

BEYOND TOKENISM: MAKING COMMUNITIES MORE INCLUSIVE

# COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

Fall 2020 • Issue #188



## SCALING UP, SCALING DOWN

Quarantining at Camphill Village

Community Lessons from the Pandemic

Scaling Up a Community Nature Reserve

Scaling the Impact of Los Angeles Eco-Village

From Five Earths to One: Implementing the Change





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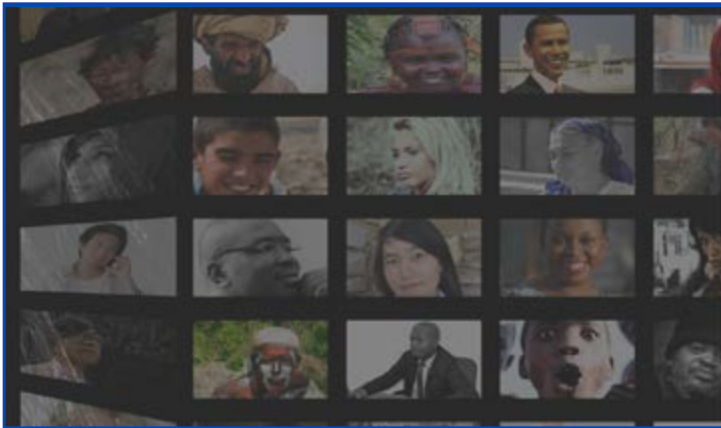
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## 6 REASONS TO FOCUS ON COMMUNITY

- Strengthen connection and combat loneliness.
- Leverage the assets of the whole community to drive long-term change.
- Promote citizen-led multi-sector engagement and develop a common agenda.
- Build systems for belonging and community safety.
- Develop and implement neighbourhood or city-wide strategies for change.
- Strengthen neighbourhoods.

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Visit [deepeningcommunity.ca](http://deepeningcommunity.ca) to learn more about the Cities Deepening Community network.



Creating deeper communities is THE opportunity of our time. As we learn the skills to transform our neighbourhoods, we restore our capacity to care for one another.



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**Annual National Gathering of Cities Deepening Community – *Celebrating Neighbours-Measuring the Impact of ABCD***. In June 2021, we will explore the impact of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) and leading neighbourhood and community revitalizing strategies.

**Webinars** - Deepening Community hosts a variety of dynamic webinars with leading thinkers or practitioners on a wide variety of topics.

**Neighbours Journal** - an online bi-monthly publication that offers the latest resources and events on collaboration and neighbourhood development.

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Silver Sage Village cohousing resident Lindy Cook in Boulder, Colorado takes a whack at the coronavirus piñata she fashioned out of papier-mâché and toilet paper rolls. It was the culmination of a big party celebrating community members who had June birthdays. Cohousing community cultures provide a natural hedge against loneliness during self-isolation because of the strong relationships continually being built and nurtured among neighbors. Photo by Alan O'Hashi.



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Chris Roth

# Up, Down, and All Around

When the theme for this issue (originally simply “Scaling Up”) entered our conversations well over a year ago, we envisioned it in a fairly cut-and-dried way. The basic premise of the theme, as I remember it, was this:

*Intentional communities and similar examples of cooperative culture have so much to offer the world at large that they need to grow. How do we reach more people with our ways of living and with wisdom and practices that are applicable more widely? How do we expand our own individual communities, expand the total number of communities, strengthen the networking among these groups, and increase the influence of community living and its insights in the wider society? How do we become once again a notable part of the national and international conversation, as “communes” were in the late-’60s/early-’70s, but with a firmer foundation and in a more enduring way this time? How do we “scale up” at every level, from the micro to the macro, in order to help facilitate the transformation of society, so desperately needed in these times when the human future is so uncertain?*

Since then, a number of events have conspired to suggest: *not so fast*. Our former publisher’s efforts to scale up through rebranding and through hoped-for projects including a new print Directory and eventually a multi-faceted online platform for community-seeking-and-matching ran into the brick wall of lack of finances. As one part of scaling down in hopes of scaling up again in new areas, publication of COMMUNITIES was discontinued. Magazine staff regrouped and, through much conversation, networking (including the key connection to GEN-US made through our former editor and current Editorial Review Board member—thank you, Diana), and strong support from dedicated readers, we arrived at a new publishing home. Even here at GEN-US, though, after a much-larger-than-usual print run of our first issue (sending complimentary copies to many former subscribers), and a still-expanded print run of our second (to create sample copies to hand out at communities-friendly public events scheduled to happen in Spring and Summer 2020, but subsequently canceled by the pandemic), by the time of our third issue we needed to cut page count by eight, reduce the press run to a number just a little more than already-known demand, and even operate for several months without pay.

