanced students on a special project so they don't get bored while the rest keep working on basic skills. Ideally the teaching staff will include a range in age, gender, and background; that way each student is more likely to find someone to relate to.

That point brings to mind the most painful experience of my teaching career so far. It was a weeklong cob workshop, the very first I taught as lead instructor. My co-teacher and I were both young men in our 20s, with more experience building than teaching. By chance we ended up with a group of students who were mostly women, many of them in their 40s and 50s. By halfway through the week, many of the women were skipping my lectures and gathering elsewhere on the property for their own discussions. They had decided they had more to learn from each other than

By halfway through the week, many of the women had decided they had more to learn from each other than from me, and they were probably right.

from me, and they were probably right. Unfortunately, I lacked the skills to bring the group back together, perhaps by creating an open forum for the students to share their experiences rather than sticking with my planned agenda of presentations.

Changes to the schedule or structure partway through a workshop should not be made lightly, but sometimes circumstance demands them. Last year in a building workshop, for example, my co-instructor noticed a disturbing gender dynamic. Most of the men were actively involved in raising a strawbale wall while many of the women stood back or moved on to a secondary task. We delayed the next building session for a discussion on the topic that I found fascinating. The students included about an equal number of women and men, as well as two transgender folks and a person in a wheelchair. They came from six different countries of origin and native languages, and ranged in age from early 20s to 60s; altogether an extremely diverse group. Were the two hours we spent discussing gender issues a valuable use of group time? At the very least, everyone got to hear a perspective very different from their own. In situations like that, I try ask myself: What is the most valuable thing to model and teach? Is it natural building skills (which is what the students signed up for), or is it a culture of awareness, respect, and honest communication, the core values of this community?

Perhaps the greatest value of longer residential courses like these is the break they provide from students' daily lives. I prefer to teach in a setting where students eat and sleep as well as learn and work together—ideally, all within walking distance. This strengthens the social bonding and support within the group and gives people the experience of being part of a community (albeit short-term) with shared interests. I've seen many life changes come out of residential workshops, including lasting friendships and partnerships (I won't get started on those stories) and the breaking of destructive old habits. Communities are ideal containers for this sort of transformation to occur. At Emerald Earth the experience of living in community for a week seems at least as valuable to most students as whatever practical skills or knowledge they take away with them.

We like to involve students in as many aspects of community life as possible during their stay. As a matter of course, they always help with after-meal cleanup and dishwashing, as well as building-site cleanup and preparing materials. Individuals may volunteer for more complex tasks like lighting the sauna, leading a morning circle, or helping to cook a meal. These kinds of activities enhance the experience of being part of an interdependent community. Occasionally, they can also create unexpected complications.

Some years ago I was doing support work at another community during a two-week Permaculture Design course. Part of the students' daily chore rotation included harvesting salad greens from the garden. They got to learn some garden botany and to exercise their creativity by selecting from dozens of varieties of edible greens. Late one morning the frantic lunch cook called me into the kitchen. The student harvesters had mistaken poison hemlock for fennel and the highly toxic leaves were peppered throughout several pounds of salad. It took three of us an hour to make sure we had gotten every leaf out and that the salad would be safe to serve!

Longer Educational Programs

Established Natural Building centers now commonly offer longer hands-on train-

ings, usually from six weeks to three months. I've been part of teaching four such programs here at Emerald Earth and three elsewhere (two at intentional communities). These programs are often called "Apprenticeships," although I prefer the term "Skillbuilder" used at O.U.R. Ecovillage. If you're trying to teach a complex set of skills like building, after a month is when you really begin to see the payoff. Most people seem to take that long to get so comfortable with a new set of activities and habits that they begin to incorporate the change into their self-identity. If we want to prepare people for professional work in natural building, teaching, and other skills, long programs like these are a good way to do it.

One of the gifts of a long class like this is the opportunity to develop deep relationships between instructors and students. I find that a month after a one- or two-day workshop I won't remember the names of most of the students; in a week-long class, students may or may not make a lasting impression; but the students I've spent two months with very often become long-term friends and colleagues.

If the workshop's influence on students is at all proportional to the students' impact on me, there seems to be a sort of a law of conservation at work. You can either have a little impact on many people, or a lot of impact on a few people. The shorter a workshop is (and the cheaper it is), the more accessible it is to people with busy lives, many interests, or limited resources. You can also usually accept more people into a short workshop, if for no other reason than that the logistics are easier. And obviously, you can pack more short workshops into your schedule than long ones. So the best formula for exposing a lot of people to your ideas is to offer many short inexpensive workshops.

On the other hand, if you want to make a really big impact on someone's life, you need time. Our two-month apprenticeships at Emerald Earth had two full-time instructors for a maximum of six students. This allowed us to

give each student individual coaching nearly every day, and to introduce dangerous tools like power saws that just do not make sense in a large workshop.

In any program longer than two weeks, social dynamics within the group become a major contributor to its success or failure. Most people, stimulated by a learning experience in a new environment, can be “nice” and avoid conflict for a couple of weeks. If they find they aren’t getting some of their needs met, they can usually suck it up until they get home. This is less likely when the program goes on for many weeks. Often during periods of discomfort and stress, the differences between personalities will rise to a head. I strongly prefer to include the skills needed for working and living together as an explicit part of the curriculum, spending time each week on things like conflict resolution, meeting facilitation, and understanding different learning and leadership styles. We called our apprenticeship “Natural Building in Community” to make this emphasis clear. It’s also important to have open discussions periodically about what is working and what isn’t, and for the staff to either work to resolve issues or to explain why they can’t. I’ve seen the failure to directly address conflicts and expectations lead to persistent unresolved social tension among students or between students and staff.

Of course, the functioning of a group is not just the result of planning, structure, and the skills of the staff. Over the four years that we offered two-month building apprenticeships, the levels of social cohesion and support amongst the groups varied widely. One year in particular stands out in my mind as a model group of students. They were three women and three men, with a broad range of backgrounds and ages. They actually spent one of their spare evenings each week in a self-organized study group where they shared notes and discussed how they could support one another’s learning goals. This was in welcome contrast to the previous year, which had sometimes felt like a summer school for reluctant teenagers. The orga-



Anne Froben

Natural building apprentices from Emerald Earth participate in an earthen oven workshop.

I’ve seen the failure to directly address conflicts and expectations lead to persistent unresolved social tension.

nization of both programs was similar; the main differences were the personalities of the students. Careful selection of self-motivated learners goes a long way toward the smooth functioning of an educational program.

Long programs like these require a major commitment on the part of the instructors, and may have significant effects on the hosting community. Community members who are not directly involved with the program may feel excluded from the social bonding taking place among students and teachers, or stretched thin taking care of business while the course leaders are occupied, or impatient for the program to end and life to get “back to normal.” At Emerald Earth, we have felt these tensions, but the advantages to the community seemed to balance them out. With longer building trainings (over a month), the contribution from student work finally gets to be significant. We used our apprenticeship programs as a way to fund some of our builder/teachers to stay on-site working on community projects rather than seeking paid work elsewhere.

Internships or Work Exchange

Educational programs can vary in the formality of instruction as well as in length. Combine long duration with

low formality and you get an internship or work-exchange program. At Emerald Earth, we have offered work-trade positions for the last 10 years, ranging from two to seven months. We’ve found that these programs offer many of the advantages of long formal trainings, but with fewer negative impacts to the community as a whole.

The exchange in “work exchange” is mostly not financial. At most, we ask work traders to cover the costs of their food, but usually we split this expense with them 50/50. We offer them a place to live and learn and contribute and they offer us their labor and energy. Work traders come primarily for the experience of living in community and for general exposure to sustainable living skills. There may be some “classroom time,” but most of the learning takes place on the job in the garden, kitchen, or building site. Any additional time we spend on instruction is compensated by increased productivity. Work-exchange therefore does not generate income for community members. It may or may not pass along knowledge as effectively as a paid apprenticeship. A formal training usually helps people pick up a specified set of skills in a relatively short time, whereas work exchange gives them broader exposure to everything happening in the community

and the opportunity to develop a more personalized niche.

We find that, compared to apprentices and students, work traders reach a much higher level of social integration with the community. This is partly because their time is less scheduled with educational activities and they tend to spend time more evenly with all members. Work-traders, unlike apprentices, attend weekly coordination meetings where they see more of the inner workings of the community and have the opportunity to respond to emerging needs. The difference may also be in part because their primary focus is to be of service to the community rather than to learn specific skills.

Our 2009 work exchange program proved an exception to this rule. We offered two different focus areas: one on building our new common house and the other on gardening, animal

husbandry, and food production. Each group worked about 30 hours per week in their focus area, directed by a non-overlapping subset of community members. This arrangement allowed us to get a lot of help in both areas from well-trained and dedicated teams. However, despite weekly sharing circles, shared mealtimes, and one afternoon per week spent working together in mixed groupings, we found that the split focus led to a surprising level of disconnection and even tension between the two teams. Partly because we were all so busy with our assigned tasks, some of the work traders (and members) were not finding time to develop friendships outside their focus groups or to resolve conflicts resulting from shared space.

This provided yet another lesson for us on how the structure of a program affects the social harmony of the community. As

we design our programs for this coming season, we have tried to incorporate these learnings, as well as many others from the last decade of work parties, workshops, and work exchange. How to plan and implement educational programs that best serve us and our students is an evolutionary process for Emerald Earth and for communities in general. The stories of our successes and failures can be among the most important sparks of that evolution. ♦

Michael G. Smith is the author or co-author of four books, including The Hand-Sculpted House and The Art of Natural Building. He is interested in the role intentional communities can play in the re-development of sustainable place-based cultures. Email him at michael@emeraldearth.org. Emerald Earth's course offerings and work-trade description can be found at www.emeraldearth.org.

Some advice for communities wanting to start educational programs:

Start small. A series of one-day or weekend workshops on topics you know well can be a good way to start. Keep your costs low and try to run the workshop even if you don't get much enrollment. That will give you experience and start to establish your reputation as a learning center.

Develop programs based on your strengths. Ask yourself, "What does our community do best?" That is probably what you should be teaching.

Get help from outside instructors. If you don't have a reputation and experience running workshops, hiring a high-profile instructor from outside your community can help get the public's attention and provide a model for you to learn from.

Create programs that interest you. Bring in outside instructors to teach classes that you and other community members want to take. You may not make much money that way, but it will probably be cheaper than several of you traveling to study somewhere else.

Consistency and quality fill workshops. Word of mouth is a cheap and highly effective means of advertising. If you offer the same workshop repeatedly, students who enjoyed it will recommend it to their friends.

Make community structures visible. No matter what the topic of the workshop, visitors will be curious about the community. Being transparent about how your community works is good advertising for you and for the communities network as a whole.

Offer scholarships or work-trade. It's hard to balance covering your costs and paying your staff with making the workshop accessible to people with less money. Some effective solutions include scholarships, work-trade positions, and sliding scales. Differential payment scales can also help attract specific populations to your workshops. For example, our first two Natural Building Apprenticeships at Emerald Earth ended up with only a single woman student each. The third year, we offered scholarships specifically for women, and the ratio of women to men was equal. By the following year, we had one man and five women in the program, a complete reversal from two years previous.

To Learn Sustainability Is To Learn Community

An Example from South Portugal

By Leila Dregger

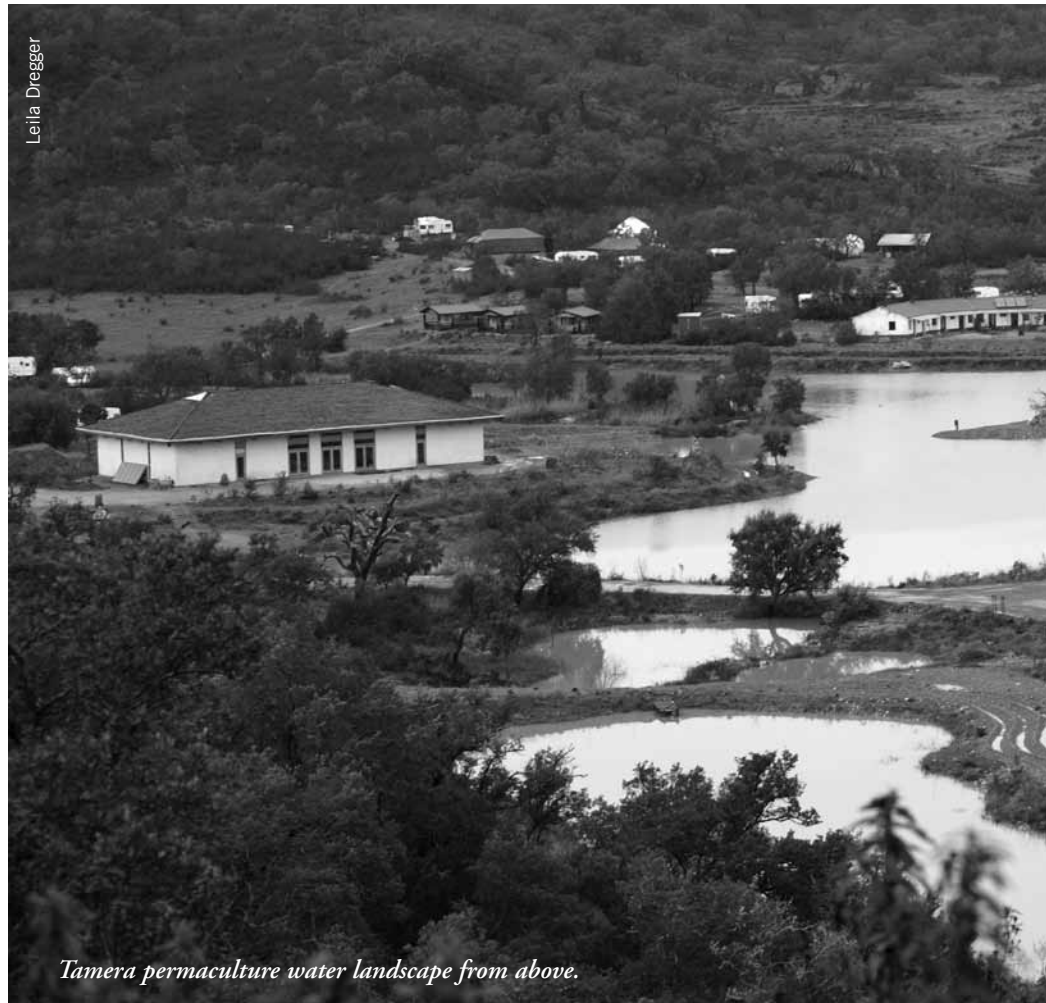
Walk 20 miles away from the ocean, and South Portugal becomes dry and dusty in summer and devoid of people in any season. What had been a lush landscape for centuries, with oak forests, white stucco villages, and vegetable gardens and pastures, was destroyed in the 1940s to create industrial cereal production for Spain during the civil war. Now the landscape seems slowly to be turning into a desert. Villages are dying. Food is imported. Only very few farmers continue their hard work under difficult economic and ecological conditions.

One of them is Claudio, a farmer in the Alto Alentejo. His 4000 hectare (10,000 acre) site, inherited from his father, includes beautiful nature reserves and extended cork oak and olive groves. Employing 20 workers, he started with the vision of reestablishing the original extensive cultivation of cork, pork, and Biodynamic vegetables. And he is doing just that. But to maintain the farm under tight economic conditions, he has developed intensive mass animal farming with thousands of pigs and turkeys. "If I didn't farm this way, I would have to fire my workers, and I feel responsible for them. What could I do?" His wife left him two years ago, taking their two daughters with her. Maybe this was not the only reason, but she could not stand the mass slaughters and the tension her husband is living under. Living alone in his big farm house, Claudio is urgently looking for an alternative and a new start in his life.

Fernando grew up in a little village in the Baixo Alentejo. Like all his classmates, he left for Lisbon to study and become an engineer. Before he finished

the studies, his father died and Fernando had to return home. Now he runs the apiary with 2000 bee hives. He produces organic honey but has to sell it for a low price to the industry, as the market for organic products is still too small. Thus his income is limited, and after 12 hours of daily work he feels very tired. He is 38 years old, smart, good looking, and speaks several languages. However, living rurally with his mother makes it difficult for him to find friends and a mate: the average age in the village is 52.

Fernando's and Claudio's stories illustrate the situation in many similar places. Sustainability is a complex issue: it involves politics, economics, and ecology, and it definitely involves cultural, social, and human conditions. If living in the countryside does not become more interesting for young people, we can never hope to have nature and land maintained and cared for.



Leila Dregger

Tamera permaculture water landscape from above.

Tamera pilgrimage through Portugal



Maria Soares



The peace community of Tamera did not come to the Alentejo originally to help this situation. In fact, it came because innovative and enthusiastic local authorities and the abundance of sun were good conditions for its aim of building a global peace model based on solar technology. However, 160 people living, working, and studying together make a difference—internationally by peace training, education, and nonviolent actions, and regionally by teaching ecological skills and creating a regional network for food and water sustainability.

The Tamera community decided that it would stop buying food from supermarkets by the end of 2010, and by then would also produce all its own electricity using solar energy. Why is this so important for a peace project? Because industrial production of food is a sort of war. Electricity comes from the plug, fuel from the petrol station, coffee from the supermarket, water from the tap, and steak from the butcher. Those who look a bit deeper than this will see the cruelty of today's industrial globalisation at the origin of our everyday consumer goods. Behind nearly every product you will find suffering, ignorance, and violence. Even those who are aware of it, and don't want to support it, find it difficult to become independent from these connections.

The need to find another strategy is not only a matter of ethics. An incident which happened two years ago in Portugal makes this clear. At a time of high oil prices, the drivers went on strike, and the fuel was no longer distributed. After one day, there was no petrol in many gas stations. After two days, the first supermarkets had empty shelves. After three days, two drivers who wanted to prevent strike-breakers from working were driven over. That quickly can the supply system collapse; and that thin is the layer of social peace.

An obvious solution for the insanity of globalisation is regionalisation: to reestablish the regional supply which global trade destroyed, and to do it with socially and ecologically friendly means. Every region of the world should be able to meet its basic needs for food, water, and energy. The special goods desired from further away could be bought or bartered from other countries.

The task of Tamera—building a model for a peace culture—includes showing that



regional food and energy autonomy is possible without lowering quality of life. In order to do so, one team at Tamera is working on the permaculture water landscape, where a part of the food needed is grown. The community also produces olive oil, honey, and herbs. Another team develops a regional network for sustainability. Its aims are to share knowledge about ecological skills, share the supply and production of basic food, water, and energy needs, and cultivate social contacts.

Tamera started to meet local farmers and traders, and so we met Claudio. Very quickly, we agreed on a win-win-situation: starting in 2010, he will produce olive oil, rice, cereals, oat flakes, and vegetables especially for the needs of Tamera. Additionally he will give Tamera all the things he cannot sell and would have to destroy. This arrangement gives Claudio the possibility of producing independent of the market. Therefore he is not forced to throw away fruits that are too small or don't

have the normal shape. He will even earn much more than the market price, and Tamera will get valuable organic food at a reasonable cost.