Economic forces beyond our individual control had already been putting a damper on ambitions to scale up the communities movement and our projects within it; COVID-19 humbled us further. And the murder of George Floyd, following a slew of others, brought to light beyond deniability that systemic racism is so embedded in our world

that we have all been fish swimming in water that we take for granted, because it is so ubiquitous—but that water is toxic. Predominantly white groups, especially, need to ask ourselves: If our own tanks are full of that toxic water, how can we hope to viably scale up anything? And why would we want to? Perhaps we need some “schooling” before we can pretend that we are ready to scale up, as we have so far failed to do anyway.

Moreover, much of the impulse to scale up may be unconsciously based in the same assumptions that have created the untenable world that we are wanting to create an alternative to (ironically, by scaling up). “Bigger is better,” “visibility is success,” “acclaim is virtue,” “immediate results are what count,” “growth is good,” etc., are ideas most of us have been immersed in even as some of us have learned to question them. But those ways of thinking are what have built the civilization that currently threatens to destroy the planet (or at least eliminate conditions on the planet conducive to our own species’ and many others’ survival) while in the process destroying itself. In what ways do we need to “fight fire with fire,” and in what ways do we need to take a whole different approach?

Sometimes it’s appropriate to scale down. That’s what both FIC and the magazine (now with GEN-US) have chosen, doing what we have capacity to do given current resources and conditions, not basing our sense of self-worth on how big a splash we can make immediately. Scaling up *can* be about taking the long view, not just the short view; scaling down almost always is. Accepting limitations can make space for whatever’s next, and can release us from illusions, misconceptions, or ineffective modes of being that we may have been clinging to. It can shake us of ignorance or bad habits. It can be a learning experience.

For a host of reasons, “Scaling Up, Scaling Down” became the theme of this issue.

• • •

Scaling up can bring liabilities as well as benefits. It can create institutions whose values and practices are antithetically opposed to the initial impulse around which a movement is based. Does anyone think that Jesus of Nazareth would endorse the Holy Roman Empire, the Crusades, witch-burning, widespread indigenous genocide, colonialism, or kidnapping Native American children to raise them in boarding schools in which speaking their own language resulted in beating or worse? (I won’t even wade into more contemporary examples of Christian hypocrisy.) On the other hand, would slavery have been abolished, or the Civil Rights movement have gained as much traction as it did, without a scaling-up of a very different brand of Christianity? The same can be said of many a person or cultural artifact whose adherents have attempted to scale up their work or interpret their vision, from Buddha to Karl Marx, from *Walden*<sup>1</sup> to *The White Album*<sup>2</sup>. Scaling up can be a double-edged sword, sometimes literally.

Scaling up risks not only losing the core values and attributes originally present in a project or vision. It can also bring legal and logistical perils, even for groups and institutions that may do a good job of adhering with integrity to their core principles. The bigger a community becomes, the more events it sponsors, the more it attempts to serve the public, the more it opens its doors and engages with the wider society, the more vulnerable it may find itself to lawsuits, bad publicity, “bad actors,” etc. The real possibility of something going wrong, of a major accident or tragedy, of debilitating real-world financial liability, increases along with the scale of a group’s activities and ambitions. The likelihood of being targeted by litigation may also increase with the size of one’s bank account and/or insurance plan. At the same time, even very visible but cash-poor organizations can find themselves the targets of lawsuits, whether frivolous or not, which would not have happened had they scaled down rather than up.

Articles in past issues have looked at the inevitable changes that happen in the tran-

1. [www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/10/19/pond-scum](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/10/19/pond-scum), [www.huffpost.com/entry/the-new-yorker-nukes-thoreau\\_b\\_8337888](http://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-new-yorker-nukes-thoreau_b_8337888)

2. [www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/charles-manson-how-cult-leaders-twisted-beatles-obsession-inspired-family-murders-107176](http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/charles-manson-how-cult-leaders-twisted-beatles-obsession-inspired-family-murders-107176), [famous-trials.com/manson/244-influence](http://famous-trials.com/manson/244-influence)



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—Lois Arkin, Los Angeles Eco-Village

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Forge Bank Cohousing, Lancaster, UK

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cut to the chase, providing  
hours of practical  
answers about Sociocracy.”**

— Denis Gay,  
Champlain Valley Cohousing, VT

**“I don’t think I ever learned  
so much in such a short time.”**

—Susanna Michaelis, Pacific Gardens  
Cohousing, British Columbia



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## 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 contribute articles 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; email [editor@gen-us.net](mailto:editor@gen-us.net). To obtain Photo Guidelines, email [layout@gen-us.net](mailto:layout@gen-us.net). Both are also available online at [gen-us.net/communities](http://gen-us.net/communities).

## Advertising Policy

Please check [gen-us.net/communities](http://gen-us.net/communities) or email [ads@gen-us.net](mailto:ads@gen-us.net) for advertising information.

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 nor in REACH listings, and publication of ads should not be considered a GEN-US 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/lister and complainant. If, as someone raising a concern, you are not willing to attempt this, we cannot promise that any action will be taken.