Now, in the spring of 2010, we stand in the stable which last year held 3000 turkeys. Their shouts still seem to fill the air. But the stable is empty, and soon it will be a place to store cereals. Having seen the new economic possibilities in his cooperation with Tamera, Claudio has taken the risk to eliminate, step by step, his industrial livestock farming. Even more hopeful, on a visit to Tamera he saw the possibilities of permaculture. Now, two ecologists from Tamera will advise him on how to build a water landscape on a part of his land. Thus Claudio will join the movement to reforest the land and bring back the water. "My vision is to save this beautiful land and make a part of it a retreat and educational place for city people to learn natural cycles."



Maria Soares

The visitors also experience something which has been lost in the villages: a vital social life of different age groups.

for pollinating our fruit trees.”

Four times a year, Tamera invites interested people for an open Saturday. Those are days to get to know some of our sustainable tools and methods. For most of our neighbours, permaculture, compost toilets, solar energy systems, and strawbale buildings are still very exotic. School classes and University students come to observe in practice the ecological systems they have studied. Local farmers, politicians, teachers, and journalists enjoy this day; they see the presence of water in every season, lunch cooked by solar energy, and an abundance of food growing without fertilizers. Representatives of the beautiful neighbouring village Amoreiras come to see a plant-based system for water purification to decide if they want to build it in their village too. At the same time, the visitors also experience something which has been lost in the villages: a vital social life of different age groups. This is what can bring life back to the villages.

Bringing back sustainability and saving the rural areas means reestablishing the regional circuits that have been cut down in the times of industrialisation. In order to bring back life to the countryside, the connections and synergies have to be reinvigorated on a new and modern level, such as between producers and consumers, between water and trees, between bees and trees, between young and old people. And even between men and women, as the example of Fernando shows: on one of the open Saturdays at Tamera, he met Ilona, an Italian woman. Now she is preparing to move to his farm. “Although I love him very much, I could not imagine following Fernando onto his remote farm without having a place like Tamera nearby. We can always go there and meet friends, get inspiration, have cultural life.”

In the end, even an international community like Tamera has to face the fact that one day—maybe after peak oil, after the next financial crisis, or after climate change—it will not be global contacts that will help us to survive. Instead, it will be the surrounding region and the neighbourhood, with stable and trustful networks. Now is the time to develop them. ♦

Agreements like this could become the basis for cooperatively meeting basic needs in the future, with communities telling farmers what they need, and farmers growing it for them.

Not all the foods we commonly consume are produced in Portugal. For example, neither sugar cane nor sugar beets are cultivated in this country anymore. But there is something much better and healthier than sugar to provide sweetness: honey.

Twelve bee hives at Tamera are not enough for our needs, and so we got to know Fernando. Buying organic honey from Fernando is cheaper than buying honey in the supermarket, and still, by selling to Tamera, he earns nearly double what he would by producing for industry. Tamera coworkers also help to move the bee hives. As Silke from the ecology team says, “This is synergy: We help Fernando, but the bees in our permaculture landscape help us. They are the most important insects



Leila Dregger, 50, freelance journalist from Germany, former publisher of a women's magazine and book writer, joined Tamera in 2003. She works in Tamera's political network office especially to build a bridge to the Portuguese people. Her aim is to establish a school for peace journalism in Tamera. For more about Tamera, its visitor programs, and Summer University (July 25-August 5, 2010), see www.tamera.org.

Seeing the Good in the World: Connecting Communities and Students for Sustainability Education and Transformation

By Joshua Lockyer



Photos courtesy of Joshua Lockyer

“I think a lot of people subscribe to the idea that intentional communities are cloistered away, and only focused on improving their own immediate societies. It was wonderful to see how each and every place we visited articulated how important it was to extend the benefits of cooperative living to everyone, not just those who actually live with them.”

This quote from one of my students indicates the impact that visits to intentional communities have on students in higher education. As an anthropologist and environmental studies teacher, I believe that providing students opportunities to experience intentional communities is an excellent way to explore the nuts and bolts of sustainability and participate in positive social transformation. This short article explores my experiences in this area and presents a call for communitarians and academic researchers to come together for a broad discussion about connecting communities, students, and academic institutions for sustainability education and transformation.

Intentional Communities in a Summer Field School

“This was one of the most educational and fun experiences of my life and I truly went home with a new perspective on our society and my life in general.”

In the two years after finishing graduate school in 2007, I taught about intentional communities mostly in the abstract. I gave brief lectures on them in my introductory anthropology courses and even taught a one-credit freshman seminar on ecovillages. Throughout, most students did not show the greatest enthusiasm. A topic that held my attention for 10 years was not captivating for my students.

This began to change during summer 2009 when I co-taught a field school on the human ecology of the Southern Appalachian region during which we took students to visit a number of intentional communities. These visits came on the tail of several weeks spent learning about transformations in human-environmental relationships in the region over the last millennium. These transformations tended not to be positive in nature. From European colonialism and its effects on native cultures and landscapes to industrial-scale timber harvesting and mountaintop removal coal mining to the decline in agroecological diversity in the region, a series of negative scenarios confronted us. While it was exciting to immerse ourselves in the landscapes and communities in which these changes occurred, the experience was not particularly uplifting.

However, we also wanted to bring to light positive trends in the region: Cherokee cultural revitalization, an elk reintroduction program, renewable energy projects, local and organic food movements, and intentional communities. Moving roughly chronologically through the environmental history of the Southern Appalachians, toward the end of our itinerary we turned our attention to

groups of people attempting to reinhabit this place. At this point, the tone of the course and the attitude of the students began to shift. Perhaps it was my own enthusiasm. My knowledge about the region was rooted in my long-term relationships with several intentional communities there. I think that seeing and talking with groups of people engaged in deliberate endeavors to change their relationships with each other and with the surrounding environment provided a sense of positive possibilities.

Learning about the communities was challenging as well. How could people choose to share ownership of land and other property with so many other people? How could people be willing to sit in meetings discussing minor details for so long? How could people put up with not having cell phone access 24 hours a day, seven days a week? These seemed contrary to what students expected from life. Students were also challenged by the practical, daily realities of community life. We spent 48 hours at an ecovillage and during that time, I was the only one to use the composting toilet. Students yearned for a “real” shower. Bathing in the creek didn’t do the trick. Still, I could see that these experiences began to open up new possibilities for them. Simply seeing that other people could do something different was empowering.

Undergraduate Research on Intentional Communities

“I think intentional community building is one way, one step to creating a better world. It’s great to see these communities in action instead of just having an abstract idea of what they are like.”

Fast forward to spring semester 2010. A colleague and I received a small grant for research on intentional communities. The grant was part of a larger, campus-wide project that aims to determine how research, public policy, and citizen action can combine to contribute to more “livable lives” in the region surrounding our campus. Recognizing that intentional communities are inherently formed in



Opposite page: Students in the Human Ecology of the Southern Appalachians Summer Field School take a tour of an urban permaculture community in Asheville, North Carolina. This page top: Students in the Human Ecology of the Southern Appalachians Summer Field School take a tour of an ecovillage outside Asheville, North Carolina. Above: Students in the St. Louis Intentional Communities Research Group learn about cohousing at an emerging cohousing community in St. Louis, Missouri.

pursuit of lives more livable, we believed their endeavors should inform the larger project. Rather than simply writing a report or doing library research, we decided to get our students actively engaged with some of the intentional communities around campus. We wanted them to experience the transformative potential intentional communities hold and to use their fresh perspectives to help us bring this potential to light.

We chose to use appreciative inquiry to engage community members in discussions focused on the most positive aspects of their communities. Following on the idea that intentional communities are creating the change they wish to see in the world, we ask mostly about not the problems that local communitarians are responding to, but the solutions they’re creating. Our research focuses on community members’ experiences of the ways in which community living contributes to things like increased economic security and social support, a better sense of health and well-being, and reduced ecological footprints—all essential components of any transition to a more sustainable

(continued on p. 75)

Sustainability: Reflections from an Eco-Warrior

By Bruce Davidson

The thrill and the wonder of opening one's heart to the complexity and beauty of all life can be both terrifying and exhilarating. Letting go into this wonder is really what sustainability is about.

Joy and fulfillment come into your life when you consciously act to enhance your own and others' well-being. That joy far exceeds any satisfaction that might come from the accumulation of wealth or power.

Society has created a system of value not tied to the good of all beings. The dilemma is how to emerge from the delusions of what constitutes happiness or a good life, i.e., consumption and consumerism, and recognize that happiness and fulfillment occur through serving the well-being of all. Having worked on this for 36-plus years, I'm greatly encouraged to see the stranglehold of materialism on humanity's consciousness now loosening its grip and giving way to sincere interest and movement towards sustainability.

Our local town reflects this shift in consciousness. When Sirius Community first decided to put up a wind generator for electricity, in 1999, the town balked at the idea. After countless meetings with the board of health and a very long process, we received provisional permission to go ahead. Six years later, the town invited me to join their energy committee because they wanted to put up a wind generator behind the town hall.

People have come to Sirius with the idea of learning the nuts and bolts of green building, alternative energy, and permaculture. More often than not, they are confronted with the limitations in their attitudes toward life



Brice Wilson



Amy Sophia Marashinsky

Opposite page: Bruce climbing the wind tower. This page left: Sirius Community Birthday Gathering. This page right: Elana and Llani Davidson repairing Kailasha.

that create their road blocks to living sustainably. What they learn—what helps them most—is to take responsibility for their experience and to open to what truly constitutes a joyful, satisfying life: simple living; positive, heartfelt human connections; and service.

In order to live sustainably, one must do more than teach or learn skills. One must embody the principles and values that lead to a sustainable life: love, compassion, and a commitment to the highest good for all beings. Without embodiment, skill learning becomes another theoretical or intellectual exercise. The most successful educational experiences are simultaneously intellectual, spiritual, and practical; they come through the combination of the head, the heart, and the hands, and through living the principles and values that create an environment where everyday life is a sustainable statement.

At Sirius, people have discovered themselves and the joys and possibilities of a new way of living, one where connection with others is important, living simply is valued, time spent working together is joyful and fun, and meditation brings peace. Significantly, they discover that they are not alone and there are others who share their values. The change in consciousness is deep and profound and influences their lives long after they leave.

Many people come to Sirius wanting to change their lives. Sometimes they are no longer satisfied with the “good” life they have created for themselves. Sometimes they have been through a life-changing trauma. They are open.

A man from an extremely wealthy background came to Sirius, bringing with him all the family pressures and expectations that accompany inherited wealth. He ended up in one of the smallest living spaces in the entire community. Through the process of living here, joining in the meditations, working with me three days a week, and participating in all aspects of

community life for roughly three years, he found the inner confidence to live simply. He felt at peace with his commitment to use his wealth to support projects promoting planetary peace and well-being.

One of our apprentices came from a gang in New York City. Roughly 18 years old, he had a chip on his shoulder and was enmeshed in the culture of violence and revenge. On his first day, he refused to participate in anything. He came to meals and wouldn’t clean up, he wouldn’t accept being told anything, and he was disruptive. Instead of getting angry, we worked to give him love. Instead of getting frustrated, we were determined to be accepting and to model right relationship. After two months in our apprenticeship program, he became willing to participate fully in the life of the community. When he left, he saw more possibilities and a wider horizon for himself. He now wanted to become a professional green builder. He returned to his previous environment, determined not to get caught up again in the negative downward spiral of gang violence.

We hosted an international program for youth from all over the world, mostly from affluent backgrounds. One indigenous aboriginal male teenager, coming from a reservation outside Los Angeles, California, felt alienated from the sustainable vision of his elders. Because of his background and because he had been hostile and mistrusting of the rest of the youth group, I invited him to help me run the sweat lodge ceremony. He called the reservation to get permission from his grandfather. After the ceremony was over, he was radiant, a changed young man. He told me that because young people from all over the world had participated in, accepted, and were deeply moved by the sacred ceremony of his people, he felt he and his traditions had value, and was now able to open up and connect with them.

(continued on p. 76)

Sirius Community

Sirius Community, 72 Baker Rd, Shutesbury MA 01072 USA, 413-259-1251, www.siriuscommunity.org, teaches spirituality and sustainability by demonstrating them as a way of life. For 31 years Sirius has taught courses on permaculture, organic gardening, natural building, simple living, and land stewardship ecology. We host our own programs for interns, apprentices, and guests, and facilitate tours of our site which include use of appropriate technology (wind- and solar-powered), vegetable-oil-powered vehicles, and composting toilets. Our conference center and facilities are also used by outside presenters. We interface with the larger community by doing presentations, have a strong educational presence on the internet via our website, and continue to develop social and spiritual connections with the local neighbors and community.



Ecovillages and Academia

By Daniel Greenberg

We are living in a unique time, not just in human history, but in *planetary* history. From the war in Iraq to the war on rainforests; from global markets to global warming—it is clear we *must* learn to live in ways that honor all life. Yet, as a species, humans seem almost evolutionarily unprepared to address the global issues facing us. For the most part, business is going on as usual; governments—at best—are thinking ahead only to the next election; and, as Oberlin Professor David Orr has said, “We are still educating the young as if there were no planetary emergency.”

We now need to move beyond the industrial era and begin to train leaders for the 21st century—leaders who know how to *heal* the Earth and build durable economies and sustainable communities. But how? Einstein once said, “We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” So perhaps we also need to move beyond the ivory towers of traditional academia and create campuses and pedagogies that are better able to educate for a sustainable future.

Worldwide, ecovillages are striving to create high quality, healthy lifestyles *and* low ecological impacts. These ecovillages

are developing and refining ecological and social tools such as community-scale renewable energy systems, ecological design, organic farming, holistic health and nutrition, consensus decision making, and mindfulness practices such as yoga and meditation.

Ecovillages are increasingly being used as “campuses” where students learn about sustainability while actually living it. Ecovillages such as Crystal Waters (Australia), Findhorn (Scotland), and Auroville (India), and, in North America, Sirius, EcoVillage at Ithaca, The Farm, and Earthaven, have already had considerable successes as educational centers and in creating ongoing partnerships with government agencies, research centers, and schools of higher learning. And organizations such as Living Routes are helping to build bridges between ecovillages and academia by creating college-level semester programs based in ecovillages around the world.

Why Academia Needs Ecovillages

To understand why ecovillages offer ideal campuses for sustainability education, we need to compare them with traditional universities. Regardless of what classes students take, the

following list illustrates the hidden curriculum, or “metanarrative” as Chet Bowers would call it, that students learn simply through their day-to-day participation and involvement:

Conservative vs. Experimental

Universities tend to be burdened by cumbersome bureaucracies and are slow to change. In fact, the basic structure of universities has not significantly changed since the Middle Ages.

Ecovillages are physical and social “laboratories,” experimenting with new technologies, social structures, and worldviews. They tend to have a trial and error mentality and are quick to adjust to changing conditions, challenges, and opportunities.

Hierarchical vs. Heterarchical

The power structure of universities is very top-down, with power emanating from the president down to the provosts, deans, faculty—and, at the bottom rung, students. The hidden agenda is one of “power over” and submission to authority, which is consistent with the conventional attitude that humans are meant to dominate and subdue nature.

In ecovillages, there is a wide diversity of relationships and members tend to interact on more or less an equal footing. Individuals might cook a meal together one day, sit in a budget meeting another day, and perhaps help harvest vegetables on yet another. These interdependent sets of relationships help members get to know each other on many levels and better understand the complexity of living systems.

Competitive vs. Cooperative

Universities are competitive on all levels—among students for the best grades; among faculty for grants, tenure, and recognition; and among schools for prestige and endowments.

While competition exists within ecovillages, the norm tends toward cooperation with members assuming as much responsibility as they are willing to handle. The success of individuals is typically viewed as inherently tied to the success of the community as a whole.

Fragmented Knowledge vs. Transdisciplinary Knowledge

Universities have responded to the exponentially increasing rate of knowledge generation with ever more sub-specializations within disciplines. Pat Murphy, director of Community Service in Yellow Springs, Ohio, refers

to the “silo” mentality of higher education where institutions “stockpile” knowledge within discreet containers that are functionally isolated from each other.

Ecovillages recognize that real-life issues rarely exist within the boundaries of disciplines. For example, the decision to put up a windmill requires knowledge within the fields of appropriate technology, engineering, regional and community planning, governance, and even sociology and anthropology. The decision to create an organic farm crosses disciplines of agriculture, nutrition, philosophy and ethics, business, education, and communications, among others. While able to train specialists, ecovillages are uniquely positioned and equipped to train much-needed *generalists* who possess “lateral” rigor across disciplines to complement “vertical” rigor within disciplines.

Academic Community vs. Living Community

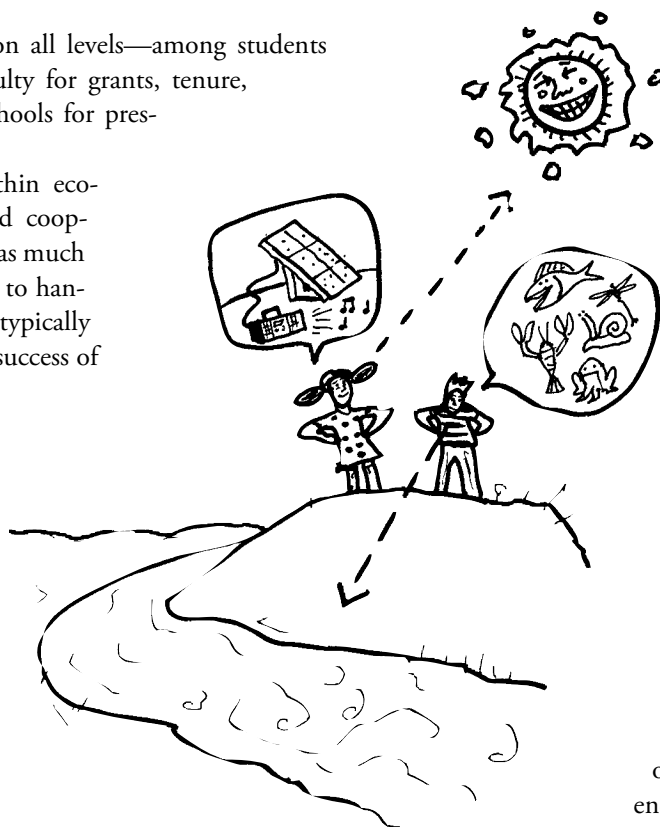
Many students claim that “gaining a sense of community” is a primary motivation to attend college. While this is certainly available, it is also true that most relationships in academia are mediated by specific, rather narrow roles—student/teacher, fellow researcher, classmate, etc.

If a sense of community is the goal, wouldn't it be more fulfilling to immerse oneself in a “living” community where members have a wide range of relationships, hold a common vision, and are committed to each other's long-term growth and development? Small class-size, the use of authentic assessment methods,

and the creation of “learning communities” in which students have opportunities to deeply reflect on and share about their experiences further support their learning and growth.

I believe humans are “hard-wired” for community and tend to resonate with human-scale institutions in which they can both know and be known by others.

Margaret Meade, the noted anthropologist, observed that for 99.9 per cent of our evolution, we lived in tribes. Many people in modern, “developed” countries have lost a sense of community so thoroughly that their closest acquaintances are characters on TV shows. The sense of belonging that students experience within ecovillages both awakens and fulfills a need that many did



not even know they had. And once nourished, this sense of belonging tends to expand to include ever broader communities—both human and non-human.

Theoretical vs. Applied

Academic types tend to stay in their heads—and their arm-chairs—and maintain a detached, theoretical perspective of the world. Researchers use the myth of “objectivity” as a rationale to stay removed from their subject matter and, consequently, often create knowledge, but rarely wisdom.

Ecovillages, in order to survive and prosper, must focus on practical knowledge and wisdom that can be applied in real-world settings. Theory is in the service of “what works” rather than the other way around. Ecovillages are inherently “experiential”—a word that many universities are loath to even use. Students often claim they learn more through internships and service learning opportunities than in even the best seminars.

Secular vs. Spiritual

Not only are most universities very hands-off, they also tend to separate our heads from our hearts—and typically only care about our heads. Consequently they tend to support a Cartesian view of the universe as a soulless machine to be manipulated and controlled by humans.

While some are explicitly religious, most ecovillages embrace a larger, more eclectic spiritual container in which members are supported to be “in process” and engaged with large questions of life and meaning. Yoga, meditation, and silence are common features of many ecovillages, and students on Living Routes programs have pursued vision quests as a way to deeply reflect on their relationship with themselves, each other, and the world.

Large Footprint vs. Small Footprint

Universities are beginning to incorporate more ecological design and building, but for the most part they are still incredibly resource-intensive institutions and not very attuned to their impact on their region or the world. Recycling and compact fluorescents are recent phenomena on many campuses and very few campuses even attempt to buy food locally, not to mention organically.

Ecovillages strive to live well, yet lightly. While many assume ecovillages aspire to self-sufficiency, this is rarely accurate. Most

look to their bioregion or watershed as the unit of land and culture that should become more self-reliant. Ecovillages often serve as regional catalysts for reducing ecological impacts by supporting local initiatives such as organic agriculture and local distribution networks so resources do not have to be shipped great distances.

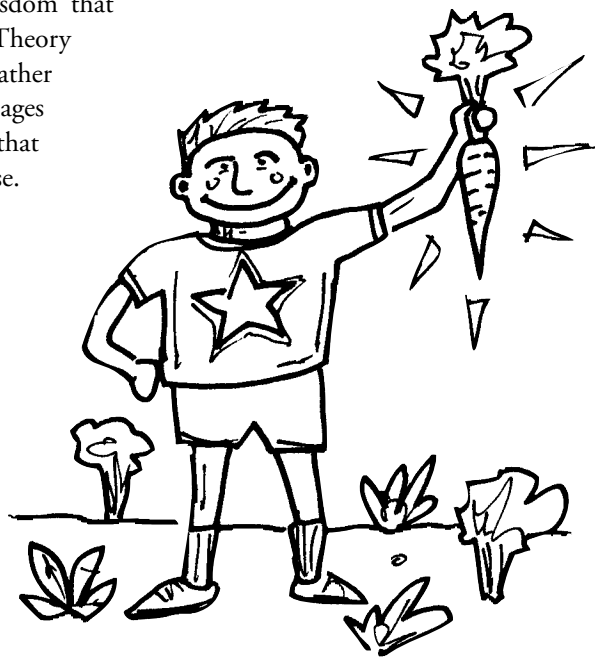
Cross-Cultural vs. Cultural Immersion

Most campuses enroll students from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Yet typically these lifestyles and traditions are subsumed under the melting pot of the academic culture with few opportunities for cultural expression or exchange.

In ecovillages, perhaps because they are “living” rather than “academic” communities, there tend to be fuller expressions of members’ cultural backgrounds through festivals, rituals, language, and food. Even further, in traditional, indigenous ecovillages, students have the opportunity to truly immerse themselves in vivid and full-featured cultures that both honor the past and are consciously reaching towards the future. For example, on Living Routes’ programs in Senegal, US and Senegalese students join together to explore sustainable community development within indigenous ecovillages, which provide rich contexts for cross-cultural exchange and understanding. These programs are frequently life-changing experiences in which students experiment with and adopt wholly new ways of being and thinking.

Problem Oriented vs. Solution Oriented

Last, but perhaps most important, universities tend to be primarily focused on dissecting and understanding “problems.” It is obviously critical that we continue to study and better understand the serious local and global issues facing us. But there comes a point when students “get it” and need to either do something about it or risk becoming overwhelmed with negativity and despair. Worse, some students even become emotionally numb in an unconscious effort to defend their hearts against the seemingly insurmountable social and environmental problems facing humanity and the Earth.



Ecovillages give students important opportunities to be a part of the solution and learn how they can make a positive difference in the world. They are not utopias, but after spending time living and learning in an ecovillage, students can never again say, “It can’t be done,” because they see people wholly devoted to right livelihood and creating a sustainable future. It then comes back to students to ask themselves, “What am I going to do? How can I make a difference in my own life and in my own community?”

Why Ecovillages Need Academia

The above comparisons may seem like an argument to run, not walk, away from traditional academia, but there are also important reasons to build bridges and work together.

First, academia is changing. With an increasing internationalization of the curriculum, interest in community partnerships, and recognition of the need for ecological design and interdisciplinary research, universities are beginning to see ecovillages as natural collaborators. Also, technological changes such as the internet and distance learning are making the large infrastructures of campus-based universities increasingly irrelevant and out-dated.

Second, universities are not going away anytime soon. In the US, higher education is approximately a \$350 billion/year business. That’s the GDP of Belgium! And this is not counting the *trillions* of dollars invested in facilities and resources. And universities are where the students are! Two out of every three high school graduates in the US go directly to college, and nationwide more than 16 million students are currently enrolled. Worldwide, by 2010 there were expected to be approximately 100 million college students (well more than the population of Germany!) and this number may reach 150 million by 2025.

Third, ecovillages need help in order to reach their highest potential. As advanced as ecovillages are in terms of providing campuses for sustainability education, I believe they are still in *kindergarten* in terms of what is truly needed to educate professionals capable of building the institutions and systems

required for a sustainable world to be possible. While programs offered through Living Routes and individual ecovillages are a good start, we need to further collaborate with academia to create “communiversities” where students can spend *years* in ecovillages and other related organizations and gain the background and skills needed to enter the workplace as professionals in fields as diverse as appropriate technologies, habitat restoration, sustainable agriculture, group facilitation, holistic health, ecological design, and green building.

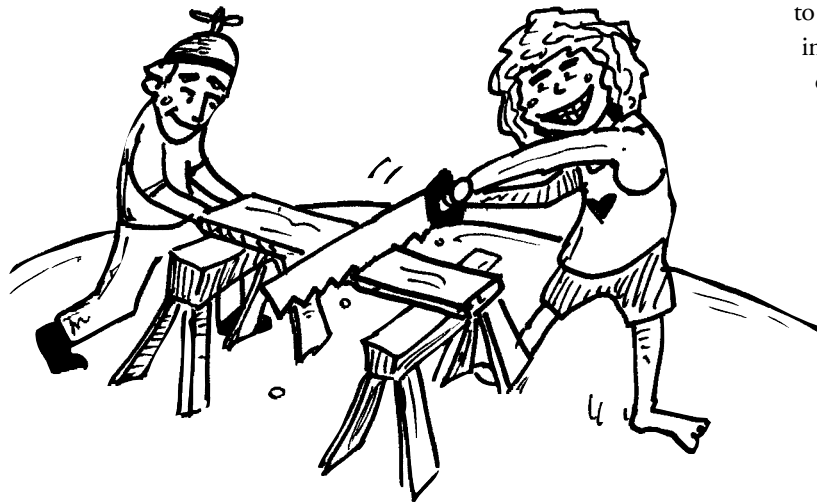
The fourth and most important reason for ecovillages to reach out to academia is that college-age students represent a powerful leverage point in the world’s “Great Turning toward a more Ecological Age,” as Joanna Macy refers to it. Many talk about members of the college population as “emerging adults” in that

they are mature enough to ask the big questions yet also open to radical alternatives and new life directions. Emerging adults are key to the dissemination of emerging paradigms, and the world desperately needs leaders who are able to think—and act—outside of the box.

The novelist Frederick Buechner once wrote that, “Vocation is the place where one’s deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Never

before has this been more true—or necessary. Building bridges between ecovillages

and academia is literally building bridges to a more sustainable future. What an amazing time to be alive! What an honor to be a part of this Great Turning! ♦



Daniel Greenberg has studied and directed community-based educational programs for over 15 years. He visited and corresponded with over 200 US intentional communities for his Ph.D. dissertation on children and education in community, and later spent a year at the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland working with children and families there. He is the founder and Executive Director of Living Routes, which develops accredited ecovillage-based education programs that promote sustainable community development. He lives at the Sirius Community in Shutesbury, Massachusetts with his wife Monique and their two daughters, Simone and Pema. This article is adapted from a chapter written for the book Beyond You and Me: Inspiration and Wisdom for Community Building (Permanent Publications, Hampshire, UK, 2007).



Leadership for Social Change: Living Routes in Action at Huehucoyotl

By Giovanni Ciarlo

Huehucoyotl Ecovillage was started in Tepoztlan, Mexico in 1982 by an international group of artists, environmentalists, and social activists with the vision of creating a demonstration model of sustainable community living, where we could engage in action-learning education, creativity, and fun-filled activism. After many years of living and learning about various aspects of sustainability (personal, social, and ecological), and exploring how to develop healthy and empowering leadership qualities in ourselves and others, in 2005 we partnered with Living Routes, a study-abroad organization based in Amherst, Massachusetts that offers college-level sustainability study programs rooted in ecovillages around the world. Through Living Routes, we offer a condensed version of the leadership style we have developed in a three-week January term course titled Leadership for Social Change. Students learn basic facilitation techniques, compassionate communication tools, and self-awareness skills that explore their social identity and their emerging values of social justice and inclusiveness.

Students are taken through an action-learning process of discovering their strengths and personal skills in a group setting, with the ultimate goal of researching, developing, presenting, and implementing a community service project that meets strict criteria of sustainability, group integration, and limited resources.

The first week of this program focuses on academic work related to facilitation and communications skills, with a good amount of

personal discovery and social identity exercises. Then the students go on field trips to get more acquainted with Mexican culture and heritage. One of these trips takes the students to meet a women's organization that works through local campesinos groups (subsistence farmers) to help the poorest families in the state meet basic needs of nutrition and economic security. The organization provides micro-credit funding to families and individuals to start small businesses in their villages. Students also visit small poultry operations, a shoe store, a nopal (cactus) farm, an ecotourism park run by locals, and other examples of leadership projects that make a direct difference to the communities in which they are located. Informed by this background, the students then research, interview, propose, and decide with ecovillage members what service project they will dedicate their last week to completing.

The first year we hosted this action learning program, the students decided to build a bus stop on the road where Huehucoyotl's driveway starts. This was well received by the community and the local people who rely on bus service but have no defined place to wait for the bus or to take shelter from the rain when waiting. However, this admirable service project presented some unexpected challenges that the course organizer (I) had to deal with after the students left the ecovillage. As it turns out, the municipality of Tepoztlan, where our ecovillage is located, had been locked in a struggle with the local bus service company about where they would put three bus stops along the route that goes past Huehu-



the works. It took quite a bit of smooth talking with officials, and the support of a couple of local residents who attested to the benefit of the project to the local community, before we were dismissed with a light scolding and the project got approval. It has been one of the most used public spaces in the area, and a big success with the local community. But it also taught us an important lesson in local politics and conflict resolution.

Another year, students decided to build a new recycling center for the community. Since the old center was only a temporary shack that was untidy and falling down, this was a perfect opportunity to create a model recycling station to separate the various recyclable materials coming out of the community: paper, metal, glass, plastics, etc. This project was partly inspired by the installation in one of the houses of a new roof using recycled material made from plastic water bottles. We had been recycling all the plastic that entered our community for the past 25 years, and only now realized that we could get it back in the form of plastic roofing panels guaranteed to last for 100 years and not leak.

Our students designed and built a spacious recycling room, closed off from invading animals and organized with signage and containers for each material. It actually blends nicely into the landscape and looks stupendous with its bamboo walls, metal roof, and elegant round adobe back wall. It is centrally located with easy access for the pick-up service. This has been one of the most successful demonstration projects the community has to share with the outside world. People come from the surrounding villages and households to look at it and take back the idea

to recycle in their own places. It has also become a feature of our tour of the community whenever we have groups looking for the application of sustainable systems.

The projects implemented by Living Routes students have greatly benefited our ecovillage and the surrounding area. We are proud of the leadership our students have provided and the improvements they've made to our community while learning by doing, just as we did from the beginning of our own collective undertaking. The challenges have been to choose projects and activities that integrate well with the needs of the community and the local bioregion, while making the best use of the students' skills and criteria. Few students had ever mixed concrete before, or designed a building, or even dealt with local politics, but these experiences have made them more aware of the issues and dynamics of leadership for social change through personal and group action and engagement. ♦

Giovanni Ciarlo is a cofounder of Ecoaldea



Huehuecoyotl (www.huehuecoyotl.net), and a consultant in sustainability and ecovillage design. He has an M.A. in Sustainable Communities and Socially Responsible Businesses from Goddard College, Vermont. Giovanni is the president of the board of both the Global Ecovillage Network (www.ecovillage.org) and Living Routes (www.livingroutes.org). He lives in his ecovillage in Mexico with his wife Kathleen Sartor part of the year, and leads arts in education programs in Connecticut with their musical group Sirius Coyote (www.siriuscoyote.org) the rest of the year.

ecoyotl—and about who would decide. By building the stop ourselves we had inadvertently bypassed their authority.

A few days after the students left, I got a visit from the planning department asking that I come in and explain why we did not take a permit for the bus stop. This was a big surprise, because for the last 23 years we had never needed to take out a permit before building our houses, or any other construction in our community. We always get the paperwork approved after the fact. I suspected a bribe request was in

Student Reflections

“I was really glad to have the opportunity to interview so many of the community members because I feel this was an integral step in choosing a worthwhile project. So often students on community service projects think they can change the world in one project—that they can just sweep into a place, build something, and have the residents be eternally grateful. I'm glad this certainly wasn't the sentiment among our group, and we took care to ask those most familiar with the local issues rather than assume our own knowledge to be superior.”

—Rebecca Berube, *Living Routes student, Huehuecoyotl, January 2010*

“At first I thought that the classroom work was dull and pointless, but I realized quickly that I was learning a lot. By not only learning about leadership, consensus, and communication, but also getting to act on these lessons and use them to create a real, touchable, feasible goal, I feel like I really learned.” —Emma Hutchens, *Living Routes student, Huehuecoyotl, January 2010*

Olympic-Sized Community

By Satyama Dawn Lasby

Two years ago I decided to take the plunge. That is, I decided to leave my corporate job in Vernon, British Columbia as the General Manager of the Chamber of Commerce and do exactly what I wanted to do. I wanted to live in community. I wanted to serve, experience unconditional love, and study meditation and yoga from authentic and traditional sources. I wanted to travel for a full year. At the end of all of that, I also wanted to live out a special dream: to live and work in Whistler, BC for the 2010 Olympics.

I have managed to do all of that, and coming out of the other side, I am now passionate about educating others about community and living sustainably.

To prepare myself for the time I was going to spend in India during my year of travel, I decided to live communally at a retreat centre in British Columbia. It was my first intentional community experience and a difficult one due to personality clashes with one of the owners and the mere fact that it was owned and not truly communal. The couple who owned it wanted to have several couples working the land in exchange for the living accommodation, but that vision wasn't in place at the time of my residence. It was still a retreat centre hosting wonderfully educational courses on self-development, but no one (other than the owners) lived there permanently.

I was one of about six volunteers who worked in exchange for food and accommodation. I learned a lot about communication through our daily meetings, based on the Findhorn Foundation model, in which we would plan out the day's work, food preparation, discuss how we were feeling, etc. I also learned about vegetarian cooking, composting, recycling, wind generation, and what it takes to run a retreat centre without a lot of resources. This experience prepared me for living at the

Osho International Meditation Resort in India, and has helped make me the person I am today. That person, in this moment, is working for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games in Whistler, BC, and occasionally writing for magazines and teaching yoga classes.

My previous careers focused on event planning. As a person who lives their dreams, I wanted to work for the biggest event in the world. When I was done with my year of travel, I made my way to Whistler to make that dream a reality. Finding accommodation, let alone a like-minded community, is no easy task in Whistler. It is a tourist destination, so many people from all over the world live in shared houses, working for the winter season so they can enjoy skiing or snowboarding on a daily basis. After two forced short-term moves, I ended up in one of these shared houses due to its location near to the village, a "community" of sorts, but not a conscious one, with five Australians, two English, one Korean, one French, two Kiwis, and me, the only vegetarian, the only one who meditates, the only one who owns a home and a vehicle. It is a year like no other, where rents are at an all-time high at \$1100/ month for a room, and landlords cash in on the number of people they put into a house that is shared.

One of the great things that happened in this house was the education of my housemates from all over the world. As a Canadian familiar with how Whistler functions as a resort community, I was able to see how the young people in this house learned about sorting and separating tin, plastic, glass, paper, cardboard, and compost. Whistler aspires to be a sustainable community, and because of its proximity to wildlife (bears, racoons, and other friendlies), the municipality puts the responsibility on the city's residents to bring their waste



to the depots, already sorted, instead of leaving it curbside. Until Whistler, none of the people in the house had ever sorted, or been responsible for the waste of 14 people and their guests. Reusable shopping bags and more conscious buying choices happened organically as it quickly became apparent how much waste was produced in the house.

Synchronistically, I landed a job with the Resort Municipality of Whistler working for Whistler Live!, an arm of the RMOW designated to produce all of the entertainment for the Olympics and Paralympics. It was a dream job, with the added bonus of being the sustainability coordinator for the organization, aligning with the province's commitment to host the greenest games in history.

It was a seemingly odd work situation, as I, a communal, hippie yoga teacher, was now in the midst of the millions of dollars being spent to put on the games and entertain the masses. I went to work on my sustainability assignment in between trips to the recycling depot and Whistler's famous Re-Use-It Centre.

To eliminate bottled water in the village, Whistler Live! provided all staff, contractors, and our entertainers with stainless steel water bottles that they could keep and refill. As many as 50 artists and performers were in our green rooms at once. All catering was done with washable dishes so money would not be spent on disposables. Artists were educated about Whistler's sustainability procedures, and given a document the community is very proud of, Whistler2010, which

I, a communal, hippie yoga teacher, was now in the midst of the millions of dollars being spent to put on the games and entertain the masses.

was designed with Smart Growth principles and full input from the community. Whistler Live! was also instrumental in eliminating air pollutants from fireworks by removing the fireworks from the nightly "Fire and Ice" show.

My position with Whistler Live! was one with merit because of the educational aspect and ability to share Whistler's vision of a sustainable community with the world. The most educational element of living this dream, however, was learning how dreams change when they become reality—like fantasies lived-out, or like our feelings about things we want, once we get them. Dreams change, people change. I am living the dream, yet when interacting with thousands of people each day through the Olympics, I am also conscious of the work that needs to be done to really educate people on how to live with greater awareness of the impacts of lifestyle on the environment. One small group of people (the performers for Whistler Live! and our municipality staff) are being exposed to our good efforts to preserve the planet, but there are so many that could benefit from that same exposure, as I watch hundreds of people stroll down the village only to throw their Starbucks coffee cup in the garbage instead of taking the time to recycle it.

While I am fortunate to be paid to be living my dream, it also puts me in the position of knowing just how much is being spent on the games. The expenditures of the Olympics are not sustainable. There are so many ways that money could have been saved where it wasn't. In fact, it seemed like it was there to spend, and then spend more because government funding was easily presented. While working for the Olympics was an "old" dream lived out, I can't help thinking how much I have changed since taking the plunge. Where I may once have been fascinated by titles, money, and marketing, I am now happier, and much more conscious of excess. The excess use of any resource, especially money, is no longer acceptable to me, no matter what the cause. ♦



Satyama Dawn Lasby is a freelance writer and artist living in Whistler, British Columbia at the moment.

Dedicated to discovering and teaching the way to the truth through meditation and yoga, she also likes to live in experimental situations. She can be reached at satyamadawn@gmail.com or found at www.meditationforathletes.com.



Misteur Valaire, one of the bands hired to entertain the masses during the 2010 Olympic Winter Games, drinks from stainless steel water bottles to prevent the purchase of plastic water bottles. Three bands per day were hired to perform, plus street performers, live artists, storytellers, and singer-songwriters.

Courtesy of photo:wpnn.org

Intentional “Colonies” and Tropical Sustainability

By Jon Kohl

Though Copenhagen negotiators wrangled and wrestled over cap-and-trade, technology transfer, mitigation funds, and other large-scale, multi-billion-dollar proposals to tackle climate change and move toward (energy) sustainability, they did not pay much heed to community transformation. Despite the lapse, many communities have transcended concern for merely their own environmental impact, and now reach regional and even international audiences with a sustainability message. Consider the ecovillage BedZED in England, Findhorn in Scotland, EcoVillage at Ithaca in New York, The Farm in Tennessee, Dancing Rabbit in Missouri, Lost Valley Educational Center in Oregon, or any of a host of others.

Despite the ascending role of intentional communities (ICs) in developed countries, intentional communities in developing countries require a different model for them to become both socially relevant and active promoters of sustainability.

In such countries, for ICs to be sustainability educators, they must offer more than educators, education centers, and a group of people dedicated to implementing sustainable technologies in their communities. In fact, the model often transplanted to developing countries makes such projects seem more like intentional colonies than intentional communities. And perhaps no country better demonstrates this phenomenon than Costa Rica.

By virtue of its high ecological attractiveness among foreign tourists and retirees alike, and its proximity to the United States, Costa Rica makes the perfect destination to study how development requires more than transplanting a successful northern model into southern waters where the concept of intentional community still strikes people as a foreign, perhaps even zany, idea.

The Intentional Colony

What then constitutes this transplanted model, the intentional colony, and why can it preclude sustainability education? The model exhibits the following characteristics, though any real IC may only exhibit some.

Strangers in a Strange Land

In Costa Rica we have several dozen ICs founded by foreigners and populated principally by foreigners, especially from the US.

Distant Shores

Foreigners often seek beaches, distant mountains, or secluded forest retreats, far from major population centers, to build their

own “little paradises” as marketing materials often boast.

A Lot Different

As in the US, a common model to finance such communities is for one person or a group of partners to acquire a property and then subdivide it into heritable lots which they then sell to those who value the concept and can pay—most frequently foreigners. As site plans distribute lots along roads so that each landowner can enjoy a chunk of forest or beach frontage, lot layout inhibits resident interaction.

For the Rich and Mobile

Just as in the US, this model largely excludes those who cannot pay, and Costa Rica does not require low-income housing within IC projects. In fact, most municipalities have no master plan at all to influence their development.

Where Are the Locals?

Consequently, except for local caretakers or those who earned the beneficence of owners, Costa Ricans remain excluded from such projects.

Local Benefits for Foreign Members

Most well-intentioned ICs import quality sustainability and spiritual practices to Costa Rica. Communities here specialize in yoga, spirituality, biodynamic agriculture and permaculture, human potential, conservation, holistic healing, and other laudable perspectives. Some communities have innovated the use of biodigestors, tree houses, natural building technologies, and solar power. Yet many communities restrict these activities largely for their own members.

Furthermore, some communities cater almost exclusively to foreigners in marketing abovementioned services, partially because local populations do not yet appreciate the value of holistic cleanses, natural medicine, group meditation, or even nonconventional agriculture, and also because they could not afford such services in any event.

The English Way

The communities often operate mostly or exclusively in English (with some notable exceptions), and their websites are completely English-oriented to the United States or Europe. Last year I attended the first conference of intentional communities in Costa Rica. Everyone spoke English, while the only Costa

Rican participants were those who worked on the host farm.

Community educational materials are largely in English because, in general, most educational materials in environmental and sustainability matters are produced in the US with very few being adapted to the Latin American context. My wife is a professor at the University of Costa Rica in environmental education and interpretation, and her students regularly struggle to obtain educational material adapted to Costa Rican reality.

Hardware over Software

IC advertising often focuses on the more tangible and attractive tropical rainforests, solar panels, rows of organic tomatoes, and other aspects of community hardware. They much less advertise a community's capacity to resolve conflicts, cooperate in the management of community buildings, or make consensus-based decisions. My wife and I contemplated buying a lot in just such a community project where the developer (a great guy with great intentions) was selling an IC concept and the first time we potential buyers met each other was to settle lingering doubts before settling our down payments. We felt no sense of community, trust, or transparency. The developer's

lawyer even refused to meet with us. Consequently, and with the recession's dissuasions, the deal fell apart.

Intentional Colonies Make Sustainability Education Difficult

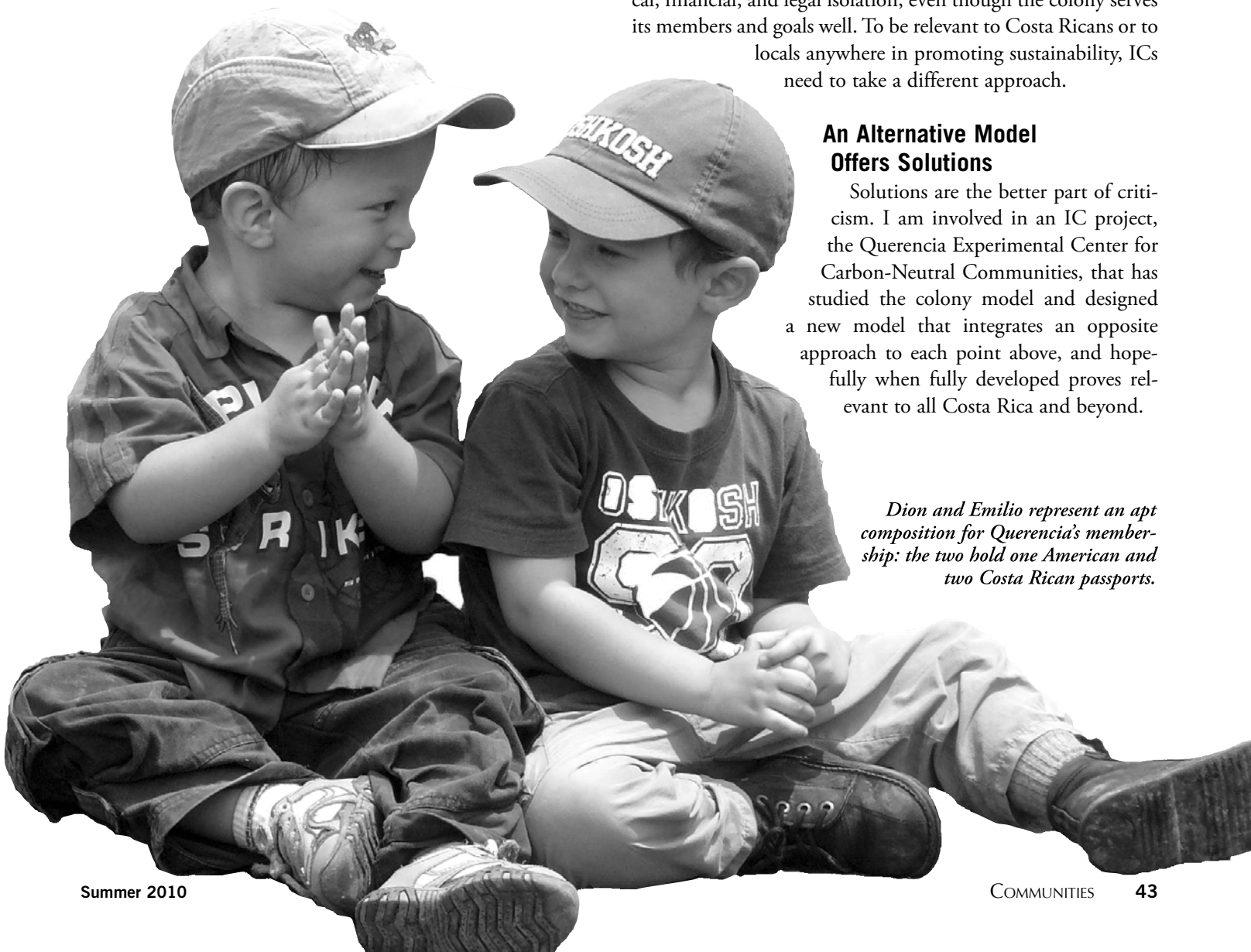
My assumption of sustainability in an IC context means that the IC nudges the region's place and people (not just its own property and its own people) toward sustainability. Otherwise the IC is little more than an intentional outpost, oasis, enclave, or colony. Some will argue that such well-intentioned communities assist foreigners in foreign lands to adopt more sustainable practices, and that the community itself, through wise land management and food production, is in fact sustainable with its concomitant educational value. Those definitions are fine and understandable, but to be generators of sustainability education, ICs must offer something more. Localization is key to sustainability and an IC can't promote localization if the locale doesn't benefit and integrate into the community's value chain.

Thus this environmentally sensitive model presents a hard sell for sustainability education, given its sociocultural, geographical, financial, and legal isolation, even though the colony serves its members and goals well. To be relevant to Costa Ricans or to locals anywhere in promoting sustainability, ICs need to take a different approach.

An Alternative Model Offers Solutions

Solutions are the better part of criticism. I am involved in an IC project, the Querencia Experimental Center for Carbon-Neutral Communities, that has studied the colony model and designed a new model that integrates an opposite approach to each point above, and hopefully when fully developed proves relevant to all Costa Rica and beyond.

Dion and Emilio represent an apt composition for Querencia's membership: the two hold one American and two Costa Rican passports.



Because intentional communities are still new to Costa Ricans, it has been challenging to convince Costa Ricans to join.

Composed Largely of Costa Ricans

Querencia starts out largely as a project of Costa Ricans with some foreign members who are committed to keep the project largely in Costa Rican middle-class hands. My criticism in this article is with community development models, not with individual foreigners.

Nearby Shores

For Querencia to be relevant to Costa Ricans, it must locate where most Costa Ricans live. Therefore we seek land within an hour and a half of the capital city. If our community locates beyond the distance a school bus would readily travel on a day visit, then we are too far.

A Lot Different from Lots

Our project must be accessible to middle-class professional Costa Ricans, a socioeconomic class, as in the US, that finds itself frequently left out of both assistance programs and commercial capital availability. Instead of a private corporation, the ecovillage portion of the Querencia Experimental Center may be managed by a cooperative owning the land and houses. Members own shares and build equity rather than own private lots.

Capitalization through Social Benefit

Private communities must capitalize through private means, thus raising costs and excluding Costa Ricans; a project that has high social benefit, our assumption goes, means that we can mix donor funding with private capital to finance our project. We also will provide social services, mainly educational, interpretive, touristic, training, and community outreach, as additional income streams.

Benefits for All Audiences

Our community will be the principal teaching tool for interpreting and educating about low-carbon and sustainable living. In a sense, the ecovillage is a living museum, and everyone who lives there necessarily contributes to the cooperative's business. Querencia has already formed an agreement with one Costa Rican-based school that offers sustainability courses for foreign university students and credit (www.earthedintl.org).

Spanish First

Spanish is the first language of Querencia. Our website is in English too because we are part of an international community to better leverage our social mission. We have also initiated discussions with a local university to develop a Costa Rican-centered curriculum for studying climate change and community.

Hardware and Software

Sustainability, just like a computer, requires both hardware and software to operate. Querencia thus focuses on building and energy technologies (inspired by Colombia's Las Gaviotas community) as much as the social and cultural techniques necessary to have a sustainable and functioning community (inspired by Mexico's Los Horcones community). In fact one of our founders is a Costa Rican psychologist who specializes in behaviorism and behavior change.

To summarize, the Querencia Experimental Center for Carbon-Neutral Communities is a nonprofit organization that researches and promotes sustainability techniques specifically adapted to developing country communities, both rich and poor, rural and urban, intentional and non-intentional. The ecovillage will be in effect the center's laboratory (in a similar way to B. F. Skinner's classic *Walden II* community), accompanied by a robust interpretive program (three of us founders are professionals in heritage interpretation and environmental education) that aims at a wide variety of audiences within Costa Rica.

Not without Its Challenges

Though the project has not yet capitalized, we already grapple with a number of challenges inherent in the model.

While the concept has attracted significant foreign interest, because ICs are still new to Costa Ricans, it has been challenging to convince Costa Ricans to join. This places us into the semi-vicious cycle of needing money and members to get land, and needing land to gain the credibility necessary to get money and members from within the country.

A corollary is that somehow we must maintain a balance between interested foreigners and Costa Ricans, to ensure the project remains largely Costa Rican.

Because spending capacity is lower for Costa Ricans than foreigners, we still have the challenge of financing houses. While we feel confident the concept and the NGO can garner exterior funding for land, for nonprofit projects, and even for the visitor center, no donor will likely contribute to our houses.

We strive to use transparent, participatory legal entities such as an association and a cooperative, but we also feel a strong pull to use a less transparent corporation that can much more rapidly get things done. Likely the secret is to forge the right mix of legal entities.

We hope in addition to work with many institutions throughout Costa Rica, especially its ICs, to better leverage and adapt their vast well of experience to Latin American society. Costa Rica has already committed itself to carbon neutrality by 2021, so if its ICs can help it reach that goal, then we can truly demonstrate the value of intentional communities, not colonies, in a post-carbon world. ♦

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Towards a Seventh Generation

By Understanding Israel, M.A. Education

There are many things to be shared with the Four Colors of humanity in our common destiny as one with our Mother the Earth.

—Resolution of the Fifth Annual Meetings of the Traditional Elders Circle, 1980¹

The Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy mandated that its chiefs consider the influence of their actions and decisions on the seventh generation yet to be born.² What do our children retain from our dedication to sustainability as a community?

In my intentional community, we practiced organic gardening, recycling, seed preservation, water quality enhancement and conservation, and a variety of other earth-friendly habits. But what sustainable practices did our children retain and take to the next generation? I decided as part of my work towards a Doctorate in Educational Leadership to ask them.

They are grown now, with the youngest being 21 and the oldest 46. Via Facebook, email, and phone conversations, I queried 12 of the children who represented a cross-section of the youth I helped care for during my 26 years in our community. Ten replied.

I used this definition of sustainability graciously lent to me by Native Hawaiian elder, Puanani Rogers: “Aloha ‘aina, malama’ aina, ahupua’a style living... Aloha ‘aina simply means to love and respect the land, make it yours and claim stewardship for it. Malama ‘aina means to care for and nurture the land so it can give back all we need to sustain life for ourselves and our future generations, and, an ahupua’a is an ancient concept of resource uses and management based on families living in a division of land that connects the mountains to the reefs and the sea.”³

Our children were raised in an educational environment

based loosely on the principles of John Holt.⁴ The schooling was classified as “experimental” status under the laws then in place affecting homeschooled children in Washington State.⁵

I discovered that all the mothers who responded (and one grandmother) were teaching the next generations about gardening, recycling, and careful selection of healthy foods. All the mothers felt they were not doing enough. However, I am sure they are also feeling overwhelmed with responsibilities of young children, husbands, and jobs. They are definitely doing their part as an integral link to the future of our planet.

In contrast, the men who responded recounted that it takes a lot of work to prepare the ground, plant the seeds, maintain organic practices, and finally harvest the bounty. In reflection, I wonder if perhaps we depended upon the men in our agrarian community for a heavier workload? However, the good news is that most of the men, along with most of the women, were taking responsibility to recycle, and were practicing resourcefulness by limiting their consumption of products that negatively alter our planet. The men also often mentioned a factor that cannot be easily measured: the inspiration to create a sustainable life based on the simplicity of childhood experiences in general. Tam Hunt, now an attorney with his own company Community Renewable Solutions LLC, which is focused on environmental practices, reflected: “Seeds are planted at all stages of life and they bloom

*What sustainable practices did our children retain and take to the next generation?
I decided to ask them.*

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Editor's note: The following two articles explore how permaculture (an approach to designing human settlements and agricultural systems that mimic the relationships found in natural ecologies—see Wikipedia and a slew of online sources for further definitions) relates to education. The first compares permaculture's principles and practices to those of holistic education, and the second is an experience-based users' guide to teaching permaculture utilizing permaculture principles. While covering similar ground, each takes a distinct angle which we hope readers and educators will find both illuminating and useful.

Permaculture and Holistic Education: A Match Made in Heaven...and Earth

By Paul Freedman

After some years of study and practice in the field of holistic education, with much time spent digging deeply into its philosophical and theoretical foundations, I am noticing the resonance and commonalities between the microcosm of holistic education and the macrocosm of what seems to be a much wider global shift towards holism. In particular, recently I have felt drawn towards the holistic design principles and practices of permaculture. In my initial delving into this beautiful agricultural philosophy I everywhere see similarities and analogues to holistic pedagogy.

Fifteen years ago, as a progressive mainstream educator, I intuitively wished to bring kids into the “real world” and beyond the classroom’s four walls. At that time my impulse to include environmental education in my classroom practice drew me to lead my students on nature walks, building projects, or field-based craft work or science studies beyond the classroom’s four walls. Eventually I found my way to the Center for Ecoliteracy, and the wonderful work of David Orr, Fritjoff Capra, Zenobia Barlow, and others (www.ecoliteracy.org). It made so much sense to follow this lead and begin to grow food with kids, and in so doing integrate math, scientific observation, and practical work in the hands-on care of living organisms.¹

While exploring the field of ecoliteracy



Paul Freedman

Stormy with a chicken at the permaculture homestead.

I became familiar with the concept of place-based education, and the work of David Sobel and others.² Place-based education called my attention to the need to design curriculum specifically attuned to the particularities of specific children in a specific place and time. Students in my classes adopted local beaches, intertidal communities, or small pieces of land to study and care for.

Currently, I see all of these ways of engaging students with the larger biotic community embodied in the field of permaculture. Initially springing from the work of Bill Mollison and David Holmgren in the 1970s, permaculture is the study and practice of design principles which apply a holistic and integrated perspective, based on natural ecology, to human settlements and perennial agriculture.

Permaculture and holistic education share many common principles, values, and analogous practices. Permaculture often espouses the values or ethics of “earth care,” “people care,” and “fair share.”³ Permaculture’s ethic of care recognizes the inter-relatedness of living systems and whole systems within other whole systems. We cannot reflect on the productiveness of our garden without taking into account the entire homestead and all life—plant, animal, and human—that lives within or around it. We must then recognize how the homestead impacts and is impacted by the larger social community, the watershed, and so on.

This concept of wholes within wholes and the ethic of care that binds together any healthy system will sound familiar to many holistic educators. Various authors in this field have described it in different ways, but perhaps none have expressed it more clearly than Nel Noddings. In *The Challenge To Care In Schools*, Noddings articulates a beautiful alternative vision of education, where traditional disciplines of study are dissolved and supplanted by “spheres of care.”⁴ Noddings describes how schools might be places where children’s natural inclination to care for others is nurtured. Within the school they learn to care for themselves, loved ones, other distant people, animal and plant life, even inanimate objects, and most radically within schools, they may develop a caring ethic towards ideas and their own pursuit of learning.

Students at Salmonberry School (Orcas Island, Washington), where I work, learn about not only care for their own physical health but also social/emotional or “heart health.” This includes communication, conflict resolution, and care of the spirit through such things as yoga, guided and unguided meditations, and silence practiced as a regular part of the school’s rhythm. We also explore and practice care for the classroom community, including its large organic garden and small flock of chickens; and for our larger island community, through service learning projects like documenting and rehabilitating a small two-acre micro-island with the help of local marine scientists, and help-

ing support the local food bank.

The theory and practice of permaculture design includes specific principles and prescriptives especially relevant to holistic education: to observe and then interact, to notice the relationship between individual and community, to stay small and slow, and to integrate rather than segregate.⁵

Taking time to observe before attempting to modify through intervention is critical to any nurturing task. In permaculture, this principle is directed toward individual growing practices within specific locations. In a truly ecologically-based system, one-size-fits-all approaches don’t work. Similarly, the holistic educator dislikes impersonal national standards and instead focuses on the appropriate goal for *this* child, which can only be ascertained by talking with him, by watching her at work and at play, by taking into account her natural gifts, her preferred learning modalities, her interests and passions and even her family life, her community and her natural environment. At Salmonberry School, a significant part of each week is spent working with “Personal Interest Projects,” in which the teachers’ role shifts to that of facilitator; students define topics of personal passion and articulate guiding questions they wish to try to answer. Primary-grade students have been exploring a huge

range of subjects in this way, from a nine-year-old girl with Guatemalan ancestry studying Mayan culture, to a nine-year-old boy exploring his fascination with a particular World War II spy mission.

The permacultural grower’s practice shifts dramatically

away from the dominant contemporary agricultural practice of monoculture towards a recognition of the interrelated nature of living communities. Monoculture seems efficient at first blush, but quickly requires increasing reliance on machinery, pesticides, fertilizers, and fossil fuels that tend to deplete the life-giving nutrients in the soil and steadily decrease productivity. The permaculturist designs growing systems and speaks of “guilds,” thoughtful clusterings of different biotic organisms that provide one another with needed elements and nutrients. Similarly, holistic education shifts away from the rugged individualism and zero-sum competition embodied in mainstream contemporary education, in favor of a model that elevates the importance of community. Parker Palmer’s model of a “Community of Truth” exemplifies this vision.⁶ The needs and learning of the individual are carefully balanced against and strengthened through pursuing the growth and learning of the community. It is through the focus on neither the individual learner, nor the authoritarian teacher, but on the shared inquiry around the living subject, that transformational learning may emerge. At Salmonberry School, we encourage this community focus in many ways, including teaching elementary learners the skills of meeting facilitation. By mid-year, they are organizing

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The needs and learning of the individual are carefully balanced against and strengthened through pursuing the growth and learning of the community.

How to Add Zest to Your Sustainability Education Program

By Melanie Rios

I attacked my driveway with a sledgehammer the day after returning home from graduating from a permaculture design course. Soon friends from my community joined in, we rented a jackhammer for a few days, and within a few months, arugula and lettuce were growing where cars had been. My busy mind applied permaculture principles to everything from communicating with my family to improving the ecovillage where I lived to drafting proposals for rewriting our city's zoning codes. Eventually I began teaching permaculture design courses, and became curious about how I might bring permaculture principles to the art of teaching. Could using permaculture principles in education help create an educational environment that is as full of productivity, beauty, and joy as a permaculture-inspired garden?

Permaculture principles are an evolving set of ideas that can be applied to designing gardens, homes, cities, or any other human-created structure, even those that are invisible, such as economic systems. Some permaculture principles are common-sense ideas that might be said by our grandmothers (e.g., "Work smarter, not harder" or "Mistakes are tools for learning"), while some have a more scientific tone (e.g., "Each element supports many functions, and every important function is supported by many elements"). I will describe here how I have used some of the principles developed by David Holmgren, cofounder of permaculture, to improve my teaching of permaculture design courses at the Camassia Institute in Oregon, where students live and work together for five weeks.

Observe and Interact

The first permaculture principle on almost every permaculturalist's list is to observe before acting. When designing for someone's home, for example, we notice such things as where the water flows, the sun lands, the animals travel, the wind blows, and the neighbors are noisy, before proposing where to put gardens, trees, buildings, and walls. How could this principle of observation be applied to teaching?

Towards the beginning of each program, I ask participants to write down what they already know about permaculture, what they're wanting to learn in the course, and how they best learn. Then I meet with each participant individually over a meal to



offer “permaculture career coaching,” listening to their goals and making suggestions for books, mentors, internships, and other resources that might help them take steps towards these goals. I also observe participants while they learn; some are most awake during discussions, but hang back during hands-on sessions, while others appear drowsy through lectures and are fully engaged while working outside. All of this data helps me as I plan future lessons.

Interactions with students become influenced by my observations of them. My goal is to honor each student as they are, while creating a safe, stimulating, and nourishing place for them to become more knowledgeable, self-directed, and

empowered. Just as different plants thrive under different conditions depending on their needs, so students respond to different kinds of support.

One time, participants were taking turns standing up in front of the whole class to perform a skit, receiving applause when they were done. One participant said “I pass” when it was her turn to perform. How could I best support this person, who had appeared to be shy and uncomfortable since the course had begun? The other participants nervously watched how I might handle her refusal to participate. I might have verbally encouraged a different participant to stand up and give it a go, but for this girl I began clapping, and the others joined in. “Thank



Learning permaculture principles through dance.

Photos courtesy of Melanie Rios

you for being true to yourself, for honoring your right to be ‘at choice’ in this course,” I said. From then on she knew that whatever she chose to offer in class or not was fine, and in that climate of safety she chose to participate in all future activities, even alone in front of the group. Based on observation of her extreme shyness, I had guessed an important nutrient for her growth: the freedom to just watch.

Use and Value Diversity

Just as planting a diversity of crops nurtures healthy and productive plants, so does teaching using a variety of methods create a richer, more effective learning environment. Howard Gardner describes nine different learning styles, including learning through seeing, action, hearing, music and rhythm, immersion in nature, cooperating with others, reflecting alone, thinking logically, and spiritual insight. I rotate through these teaching methods so that everyone has a chance to learn using their preferred modes.

For example, here’s how I have facilitated people learning the names and meanings of permaculture principles:

Seeing and hearing:

I often introduce a new topic with some kind of presentation involving talk and visuals for 15 minutes or so. Holmgren has created a Powerpoint presentation on his own principles that works for this purpose.

Action and rhythm:

In a circle, one person throws a ball to another while saying the name of the first principle, in rhythm. “Observe and interact.” Toss the ball. “Observe and interact.” Toss. This quickly becomes easy, so we add the second principle. “Observe and Interact,” toss, “Catch and Store Energy.” When repeating these two principles becomes easy, we add a third principle. “Observe and Interact,” toss, “Catch and Store Energy,” toss, “Obtain a yield.” If we break the large group into small ones of four to six participants, it takes about half an hour for everyone to memorize the names of all 12 principles. It’s helpful to revisit this game for a few minutes a day for a few days in a row to help participants put the list into their long-term memories.

MUSIC: We sing a song that describes each principle.

Cooperating with others: Small groups create skits that illustrates one of the principles without naming it. The whole group then guesses what principle is being acted out.

Immersion in nature and solitary reflection: Students walk alone in nature looking for examples of permaculture principles in action, and then bring these insights back to the whole group.

The first years I taught in The Camassia Institute, before we began using multiple approaches to teaching, students regularly expressed frustration that after studying for a month, they still couldn’t remember the names of the permaculture principles. Since adopting this approach, participants become fluent in talking about principles within the first week, and making references to them in discussions both in and out of the classroom throughout the duration of the course. Participants return home with a much clearer idea of what permaculture is, and are better able to communicate what they’ve learned to others.

Design from Patterns to Detail

Permaculture is a huge topic; the 72-hour standard permaculture design course is supposed to cover the content of a 600-page textbook written by the cofounder of permaculture, Bill Mollison. Since this book was written over 20 years ago, it is tempting for permaculture teachers to share even more information that has been discovered in the meantime. Permaculture is also a systems approach to perceiving the world, and doesn’t lend itself well to linear outlines. How can we organize this vast material to alleviate a



sense of overwhelm on the part of participants who are exposed to so much information? The permaculture principle “Design from Patterns to Detail” comes to the rescue. Applied to an educational program, it tells us to teach the main ideas first, working our way later to covering details.

I use *mind-maps* to show how the concepts we are learning connect to each other. At the center of the web-like drawing I put a circle with the name of the day’s topic in the center. Let’s say we’re studying water. Around the central circle that says “water” I draw several more circles with lines connecting these circles to the center. In each of these circles I write words that describe goals we might have for managing water in a permaculture design, such as water storage, or water purification. On an outer ring, connecting to these goal circles, would be other circles that describe strategies for accomplishing these goals,

such as storing water in rainwater barrels, ponds, or soil. As we move out in ever-expanding circles, more details on how to accomplish these strategies are added. Some of the strategies accomplish more than one goal, and so connecting lines can go from an outside circle to more than one inner circle. Mulching, for example, enhances both water storage and water purification. Books and other resources that describe more details can be referenced on the mind-map, so participants can learn more on their own.

The aim of an introductory permaculture design course is to help participants see the central goals and strategies of permaculture, not to master every detail. Mind-maps can help participants distinguish central ideas from the details, guiding them to focus on core material during the course, while giving them pointers to what they can study after they've graduated from the course and are working in the world.

Mind-maps also serve to help participants understand why they might feel overwhelmed learning permaculture—there's so much knowledge available to us. No one person can learn it all! As we fill in detailed understanding of topics over time, we can use the maps to suggest new places to explore at our own chosen pace.

Apply Self-Regulation and Accept Feedback

This is my favorite permaculture principle, for it addresses the overconsumption of resources that is stressing our planet. An example of applying this principle in a home is installing the electric meter in a prominent location at the entrance of a house rather than in some outside corner behind a bush. Residents will notice how fast the meter is moving, and be more likely to look for ways to decrease their electricity usage.

In an educational setting, this principle encourages us to ask our students for feedback on the course, and to respond to their answers. If participants say their bodies are sore and their minds are numb from sitting and listening to lectures too long, then it's time to change the format. Research has shown that people remember five percent of what they hear, 50 percent of what they discuss, 70 percent of what they do, and 90 percent of what they teach. [Study at the Bethel Training Lab referred to by Priscilla Logan at her website www.outdoorclassroom.org/train.htm.] No wonder instructors love to lecture—by being actively engaged in teaching they are probably learning more than their students.

Here's a trick for responding to students who say they're feeling exhausted: schedule a nap-time. Towards the end of the afternoon, put on some baroque music that is played at 60 beats per minute, and have students lie down with their eyes closed. Then slowly, in a monotone, summarize the information that has been imparted that day. According to proponents of accelerated learning techniques, this will help students remember what they've learned, moving information from short-term to

long-term memory. I don't know if this is true statistically, but from my own experience and the testimony of some students, I believe it works. As one of my students said after one nap-time: "Why can't all schools be like this!"

Produce No Waste

Though people learn more by teaching than by listening to lectures, it wouldn't work to have all the students in a classroom talking to each other simultaneously in order to try to maximize learning—chaos would ensue. So here's a principle that guided me to another approach to having students teach each other: "produce no waste." In a home situation this principle refers to using outputs from one part of the system as inputs for another part. Vegetable scraps are fed to the chickens who produce manure that is used for compost to grow more vegetables. The goal is to have nothing go off-site into the waste stream.

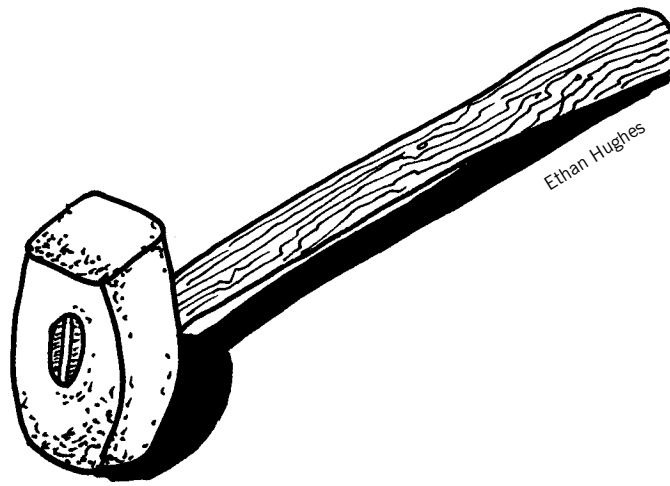
How many times as a child did you produce homework that ended up in the trashcan? Learning doesn't have to be this wasteful and demoralizing. Put participants to work creating learning materials for each other, establishing a Montessori-influenced permaculture classroom. Whatever the topic, participants can create learning games, books, or other materials for the other students to use. Let's say the topic is useful plants to grow in a temperate food forest. Ask small groups to research different plants, and then collectively create a book that describes each plant. This would be available to future course participants, who might then be responsible for researching plants appropriate for a tropical food forest. Or you and some assistants could work with different groups to prepare different herbal infusions, tinctures, or salves. The small groups would then explain to the whole group how their medicine was made and what it is used for, perhaps giving samples to each other. In this way, participants produce something that not only reinforces their learning, but also is of real value to others.

So those are five permaculture principles that can help us design environments that make learning come alive. I look forward to exploring how other permaculture principles might enrich my teaching. If you think of an idea, let me know, and I'll try it in my program. ♦

Whatever the topic, participants can create learning games, books, or other materials for the other students to use.



Melanie Rios is a permaculture teacher at The Camassia Institute in Oregon. Her latest passion when she's not teaching is being part of the Sing-Peace! Earth Pilgrimage for Global Harmony, which travels throughout the Pacific Northwest teaching songs, earth-based fitness, and permaculture. She can be reached at melanie@rios.org.



Busted, Almost Bludgeoned, Possibly Broke Hard Lessons from the Trenches of Sustainability Education

By Lee Icterus

To counterbalance some of the more upbeat stories shared in these pages, our pseudonymous author offers a few cautionary tales. According to Lee, “these are subjective snapshots, simplifications of multidimensional realities, and could be told in many different ways. In real life, even the ‘villains’ in these tales, from the decaffeinated code enforcement officer to the would-be-but-weren’t homicidal maniacs to the doomsaying finance manager, have many redeeming qualities. They were simply parts of a bigger picture—the kind of picture that could happen to anyone.”

Busted.

After 14 years of engaging in what we considered victimless crimes, we had to confront the plain fact: the gig was up. Ours had not been the usual victimless crimes—enjoyment of certain illicit substances, kinky sexual behavior among consenting adults, taking postage stamps to outer space, etc. We had transgressed not through overindulgence but through voluntary poverty and simplicity, planet care, and permaculture. We had been trying to educate for sustainability, but the law was not on our side.

We knew we’d been violating both building codes and zoning laws. We’d built multiple dwellings on a rural piece of land zoned for only one single-family residence. We’d obtained no building permits, and used construction methods and materials that conflicted with the codes and never would have gained official approval in the first place. We’d installed no flush toilets, no septic systems, no heavy-duty driveway with firetruck turnaround. We’d built among the trees, rather than cutting them down around dwellings as required in this forestry zone. We had been flying under the radar.

The founder had reassured us that the building code and zoning people would never visit, because they would never stray more than 30 minutes from their coffee pots. Because their office in town was a 45 minute drive away, we felt safe. Then several things happened that left us vulnerable: a key individual left the community on particularly bad terms; we adver-



tised locally for an open staff position; and the county planning department hired a new enforcement officer apparently less addicted to coffee and more attentive to the local newspaper classifieds. In a sequence of events that still remains mysterious, the unthinkable happened: both our infrastructure and our community received what amounted to “death sentences.”

The motive behind our crimes had been simple: a commitment to educating the public about sustainability. Our research and education center aimed to train responsible “world citizens,” especially those intending to work with local people in less-developed countries to help them meet basic needs for food, water, shelter, and fuel more self-reliantly. Instead of consuming the disproportionate amount of resources that average North Americans do, we wanted to take no more than our share based on equitable distribution throughout the world. And instead of plundering the planet and living at the expense of other creatures and ecosystems, we wanted to find balance with our environment. We tried to utilize primarily local renewable resources, at less than the rate of replacement, aided by appropriate “do-it-yourself” technologies and ecological gardening and forestry methods. We didn’t believe in “out of sight, out of mind.” In fact, to teach people to recognize and take responsibility for the results of their consumer choices, we forbade any trash or recycling from leaving our 40 acres: all materials brought onto our land were used, reused, or refashioned on site, or put into our own unauthorized dump at the corner of our property.

Limiting our population to a single family, as the zoning laws required, would have thwarted our strong educational mission, which depended on a community of unrelated adults and the ability to host additional interns and course participants. We needed places for all of these people to sleep, eat, and congregate, and we also wanted our approaches to creating infrastructure to be replicable in any “third world” situation. Plus, we had almost no money, and didn’t believe in debt or even have access to loans. This meant using almost exclusively discarded and local resources. We built most dwellings for no more than a few hundred dollars (less than the amount building permits and inspections alone would have cost us, had we built legally). Little of our lumber was inspected or stamped, and few of our other building materials (wattle and daub, straw, wood shavings, cob, etc.) even had standards to measure up to—our county banned them entirely from use in construction. In the interests of nutrient recycling, we also broke the laws regarding human waste and greywater.

We believed in respecting the limits of our local and global ecosystems, with an approach to materials usage and economics that was replicable, indefinitely continuable, and socially equitable across cultures and across generations. Unfortunately, our attempts to model “third world conditions” and live sustainably within them—to make best use of what was around us, put permaculture ideas into practice, and live by “natural law”—were themselves not sustainable, due to the enforcement

of human law.

How did it turn out? To oversimplify a bit: we hired a land use consultant and an attorney, found some fortunate legal loopholes to allow us to maintain our existing population levels on the land, tore down most of the old structures as we raised money for and built new ones, compromised in many areas, redefined some of our goals, and kept an educational focus while transitioning from an aspiring “third world sustainability site” to an aspiring “first world sustainability site.”

The take-home lessons? Consider carefully before locating your activities in a part of the country in which they may be illegal—and be prepared to deal with, and challenge when necessary, the anti-permacultural rules, regulations, and laws that stifle efforts to embody and teach sustainability.



“I’ll hit you over a head with a sledgehammer!”

This death threat was the final straw in one carpenter’s troubled tenure at our community. He received an eviction notice later the same day. But if we’d been wise, we never would have taken him on.

We endured a similar trial with another individual, who threatened to blow a hole as big as a basketball in the middle of a fellow staff member.

The reasons for provocation (an attempt to hold an individual accountable to community agreements, and a rivalry between two dogs, respectively), while minor in themselves, seemed beside the point. In addition to their capacity for making violent threats when feeling insecure, the two individuals shared a common trait: we’d accepted them into our group because we felt we desperately needed certain work done, rather than because we felt comfortable with them as people. And why did we desperately need that work done? Because we had an already-advertised and enrolled sustainability education program to run.

If we didn’t complete our new dormitory before the start of the summer, our summer students would have nowhere to stay, as the county had declared our previous student housing illegal.

Unless we could find some help, fast, we would need to cancel the program. To the overstressed, understaffed building crew, Josef seemed like a godsend (or Gaiasend). He had met a couple staff members at a party and asked if he could visit. When he arrived the next day, they drafted him into pounding some nails. It turned out he liked to pound nails, and had no pressing other commitments. While he displayed some disturbing tendencies (an inordinately loud voice; a fondness for telling anyone who would listen how to trick pay phones into letting you dial anywhere for free; a self-reported history as a spy for several different governments; a freely acknowledged status as an “illegal foreigner” with, nevertheless, what he described as a free pass from any police department in the country; a cigarette addiction that, increasingly, did not respect “no smoking” zones; and a strangely “wired” energy accompanied by a long-sleeves-only clothing policy, which became significant to us only in retrospect), he seemed to many group members like a relatively harmless eccentric who posed little risk. Besides, we really, really needed his help.

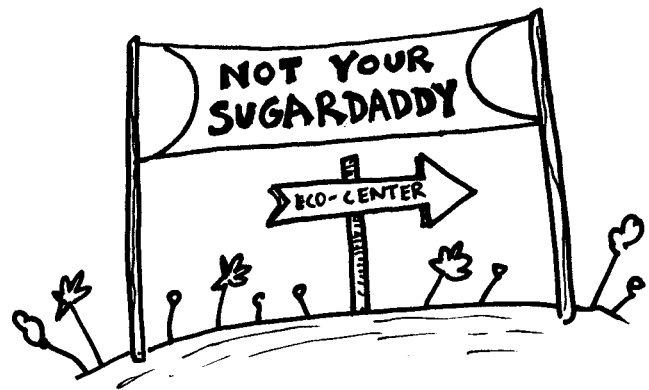
That was until, eventually, it was not his help that seemed indispensable, but his absence. Unfortunately, he then inflicted further damage by convincing a friend of our group to take him in, stealing from our friend’s neighbors, and finally fleeing the area before his status as a drug addict and dealer came to light.

In the other case, we had welcomed Glen into our group as part of a “package deal.” His wife worked quite effectively in an administrative department essential to our success as an educational center. In fact, we had waived our normal intake process, and a representative from our group had apparently “guaranteed” them spots in our community, if they would only move to our site and work with us. They arrived with a large moving van (itself a bit of a red flag in our simple-living community) and while Glen’s wife caused no problems, Glen himself immediately showed his capacity for generating conflict. Knowing that none of us is without blemish or fault, we decided to try it out anyway. Some of us had misgivings, growing from minor to major, but Glen was a many-sided, often likeable person, despite a seemingly lackadaisical work attitude, an unpredictable (sometimes alcohol-fueled) temper, and, eventually, an obvious capacity for lying. The bottom line: our organization desperately needed the work that his wife was providing, in order to fill our educational mission. Or we thought we did, until, the death threat.

In both cases, we managed to survive the departure of the formerly indispensable individuals. In the latter case, Glen nearly sunk the organization on his way out—he’d planted a certain illegal weed on our land, which came within a few yards of being discovered by the authorities. As a parting gift, he also threatened us with a \$25,000 lawsuit (for breach of a contract that existed, fortunately, only in his mind).

The take-home lessons? Among many others: *do* look a gift horse in the mouth, and know that desperate measures sometimes yield desperate results. Accepting individuals into a group

in the interest of expedience to serve one’s educational mission can provide unanticipated lessons of its own. If you are lucky, you will dodge the bullet.



Our finance “team”?

“Sparring partners” was more like it. One was a died-in-the-wool optimist, another an intractable pessimist. When they described our financial situation, one of them didn’t see the glass as half full and the other as half empty. One of them saw the glass as three-quarters full, and the other as (at least) three-quarters empty. Was it the same glass? We could never know.

Had our economic footing been inarguably sound, we would not have been confronting this dilemma of figuring out whom to believe and what to do. For years we had struggled to make ends meet financially. Our commitment to serving the public through educational programs had kept us going through thick and thin, but our chronically understaffed and underfunded organization alternated between minimum wage salaries and layoffs, and we never knew what the next financial cycle would bring. “Job security” was not in our vocabulary. Only people who could afford to commit themselves to our mission, knowing that it meant never earning much, would stay around for long. We relied heavily on intern and volunteer labor to keep our programs going—a system that seemed to work, for those involved in it, but which hardly matched the model of a thriving, growing business.

Unfortunately, our lack of adequate resources also left each employee overworked, and often too overwhelmed to learn much about other areas by spending time outside of a specific realm of responsibility. For example, the office staff almost never made it out to the vegetable gardens—and yet, because of our organizational structure, the office workers had most of the say over how we operated as a business, including funding and staffing levels for work on the land. At the same time, those involved in on-the-ground sustainability activities stayed so busy with their hands-on, land-based work, and with guiding

and teaching interns, students, and visitors, that little of their energy or patience remained for engaging in the administrative or business side of things.

That the finance team itself couldn't come up with a clear assessment of our economic health only added to the disarray. As a result, we each heard what we were most predisposed to hear and believe. The pessimist's voice tended to be loudest, and when his own family's finances started looking grim, and his wife needed to get a job in town, he seemed to transfer that reality onto the rest of the group. When we created a list of the group's challenges during our annual retreat, he wrote "EXPECTING THE ORGANIZATION TO BE YOUR SUGAR DADDY" in

large caps on the white board. He saw staff members as burdens on the group, and believed that the rest of us (like his wife), with the exception of himself and a bare-bones crew, should also get jobs in town.

How could our educational programs and service mission possibly function without anyone to implement them? To many of us, this did not appear to be a question that he asked or cared about. In fact, he believed that, with the world and economy "going down," we'd soon be confronting a far different reality anyway, one in which money played no role at all and in which small groups of people would need mainly to watch out for themselves.

For most employees, already working for minimal compensation and with too much responsibility, his message lowered morale. Meanwhile, his counterpart on the finance team asserted (less stridently) that we were actually outperforming our budget and needed to maintain our current staffing in order to bring in necessary income, fulfill our mission, and continue our activities, with all their positive local and non-local effects.

Those of us with a more optimistic, hopeful bent saw the pessimist's rants as reflecting his own worldview rather than our situation, and persisted in staying in our jobs and moving forward with our departments' plans. But the fault line in our finance depart-

ment spread to the rest of the staff. We lost at least one highly qualified employee, who decided to get a secure job in town rather than deal with the apparent uncertainty of working for our group. With encouragement of several administrative staff who believed in privatizing different parts of our organization's work, another employee decided to become an entrepreneur instead, resulting in further splits in subsequent years as we tried to reconcile coexisting public and private systems of growing

food and offering education. Staff and resident turnover soon reached unprecedented levels.

Lack of unity about how to approach work that was deeply satisfying to some, but not all of us; the economic demands of combining inno-

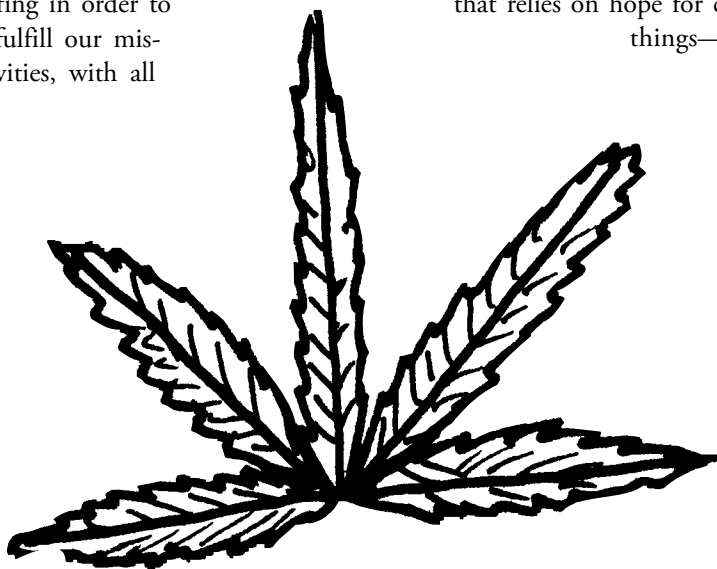
vative sustainability education programs with attempts to "walk our talk"; the financial challenges, in the midst of an ailing consumeristic culture, of serving those on an alternative path, who often had few funds to spare; varying perceptions of the larger world, its direction, and what "sustainability" within that world meant; clashing personal psychological makeups; escalating staff turnover...all of these begged the question: Is it possible to educate others effectively about sustainability if your group itself has not found a way to live and work together sustainably?

In the end, despite the challenges, educational programs continued, thanks to valiant, self-sacrificing efforts by countless individuals over the course of many years, but key questions remained unresolved and future prospects uncertain.

The take-home lessons? Running homegrown eco-oriented educational programs is not for the faint of heart. Fear and a scarcity mentality can significantly hobble work that relies on hope for creating a better world. Unlikely things—some might call them mira-

cles—do happen (otherwise, our group would never have come into being)—but only if given the opportunity. And healthy, well-functioning community may prove to be the most essential ingredient in learning and teaching about a sustainable world. ♦

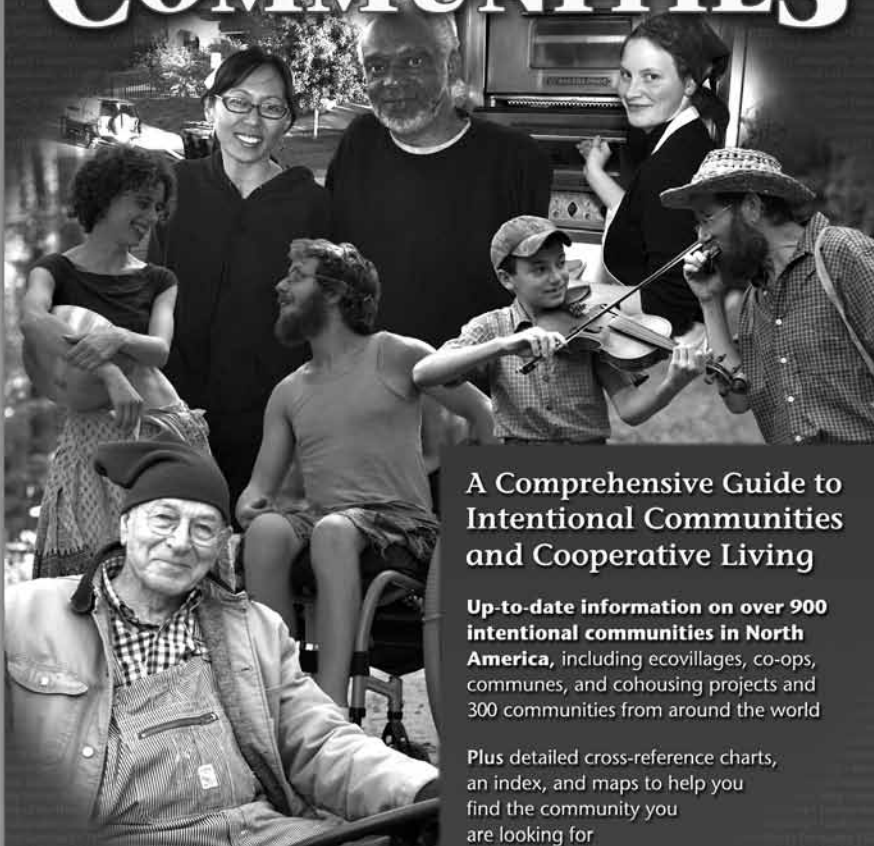
The founder had reassured us that the building code and zoning people would never visit, because they would never stray more than 30 minutes from their coffee pots.



Lee Icterus writes nonfiction (and, some would say, fiction) from the backwoods of America and the heart of community.

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Arjuna da Silva

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• **REVIEW: HEALTH AND QUIET**

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Car-Reduced and Car-Free Rural Communities

By Greg Ramsey



Kyle Gradinger



Kyle Gradinger

This page top: For approximately \$2 per trip, a shuttle connects Torri Superiore Ecovillage (Italy) to the larger town of Ventimiglia in the valley, where village markets offer a variety of goods and services.

This page bottom: Twin Oaks Community (Virginia) collectively owns a fleet of about 18 motor vehicles (including cars, pickup trucks, cargo vans, and a mini-van) for approximately 85 adult members. Members do not have personal vehicles.

Opposite page top: A work bike in Vauban, Germany.

Opposite page middle: An Amsterdam commuter combines suit, briefcase, and bicycle.

Opposite page bottom: In another typical Amsterdam scene, a woman in a tight dress skirt and dress shoes rides a bicycle, carrying two additional passengers and an industrial work basket.

Many of us love the idea of living in a rural eco-community in order to reconnect to the land, to be close to rivers, forests, meadows, farmland, and wildlife—in a sense, to go back to our origins. It is certainly not a recent desire and is the impetus that has created the suburbs and the ex-urbs. So the three hundred dollar question is, should we continue on this path, and if so, are we doing it in a way that does not adversely impact those rural areas and the planet at large?

We know today that the most ecological practice is to locate community development close to existing infrastructure in towns and cities. This is done in order to reduce the impact of traffic into rural areas and to re-use existing structures. That being said, it is important to have small rural eco-communities or hamlets to encourage small-scale agriculture and to create rural stewardship. The general pattern has been to depopulate rural areas and for these lands to be assimilated by large national and international agro/forestry investment interests that promote monocultures with little regard for biodiversity. So placing eco-communities as stewards to sustain bioregions and polycultures instead of monocultures is a good thing if done appropriately.

Unfortunately, the automobile has a devastating impact on the development of these rural eco-communities. Roads are public enemy #1 to our waterways and wildlife habitats. Ever extending, widening, and adding roads and driveways further fragment our remaining wildlife habitats and farms, and create conduits for easy access to deplete our dwindling rural biodiversity. Some suggest that efficient cars running on renewable fuels will solve the problem—but nothing could be further from the truth. The impact of cars on our already fragmented natural communities and natural spaces would increase exponentially. So what can we do to reduce car mobility and its deleterious impacts on rural habitats and still re-populate rural eco-communities?

Minimize Car Intrusion

First, we can reduce how far and how many cars are allowed to intrude into rural areas. The less the car penetrates into the land, the more we will reduce impacts on the land. We can start by thinking of this regionally, and then seeing how it applies to single sites. At a regional scale, we can protect substantial areas and avoid the extension of roads into them in several ways:

1) Develop eco-communities closer to existing roads and services by shifting potential eco-communities from more remote



Kyle Gradinger



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Automobile Impacts:

- The average car in the US emits 10,000 lbs. of carbon gas per year (three times its weight).
- The average American household generates eight car trips/day.
- 30 to 40 percent of the average American household energy consumption comes from automobile use.

to less remote areas that are more suitable for community development. Transfer of development rights is a common tool used for this purpose. More remote eco-communities should be preserved for very limited access.

2) Place conservation easements on the preserved areas to prevent future road intrusions into those areas.

3) Reduce the number of overall homes/cars allowed on particularly rural sites. Rural sites should rarely allow more than one unit per 20 acres (overall density) unless they are located within a couple miles (bike/cart access) of significant infrastructure/services/transportation center. If a particular property will not allow enough units at this density, then additional land should be preserved elsewhere to increase the number of units.

In this manner we can create a bioregional car-reducing transportation plan designed to reduce future wildlife habitat fragmentation and protect and maintain the integrity of the bioregion. This can be done at the scale of multiple counties, a county, or a portion of a county.

On an individual site basis, it is important to stop the car as close as is reasonably possible to the existing access road and collect the car there, restricting car access further into the site other than service access. Ecovillages and cohousing communities are good examples of how to collect the cars at the outskirts of the community and create an ideal walking-density community cluster. Any residents can then access further into the site on foot, by bicycle, or by electric cart.

Optimize Community-Based Transportation

Community-based transportation refers to cooperative local efforts to reduce car dependency. The intent is to create a walk and bike/cart zone (carbon-free transportation zone) connected to surrounding towns by an electric or biodiesel shuttle/bus.

The walk and bike/cart zone is designed for walking (1/8 to 1/4 mile) and for bikes/carts, including manual as well as electric bicycles and electric or biodiesel carts (20 mph or less), easily reaching one to two miles by persons of all ages. The Twin Oaks Community in rural Virginia provides bicycles for public use, as do some other budding ecovillages.

The heart of the eco-community should not exceed 1/8 to 1/4 mile (700 ft.-1300 ft. in length) to optimize walkability at a density ranging from four to 10 units per acre excluding agricultural areas. A minimum of 90 percent of the rural site should be preserved as farm land and wildlife habitats by locating the homes in a walkable compact cluster. Locating adjacent farming or market/crossroad communities within the one to two miles bike/cart area increases the overall transportation efficiency of the community, allowing multiple communities to connect by bicycle and electric carts and not be car-dependent.

Shuttles connect the walk and bike/cart zone several times per day to primary towns where lease-on-demand vehicles are available as well as links to buses and other forms of transit. In addition, shared vehicles may be available for commuting outside the walk and bike/cart zone.

(continued on p. 79)

Beyond Sustainability: Building for Health accommodating people with environmental intolerances in intentional community living

By Julie Genser

I cried when I read in *COMMUNITIES'* Health and Well-Being issue (Winter 2009) about Fred Lanphear,¹ an elder of the Songaia community who was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) and appealed to his community to help him face this last stage of his life with grace. His community embraced him, tucking him in to bed every night, helping him stretch and do yoga, and celebrating his life with a ceremony while he was still alive and able to participate. His story stood in stark contrast to that of artist and poet Bene Barrymore, a senior disabled by a toxic brain injury.² Instead of enjoying her retirement years in comfort, surrounded by family, Bene struggles for survival each year during pesticide spraying season. The 77-year-old has severe environmental sensitivities and the neurotoxic fumes from bug killers cause her to flee the comfort and safety of her home to live in her car for months every year to avoid becoming even more debilitated. Not exactly the ideal vision of how to spend one's retirement years.

Bene did not get a celebration from her community honoring her as an elder when she got sick; instead she gets to face difficult symptoms and a life on the run completely alone. There is little compassion in our world today for people whose very existence questions the sanity of a global dependence on chemicals, pharmaceuticals, petroleum, and other substances that make our culture of capitalism go 'round. Unfortunately, there is a hidden population of thousands of others like Bene, fleeing their homes and neighborhoods to escape the daily poisoning our chemically and electronically addicted society blindly and indiscriminately inflicts.

A New Conversation

As Joshua Canter wrote in his article "The True Need for Community,"³ "the element of community is one of the greatest factors in healing." Who needs healing—and thus, community—more than those who are ill? And so I want to start a conversation. The conversation I'd like to start is this: What are intentional communities willing to do in order to accommodate those with chemical, electrical, and other environmental sensitivities? Are intentional communities willing to be educated about the difference between green/sustainable and non-toxic? Are intentional communities willing to expand their notion of disabled, and count non-toxic housing and common facilities as necessary as a handicapped-accessible bathroom? Are intentional communities willing to accept that sustainability issues may have to be relegated to the back burner in order for some people merely to survive?

Some of the basic facts:

◆ **There are thousands, if not millions, of people in the world suffering from**



some form of environmental illness (EI) today, who experience mild to life-threatening physical reactions to extremely low levels of chemicals, mold, foods, electrical fields, and other environmental factors.

◆ **A large number of people with environmental sensitivities are homeless**, living in their cars, in a tent in the woods, in run-down trailers, or are prisoners in toxic apartments and homes across the country because they have no other housing options.

◆ Due to the nature of the illness, **many people with environmental illness experience rejection, blame, abandonment, ridicule, anger, and even assault** (from the intentional use of substances known to cause them bodily harm) from the people they know and love most. They often live in near isolation just to avoid exposure to the chemicals and other substances that cause them debilitating symptoms.

◆ Because of the loss and separation from most everything and everyone they

know and love, **many EIs experience post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as part and parcel of getting the illness**, and the daily trauma that comes from the social isolation imposed by the illness can sometimes feel worse than the physical symptoms themselves.

◆ **Many EIs lack access to medical care, food, and housing due to their environmental intolerance**—physician/health practitioner offices are inaccessible due to the use of air fresheners, cleaning chemicals, and perfumed patients and health care workers; food in supermarkets and even health food stores is contaminated by fragrant product displays located near open food displays; standard housing is usually rife with triggers: from formaldehyde in building materials and toxic glues used in construction, to mold, faulty electrical wiring, and air fresheners used by former tenants.

◆ **In order to survive and thrive, people with environmental illness must adopt non-toxic lifestyles that are very much aligned with intentional community values.**

◆ **There are approximately 2,200 intentional communities worldwide that might make ideal homes for those with environmental illness** due to their adherence to a chemical-free lifestyle, if not for a combination of any of the following factors:

- lack of tolerable non-toxic sleeping/housing accommodations;
- use of wood-burning stoves, gas, propane, and oil for heat and cooking;
- residents' past use of toxic laundry products (fragrance chemicals from fabric softeners and some detergents can stay in clothes forever, even if you have since switched brands to an ecological, scent-free product);
- residents' use of certain fragrant plant-based and other natural products such as essential oils;
- use of candles, incense, and other scented products in public, shared spaces;
- use of WiFi, cell phones, and other



Photos courtesy of Julie Genser

wireless technology;

- use/location of solar inverters;
- moldy conditions;
- tobacco/marijuana smoking policy;
- dietary restrictions (many with chronic illness may have dietary needs that are in conflict with vegetarian and/or raw dietary requirements that are common in many communities);
- ignorance about the condition.

The Ideal Solution

If one of the underlying intentions of “intentional” communities is to provide a healthy, community-based alternative to a more modern, technology-based life, then intentional communities could be an ideal living solution for those suffering from not only environmental illness but other chronic illnesses as well; for these are the people who are not thriving in conventional lifestyles and need to transform their reality the most.

But being sick can often mean not being able to function in nor contribute fully to a group situation—physically, financially, emotionally, or otherwise. It might even seem that someone recovering from a chronic illness could potentially drain the resources of a community. For this reason, many communities may hesitate to take on members with existing health conditions that render them unable to contribute as much as others to community life. Is it possible to shift this paradigm of illness-as-adversary so communities can actually look to their less able-bodied members as contributors to, rather than detractors from, their common goal? To see their cohabitation with differently-abled members not as a sacrifice but, as Sweigh Spilkin writes of her own journey with environmental illness, “a sacred part of a larger ceremony?”⁴

Illness as Opportunity

Monetarily speaking, those with EI do not have to drain the financial resources of a community; many are receiving Social Security Disability Insurance benefits and have a reliable monthly income. Those who are not able to contribute financially could barter services like food

preparation or organic gardening.

Taking on members who are on a recovery path can provide a community with many opportunities for collective evolution, including the opportunity to: slow down and rethink priorities; appreciate different levels of health; deepen spiritually from members who have evolved in this way due to their physical limitations; be more deeply educated on the toxicity of everyday products; see how facing adversity together can serve as a powerful initiation to a new phase in communal growth; appreciate the preciousness of life in every single, beautiful moment. Community members can come to know that suffering/illness/disability is something sacred, a teacher to be valued—that from suffering, comes strength.

Needing to pay attention to certain details in order to accommodate those with finer tuned needs will only benefit the health of the community and the individuals that comprise it in the long run. For example, wood smoke—“one of the most harmful air pollutants we have on earth”⁵—is known to be a huge health hazard that contributes to asthma and other respiratory ailments in children and adults, yet wood is commonly used for heating at intentional communities. Wood smoke is also a big deterrent to living in community for those with EI. Likewise, the long-term health effects of WiFi systems and cell phones are suspect enough for whole countries to issue warnings to their citizens (Germany,⁶ the European Union⁷) and yet are also frequently seen in intentional communities across America. Heeding the warnings that those with environmental illness call out through their immediate and more pronounced reactions to certain substances may help prevent your community members from developing cancer and other serious ailments in years to come. Any wise community will embrace these “canaries in the coalmine” and recognize their value in contributing to the long-term health and survival of the community.

Areas for Educating

Some of the issues that may potentially

cause misunderstandings and difficulties between EIs and their communities, but may possibly be avoided through disability training, include:

- the inability to participate in community consistently;
- the need for some EIs to use water inefficiently in order to prepare clothing and bedding for use;
- communication difficulties due to physical reactions to toxins (confusion, memory loss, difficulty speaking);
- need for trauma processing;
- stress intolerance and mood changes due to neurological injury that may include damage to “fight or flight” center of brain.

What complicates the situation is that each case of environmental illness is completely unique, in terms of triggers, symptoms, and severity of reactions. Therefore, no standard rule will apply to all, as each person’s specific needs will need to be understood and accepted on an individual basis.

Community-Minded

Interestingly, what I have noticed from running an online health community devoted to people with environmental intolerances for several years is the high percentage of creative and intuitive folks struck with this illness, two types that are typically drawn to a community-living mentality. Many artists, after years working with toxic art materials—paints, solvents, photographic chemicals, printing inks—become chemically sensitive. Musicians, dancers, actors, and other creative types typically take on low-paying toxic jobs to support themselves while trying to succeed in their art: housecleaning, house painting, construction, dry cleaning, warehouse work, flight attending; the list goes on. Once they have become more stable after the onset of debilitating symptoms, they often look for other avenues to express their creative spirit—possibly delving into meal preparation, energy work, leading group rituals—that could benefit community

life. It also seems true that those who become living meters to the environment pick up on all sorts of energies, not just from chemicals and electricity. Many are highly empathic and attuned to the emotional states of others, some are clairvoyant, others are medically intuitive and able to “see” illness, and there are those, like myself, that find they can use physical touch to help transition others through crisis situations.

When I lived at the supportive Lost Valley community in Dexter, Oregon while attending their Ecovillage and Permaculture Design Certification Program several years ago, I quickly transformed from an impatient New York City girl into a barefoot

I know of many others who are environmentally sensitive looking for, but so far excluded from, community living.



being in touch with her natural world, and started to connect deeply to my intuitive self in a way I never had before. Community living can do this. I was gifted with three opportunities during my relatively short time there to listen to my deeper self and use hands-on healing to help others transition out of epileptic seizure, a sleep apnea choking episode, and past trauma. It was immediately after leaving Lost Valley that I developed severe environmental intolerance. I would love to find a pedestrian-centered community like Lost Valley that offers such healing safety from our toxic world—emotionally, physically, and chemically/electrically speaking—so that I can continue to develop this primal urge to facilitate healing during crisis situations that present themselves in a community setting.

I know of many others who are environmentally sensitive looking for, but so far excluded from, community living. There is Jamie Isman, a 34-year-old community organizer, activist, and facilitator of rituals that integrate earth and goddess spirituality with Jewish practice. Jamie is also a singer/songwriter, astrologer, clairvoyant, and all around mystic who loves to share her ethereal vision. An avid cook, she loves to nourish people with healthy meals including lacto-fermented and dehydrated foods. Disabled by environmental illness as well as a physical assault, Jamie recently fled the toxic urban landscape of Oakland, California to find refuge in the desolate mountains of northeast Arizona. Although she appreciates the beauty, peace, and clean air there, she is craving human connection that comes from community. Jamie seeks community free from all chemicals, wood smoke and barbecues, gas/propane, fragranced products, mold contamination, and cigarette smoke. You can contact her at jamieisman.com.

Mary and Keith, who both have mild chemical sensitivities, recently left their beloved home, careers, health care providers, and dear friends in western Massachusetts in search of a safe ecovillage they could call home (read about their cross-country roadtrip here: [mary-](#)

andkeith.blogspot.com). Some of the gifts they have to offer a community include laughter, yoga, nonprofit program development, event coordination, nursing and hospice care, earth stewardship, elder/child/pet care, and cooking. They are looking for an ecovillage that is free of chemically fragranced products and essential oils, car exhaust, lighter fluid, wood smoke, fresh tar, and other pollutants. Speaking about their current adventure visiting intentional communities across America in search of a safe haven, Mary and Keith share their experience:

“Imagine yourself excitedly arriving to an intentional community that prides itself on living a sustainable life close to the land. To your dismay, you quickly discover that the members of the community use toxic mainstream products like Tide and Bounce, which adversely affect your health and pollute the earth. These products, incompatible with sustainable living practices, preclude you not only from membership in the community, but also from a healthy visit due to the deleterious impact on your health. As members of the chemically sensitive community, we strongly encourage and invite intentional communities to use all natural and fragrance-free products!”

Moving Forward

Community living is so badly needed for those with chronic environmental illness that I have decided to create a 501(c)3 nonprofit called re|shelter (reshelter.org) with my dear friend and fellow EI survivor Julie Laffin in order to address the housing needs of those with environmental intolerances. As part of our goal, we hope to explore solutions that facilitate the inclusion of those with EI in intentional community living.

Ideas we have on how to further this conversation:

- IC.org to provide a public listing of communities that are EI friendly/aware, including a contact person;
- Reshelter.org to maintain a private listing of EIs wishing to be placed in community;
- Intentional communities to incorporate specific language about acceptable personal care and laundry products, building materials, etc. into community rules, and—most important—**to enforce these rules;**

- Reshelter.org to provide a template for such language;
- Educational workshops to be given in participating intentional communities about accommodating disability from environmental illness;
- Reshelter.org to explore funding solutions for the creation of non-toxic housing in existing intentional communities as well as the formation of new communities

If there are any communities out there that are already accommodating those with environmental sensitivities and want to share their solutions, I would love to hear from you. To those communities interested in becoming a healthier, more inclusive home for those with environmental intolerances, please join this important conversation. You can contact me at planetthrive.com/contact-us or leave a comment under this article at planetthrive.com/2010/06/beyond-green.

To learn more about the housing needs of those with environmental intolerances, please see the resources at mcs-safehomes.com and read the *Safer Construction Tips for the Environmentally Sensitive* PDF brochure in the “tips” section. Also visit reshelter.org. Blessings to all those working to create a saner, more humane world.

Thank you to Jamie Isman and Mary Rives for editing assistance with this article. ♦



Julie Genser is a former photographer, writer, and certified holistic health counselor whose life was derailed by extensive food and chemical sensitivities. In 2004 she completed the Ecovillage and Permaculture Design Certification Program at Lost Valley Educational Center in Dexter, Oregon. A few weeks later she developed severe environmental illness and had to drop out of ECOSA Institute, where she had just begun an intensive semester in sustainable architecture. She now lives in the desolate beauty of rural Arizona, where she dreams of living in community like the one she discovered at Lost Valley. She provides online community to those with environmental illness through her website PlanetThrive.com.

1 Fred Lanphear, “Embracing a Terminal Illness,” *COMMUNITIES: Life in Cooperative Culture*, Issue #145, Winter 2009, http://communities.ic.org/articles/1327/Embracing_a_Terminal_Illness

2 “Bene’s Battle”, PlanetThrive.com <http://planetthrive.com/2009/10/benes-battle/>

3 Joshua Canter, “The True Need for Community,” *COMMUNITIES: Life in Cooperative Culture*, Issue #145, Winter 2009, <http://planetthrive.com/2009/12/the-true-need-for-community/>

4 Sweigh Spilkin, “Meaning as Medicine in Chronic Illness,” PlanetThrive.com, <http://planetthrive.com/2008/07/meaning-as-medicine-in-chronic-illness/>

5 Gerd Oberfeld, M.D., “International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood,” http://burningissues.org/car-www/medical_effects/fact-sheet.htm

6 Geoffrey Lean, “Germany warns citizens to avoid using Wi-Fi,” *The Independent*, September 09, 2007, <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/green-living/germany-warns-citizens-to-avoid-using-wifi-401845.html>.

7 Geoffrey Lean, “EU watchdog calls for urgent action on Wi-Fi radiation,” *The Independent*, September 16, 2007, <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/green-living/eu-watchdog-calls-for-urgent-action-on-wifi-radiation-402539.html>.



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Intentional communities listing in the Reach section are invited to also visit our online Communities Directory at <http://directory.ic.org>. Listing on our web site is free and data from the site is used to produce our print version of the Communities Directory. Contact: directory@ic.org for more information on being listed in the upcoming Communities Directory.

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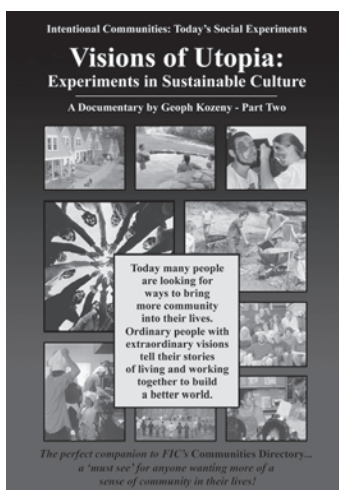
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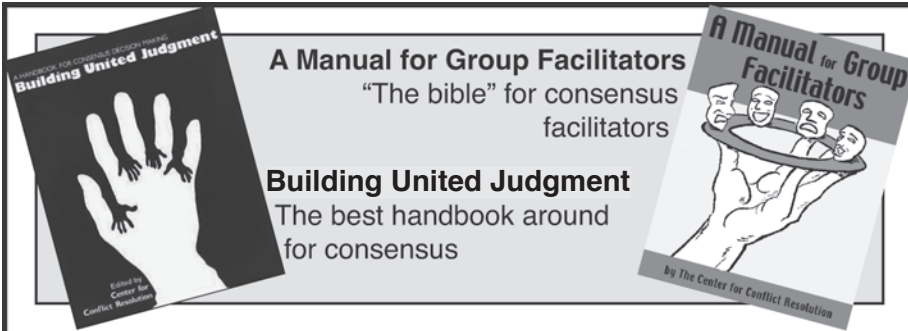
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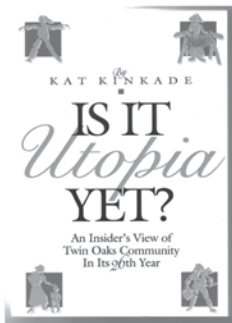
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GROUP PROCESS RESOURCES available at Tree Bressen's website. Topics include consensus, facilitation, blocks and dissent, community-building exercises, alternative formats to general discussion, the list goes on. Dozens of helpful articles, handouts, and more--all free. www.treegroup.info

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Communal Studies Association

Encouraging the study of Intentional Communities

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LIVE AND LEARN: O.U.R. ECOVILLAGE BUILDS LEARNING COMMUNITY

(continued from p. 17)

How do we find a way of managing our energy and how can we integrate new people?

On a developing site there's lots of work for builders. The building team is made up of residents, a few hired workers, instructors, interns, and students practicing a combination of conventional skills and natural building. The natural building program works on real building sites, of which there are always a few underway: you may learn foundation work on one, cob on another, and finish plaster on yet a third structure. This means that interns can see and work on buildings in all states of completion.

We call it "slow building": buildings take longer to complete when main components are part of our teaching and our season for programming is limited to favourable camp season, typically May to September.

None of our activities would function without the support of the office team. Like it or not, administration is a lot of work and requires fantastically capable and hard-working people. Here I've seen programs flourish or flounder with the work of the administrative staff. This is the place of first contact: the voice you hear when you call, the place where everyone is received, and where connection is made. This is where funding proposals are written, registration is handled, bookings made. It's where books are kept and websites are maintained. This is truly where the magic happens.

Lastly I want to acknowledge that most of us are having to wear many hats. On the same day I am asked to, accept, and choose to be a designer, builder, coordinator, mentor, blogger, communicator, team member, hearthkeeper, partner, and friend.

Whew...that's a lot of hats. Good thing I have a strong neck. Not to mention a strong sense of self.

And here's my motivation: How do I create a good life in this time of change?

My answer is building personal connections, doing things together, learning from each other, and sharing the work. That's what has me wake up in my cob sleeping alcove facing the sun and ready to face another day as a communitarian, I mean natural builder...ah heck with it...to face the day with my friends and family.

And that's good enough for me. ❁

Elke Cole is a Natural House Designer, builder, and educator. She lives at O.U.R. Ecovillage on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, where she coordinates the Natural Building Skillbuilder programs and has her consultation and design business, Houses That Love You Back. Please visit www.elkecole.com, read her blog "on building and being" (www.elkecole.com/weblog.html), or email naturalbuilding@ourecovillage.org.

Javan Kerby Bernakevitch has been a long-standing environmental educator, professional communicator, facilitator, and editor. An O.U.R. Ecovillage resident, Javan continues to expand his knowledge and passion for sustainability through permaculture as a teacher-in-training and designer, piloting top-bar honeybee hives, natural building with a special interest in finish plasters such as waterproof tadelakt, and engaging public talks and workshops on permaculture and sustainability. He continues to actively contribute to his community through his passion for sustainability and by collaborating on articles with community residents.

A brief history of education in sustainability at O.U.R.

Including the 2010 season we have

- 10 years of courses in community process (Way of Council), alternative energy, organic food production,
- and natural building
- nine years of sustainable food production internships
- eight years of Natural Building Internships
- seven years of Permaculture Design Certificate Courses
- and new in 2010 the first Canadian Permaculture Teacher Training

SEEING THE GOOD IN THE WORLD: CONNECTING COMMUNITIES AND STUDENTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION AND TRANSFORMATION

(continued from p. 31)

society. While our goals could be achieved through reviews of the growing academic and community literatures on these topics, the quote above suggests that facilitating direct student experiences of intentional community holds much greater potential power.

Student Engagement: Personal Inspiration and Social Transformation

"I really enjoyed the trip and how much it opened my eyes to the good in the world. You don't always get to see how much people care and appreciate everything they have, so much so that they extend themselves to others who are less fortunate in such a profound way."

"I was very humbled by the determination and passion with which each community pursued their goals, but also equally inspired by the grace they had in accepting where they were in that process."

"The common thread is an intense and deep love for those you are working and living with. I was truly envious of the kind of emotional relationships those people had with each other. It's an amazing thing."

A whirlwind tour of five local intentional communities at the beginning of the semester was the students' introduction to community living. Student responses to this tour reflect the power of this experience. Students were clearly inspired by the positive and moving examples presented by the communities we visited. In a world increasingly filled with bad news that can overwhelm one with a sense of powerlessness, intentional communities reverse this dynamic.

Intentional communities were seen as a manifestation of the potential good in the world. We visited communities dedicated to serving the homeless and others in need. We saw a variety of communities struggling to meet their goals and recognizing that the process of striving for something better is as important as actually getting there. Perhaps most powerfully, we encountered groups of people who care deeply about each other and about the places in which they live, people who were not afraid to speak openly and with emotion about these things even in the midst of a group of strangers.

Our all-day tour was long and tiring, but subsequent discussions indicate the students clearly took a lot from it, including a better understanding of what intentional communities are all about. Students are now excited about their research papers and projects and don't seem to need much prompting to get the work under way. Each student has selected a particular community to research in greater depth via frequent visits and interviews with community members throughout the semester. Perhaps more importantly, students are engaging these communities on an intensely personal level and contributing to the broader process of social and cultural transformation.

Sustainability is clearly not just about new technologies that enable us to use natural resources more efficiently. Nor can sustainability be achieved through research and public policy alone. Moving toward sustainability will require broad cultural transformations that can be brought about only as people reengage with each other

intentionally in local communities. My experiences over the last couple of years suggest that actively connecting students with intentional communities holds great potential for helping to initiate the kind of societal transformation that a quest for sustainability entails.

Connecting Communities and Students for Sustainability Education

I know there are many others out there who share my sentiments and who may have much greater experience with this topic. I would like to suggest that we create a forum where we can share our experiences and support each other in furthering the transformative potential inherent in engaging higher education students with community living. Perhaps we could come together at the Communal Studies Association annual conference for formal and informal discussions. Fellowship for Intentional Community events may provide appropriate venues as well. I am open to other suggestions. If you are an educator, communitarian, activist, or student who is interested in strengthening connections and increasing opportunities for interaction among communities, students, and academic institutions, please contact me at jlockyer@wustl.edu. ❁

Joshua Lockyer teaches anthropology and environmental studies at Washington University in St. Louis, including classes on intentional communities. He would like to thank the following students who provided quotations used in this article: LeeAnn Felder, Annie Rose Fondau, Gabriella Torcise, and John Wargofchik. He would also like to thank all the communities and communitarians who have helped him and his students along this journey.

Read COMMUNITIES Magazine Online! communities.ic.org

SUSTAINABILITY: REFLECTIONS FROM AN ECO-WARRIOR

(continued from p. 33)



Bruce Wilson

My own path towards a sustainable life also required a 180 degree change in attitude. I came from the mainstream baby boom values. At one time I had two sports cars, three motorcycles, and numerous girlfriends. In the 1960s, I joined the Marine Corps and did service during the Vietnam War.

After my tour of duty, when I was recovering from a broken leg received in an auto accident, an older woman whom I didn't know approached me and told me she was a healer. She said she could help me by doing hands-on healing on my leg. I thought the idea ridiculous, but when she put her hands on my leg and it immediately improved 50 percent, she got my attention.

She began talking about spiritual things, meditation, reincarnation, karma, eastern philosophies, and gave me some books to read. She emphasized that there was a spiritual component to life, that we are spiritual beings, that all life is sacred, and that if I really wanted to know truth, I would have to go within and find it myself.

I read all her books and more. I became a vegetarian and started meditating every day. My attitude changed from one that was concerned with sports cars, motorcycles, experimenting with different states of consciousness, and wanting stuff, to one more centered within.

After two years of deep reflection and personal transformation, I had a spiritual epiphany in the Sierra Nevada mountains in California. Through a meditative

experience of oneness, I realized that all the things I was studying were true, that a spiritual reality weaves itself through all creation, and that I would spend the rest of my life serving it. I was 26 at that time. My view of eco-sustainability came to me with my epiphany in the mountains: all life is sacred and everything is interconnected. If you live from that understanding, you become a deep ecologist.

Six months later I went to Findhorn Community, where I discovered a group of like-minded souls. I stayed there for four years learning more about the spiritual components of sustainability and about living in community, before coming to Sirius to help ground a similar vision in this country.

That was 32 years ago. During that time I have learned many lessons. Some of the most important, I think, are: doing what you know in your heart is right; deep patience; and non-attachment to outcome, knowing that needed changes will come.

For many years, some of our visitors expressed the attitude that our sustainable practices seemed appealing, but not necessarily applicable to their lives. Now they say "please tell us how to do that" or "we need your help." I now notice that a lot of our practices and those of other sustainable communities, including conflict resolution, green building and technologies, permaculture, consensus decision making, even composting toilets, have found their way into the mainstream.

I have learned that to effectively catalyze change, an attitude of absolute non-judgment and acceptance is essential. The opening of hearts and minds to new ideas does not happen in an atmosphere of criticism. For example, a group of corporate CEOs interested in developing more sustainable practices within their companies visited us. By putting aside our preconceived ideas and judgments and embracing them wherever they were in their process, we were able to engage in meaningful dialogs about the best ways forward, and received an invitation for future collaboration.

My most important lesson from living in community all these years is this: change that will last, that is truly sustainable, comes from changing consciousness. A new paradigm for a sustainable future grows naturally from connection with our deeper nature—call it what you like, "the force," Buddha nature, Christ, Jehovah, Allah, it makes no difference. Once someone has experienced the sacred in themselves and in all life, a commitment to harmony and sustainability follows, and the entire earth and all beings become the community we choose to serve wherever we are. ❀



Dedicated to creating sacred space both indoors and outdoors, Bruce Davidson is a founding member and President of Sirius, an ecovillage and spiritual community located in

western Massachusetts. He is a former member who served as coordinator of the Core Group of Findhorn Community, Scotland. A meditator for the past 38 years, green builder, gardener, and teacher, he also lived in a Zen Buddhist community. He continues to be a member of human kingdom, with all its frailties and vulnerabilities.

TOWARDS A SEVENTH GENERATION

(continued from p. 45)

at unpredictable times.”

I want to encourage those who now are working on their first generation as a community. I hope my research, in some small way, can assure you that your dedication to sustainability will make a difference on this planet. The time spent teaching your children now to love and respect the earth will help us all move towards that seventh generation. ❁

Understanding Israel received her Masters in Education through the Antioch First People's Program at Muckleshoot Tribal College in 2008 at the age of 64. She is currently a second year student at Argosy University Seattle, working towards a Doctorate in Educational Leadership. She received the Southern California Motion Picture Council Humanitarian Award for her help in mentoring over 168 children in her home as an educator in a community in the Cascade Mountains of the Pacific Northwest. She received her B.A. in Education from Pacific Lutheran University and taught in the ghettos of Harlem, Washington DC, and Appalachia before joining and living in her alternative community for 26 years. Understanding Israel is currently active as a Native American storyteller in the Pacific Northwest and as Operations Manager for the National Association for American Indian Children and Elders. She can be reached at ravenspuppets@yahoo.com.

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PERMACULTURE AND HOLISTIC EDUCATION: A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN ... AND EARTH

(continued from p. 47)

and facilitating their own meetings, during which they share ideas about school rules, articulate problems or challenges, and work together to arrive at solutions.

Permaculture design reminds us to stay small and slow. While modern society is predicated on the idea that the only healthy economy is one that grows, the more and the faster the better, permaculture takes its cues from wild, natural living systems and elevates the importance of sustainability. The goals are not bigger, faster, more, but rather healthy and vital and sustainable. Similarly, holistic learning communities are intimate places, designed on a human scale. They are not warehouses for youth, designed to hold, mold, and transport widgets, but home-like environments built upon familial individual relationships. Children are born into families and thrive in such family-like settings, where time is taken to recognize and validate their voices, their curiosities, their fears, and their passions. At Salmonberry School, we limit each classroom to no more than 18 children and no fewer than two adults, and most classes are even smaller than this. Parent volunteers, other community members, and “specialists” are often present and active in the classroom. In short, nobody goes unnoticed, slips through cracks, or gets “left behind.” Most children remain with the same teacher or teachers for three or more years, so the teacher comes to know all aspects of each student and is extremely mindful of this knowledge as he/she engages in his/her planning. As a teacher in this environment, I know when a parent is traveling, when a child gets a new pet, when a child has slept poorly, and often even what he/she dreamt about last night.

Finally, permaculture design strives to integrate rather than segregate. Small garden beds nestle in and among larger shrubs and a scattering of fruit trees; a pair of ducks may be seen wandering through a small pumpkin patch feeding on slugs; silk worms may be living in a mulberry tree that is surrounded by a small planting of comfrey; mushrooms are being cultivated on the edge of a wetland where cattails are being harvested. Individual plants and animals work together in small-scale integrated systems that mimic natural ecology. In a similar way, a holistic approach to education seeks to retain the wholeness of both learners and learning experiences. Edward T. Clark Jr. has written extensively on the concept of “Integrated Curriculum

Design.”⁷ By this concept, learners and teachers are expected to bring all aspects of themselves—head, heart, hands, and spirit—to each encounter. And these live encounters will necessarily cross the lines of traditional disciplines. Knowledge itself is seen as relational in nature when viewed through a holistic lens. At Salmonberry School, we follow these principles and design the curriculum to follow deeply integrated thematic multidisciplinary units. For example, in a recent unit focused on our local watershed, students’ experienced social studies, math, reading, writing, art, dance, music, storytelling, cooking, marine and life science, geography, civics, health, and all manner of crafts. We emphasize going deep rather than covering vast surfaces, and keeping things whole as we learn from the microcosm.

The ideas I present here just scratch the surface of the values and principles of both permaculture and holistic education. But as I delve deeper into this study, I find more and more similarities and analogies. Most exciting to me has been Salmonberry School’s recent foray into practicing some small elements of permaculture at the school site. We have connected with a local permaculture homestead and are soliciting the advice and wisdom of the growers and designers there to help us observe and assess our school site. We are beginning to use permaculture principles to redesign our school garden. We are looking for ways to re-envision both outdoor grounds and indoor spaces to better align with some of the concepts articulated above. It is exciting and invigorating work that feels right. I see strong connections between holistic education and permaculture. Perhaps it is time for holistic educators to explore further afield and connect with other holistic movements, as we seek to realize this “self-organizing revolution.”⁸ ❀

Paul Freedman is the Founding Head and an elementary classroom teacher at The Salmonberry School on Orcas Island, Washington (salmonberryschool.org). His current work in applying permaculture principles to holistic education has been in conjunction with Douglas and Maria Bullock at The Bullock Permaculture Homestead (www.permacultureportal.com). Both Salmonberry School and the Bullock homestead offer permaculture-based summer programs for students. The Bullocks also offer design courses and internships for adults at their farm.

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CAR-REDUCED AND CAR-FREE RURAL COMMUNITIES

(continued from p. 59)



Every eco-community should have a community transportation management plan with funds set aside to insure the purchase and maintenance of community vehicles. Incentives can be formed to encourage planning for local micro-vehicle transportation and shuttles. Disincentives can be put into place to discourage single occupancy car trips and car ownership while funding community transportation with car impact fees. In Vauban, one of the first largely car-free communities in Freiburg, Germany, the majority of residents do not own cars. Those that do, purchase a parking space in a parking area outside the community for approximately \$25,000.

Maintain a Local Micro Economy

Avoiding unnecessary commuter trips means having our daily life destinations within the local, walk and bike/cart zone area (two- to four-mile diameter). The most difficult of these destinations to maintain nearby is work! The Twin Oaks Community significantly reduces car commute requirements by providing a variety of cottage industries in the community and sharing a fleet of around 15 cars among 100 people.

So as we think of moving to a rural eco-community we should really ask ourselves what land-based workplaces can be incorporated into the community and how can their longevity best be protected. Examples of workplaces include farming, value-added agro-businesses, forest management, cottage industries, electronic cottages, artisanal shops, elder

care, health services, education, and general services. The key is that these workplaces are supported by the residents of the eco-community in some form of enduring commitment. Once residents start going outside that area and commuting for goods and services, they undermine the local walk/bicycle/cart area market. Local resident member initiatives similar to Community Supported Agriculture can help maintain the local walk/bicycle/cart market.

In closing, if we can shift our car-centric culture to a walking and community transportation culture, we can look forward to preserving our rural areas while re-integrating eco-communities. I invite readers to respond to this article with examples in your community of how you have reduced car dependency, and we will incorporate those examples in a follow-up article. Also, feel free to contact us about the planning and design of car reduced/free communities. I can be reached at gramsey@villagehabitat.com. ❁

Greg Ramsey, M.Arch. and recipient of State AIA, National AIA, and United Nations Habitat awards, has committed a lifetime of study to pedestrian village and conservation planning. Greg is co-founder, principal, and chief designer of Village Habitat Design (www.villagehabitat.com) as well as co-author of Conservation Communities, a village design primer. Greg works internationally as a workshop leader, conservation community planner, designer, and consultant (gramsey@usa.net).



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Creating Cooperative Culture

Dear readers and friends of COMMUNITIES,

At the COMMUNITIES staff summit in April 2010, we talked about ways of making the magazine even more engaging—and each one of them involves you.

Among the features we plan to introduce is a regular back page focus on Creating Cooperative Culture. This will be a space for photo essays, artwork, comics, poems, community profiles, quotations, recipes, games, seasonal rituals, personal anecdotes, contributions from children, or anything else that will inspire readers toward further exploration of cooperative culture. We are appealing to you to send us material that might fit on this back page.

We are also looking for additional short material to include elsewhere in the magazine. This can include any of the already-listed categories of items, as well as tips for community seekers, reviews of books or community-friendly products, news about communities or cooperative endeavors, relevant blog entries, historical reflections, resource lists for communitarians, or anything else you yourself would like to see in the magazine.

We are also soliciting questions for our Cooperative Group Solutions panel. Your questions need not concern intentional community *per se*—they can be relevant to any cooperative endeavor, or any arena (like a workplace or neighborhood) into which you are hoping to introduce more cooperation.

Please send us your own reflections on COMMUNITIES articles. We would like to use the Letters section to continue dialog on our various themes. We welcome your voice.

We hope you'll check our website for upcoming themes and submission guidelines, and either consider writing for us yourself or refer other potential contributors to us. We'd be happy to add potential writers to our twice-quarterly Call for Articles email list; contact us at editor@ic.org to be added.

We also encourage photographers to send us work for potential use on our cover. See the Photo Guidelines on our website for details.

Thanks for joining us in COMMUNITIES,
The COMMUNITIES staff



MUSTACHE ESCAPEDE AT DANCING RABBIT

In 2009 Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage (Rutledge MO) had collaborative mustache shavings in anticipation of its first visitor session. Nathan wanted to get the community to be excited, outgoing, and engaging with the new group that was set to arrive. And what better way to make people visiting your community feel welcome than to sport mustaches? Twenty or more people, both men and women, participated in the great mustache escapade of 2009.

— Owen Spangler

Photos courtesy of Owen Spangler

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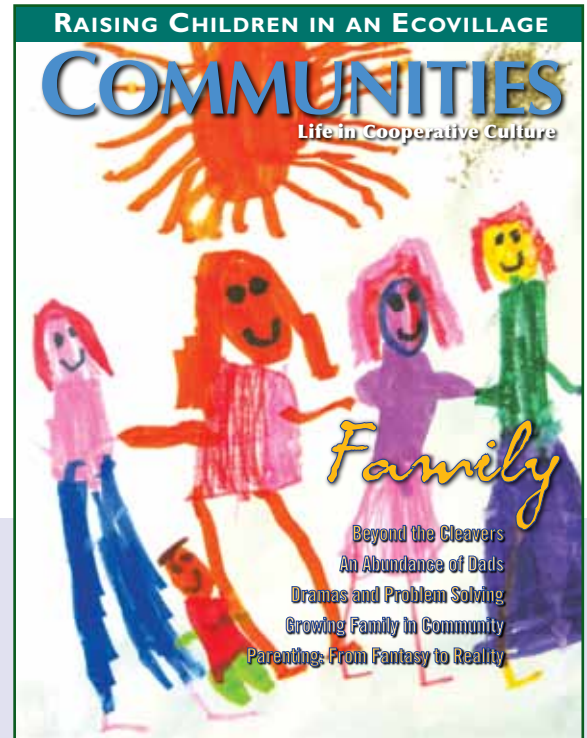
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