## 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.

sition from a founding generation to those who succeed them. An inspired, effective group can become, as it grows, a much less inspired group, made up of “maintainers,” “bureaucrats,” and “followers” rather than visionaries and creators. Scaling up can dilute the impetus and strength of vision and commitment that created a community in the first place, resulting in a muddled reality for all who join, rather than the former clarity and “total engagement” of the pioneering generation.

And yet transitions happen in communities whether or not they try to expand; the founding stages only last so long. Scaling up can be a natural next step in the life cycle of a group, and suppressing that impulse can turn out to be the stultifying, purpose-thwarting choice. There is indeed a time for expansion, for reaching out, for growing, just as there is a time for contraction, regrouping, attending to baseline needs, rather than nursing grand ambitions.

• • •

Communities inevitably go through cycles of scaling up and scaling down, and individuals do too. At times, I've benefited from being part of a small, more intimate group; at times, I've thrived in the excitement and expanded possibilities within a larger group. I find myself naturally drawn to different size groups at different times; and often, the group itself fluctuates, corresponding to these natural needs for fluctuation within all of us. In my 20s, I followed my first two years of intense, relatively larger-group, traveling community experience with a year-and-a-half living a more circumscribed life, involving more personal space and staying in place. I returned to a larger educational community for half a year, then spent two years in a smaller, land-based intentional community which ranged from four to 12 in population. When that intimacy turned into a feeling of claustrophobia, the locked-in power dynamics seeming unlikely to resolve within that small group, I explored different options and settled on a group of nearly 100, where I found more “freedom” but also greater anonymity (sometimes welcome, sometimes not). After a six-month trial there, I craved a more family-like setting and the more direct connection to land that a focused farming-based community can bring, so joined a group whose population ranged from about half a dozen to a dozen, discovering that small communities (despite my earlier experience) *could* be functional and healthy interpersonally.

And so the cycles went, scaling up or down every one to three years, until my mid-30s. Over time I found more ways to “expand” and “contract” in place. As a result, I've been based in the same intentional community (a happy medium for me between very large and very small) for all but one of the past 23 years. My break from it consisted of sampling first a smaller and then a larger group, and I subsequently returned to a decimated community, just starting to rebuild, having left a much larger iteration of that same community a year earlier. Over time, I have found it easier to adapt to and even embrace the natural cycles in our population, the periods of seasonal expansion (summer) and contraction (typically winter), the alternation between outward focus/activity, inward focus/rejuvenation, and combinations of the two at any one moment. Trips away from that community, including extended periods with my family of birth and with former community-mates now living elsewhere, add to the fluctuations in my life that seem necessary and natural—accompanied by scaling up and scaling down not only work-related ambitions but engagement with modern technology, media, money, homegrown foods, etc. The process of fluctuation, of change over time, of experiencing cycles, is the one pattern that is constant, for both me as a communitarian and for the communities in which I've participated.

At times, scaling up is enlivening. At times, it's much ado about nothing. At times, scaling down is what my soul needs, or what my community needs.

• • •

And at times, scaling down is what our culture needs—at least until we can “get things right.” This issue explores “scaling” from many angles. We start with



an extended book excerpt from Crystal Farmer, whose insights may help communitarians (the majority of whom in North America, at least, are white) understand why Blacks and other marginalized groups may feel unwelcome despite communities' stated intentions to be more inclusive. Crystal gives suggestions for how to initiate the cultural changes within groups that will allow eventual scaling up of a more inclusive form of community. Daniel Wahl advocates scaling *out* rather than up, and Jan Spencer describes many replicable, practical examples of scaling *down* our ecological footprints—necessary if we are to have anything left to scale in the future. Audrey Yang and Lois Arkin describe Los Angeles Eco-Village, a model of the kind of project that the rest of the world could learn from, while Adriano Bulla and Dr. Adrian Cooper take us to Southern Europe and Britain to look at scalable projects there.

Authors also explore the coronavirus pandemic and its impacts on intentional communities and on the scales at which they are currently operating around the world: Indra Waters surveys reports already compiled, Bill Wiser draws lessons from his experience at a Bruderhof in New South Wales, Matthew Goetzke and Diedra Heitzman reflect on quarantining at Camphill Village Kimberton Hills, Alan O'Hashi celebrates the "co-housing" vaccine, Niánn Emerson Chase and Stephen Wing draw from lifetimes of observing natural cycles, and Ron Gordon offers some improbably practical pandemic poems.

Thank you to all those who work behind the scenes to bring this magazine to you and/or support its smooth functioning: Yulia Zarubina, Linda Joseph, Gigi Wahba, Kim Scheidt, Melissa Ketchum, Orlando Balbas, our Editorial Review Board (see masthead for full list), and the people at Sundance Press, SimpleCirc, the US Postal Service, and IMEX—as well as, ultimately, others far too numerous to mention, most of whose names we don't even know.

And to our readers, too, thank you for being part of the COMMUNITIES community! 🍀

*Chris Roth edits* COMMUNITIES.



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**Contact Alice at:**  
[mcclelland.alice@gmail.com](mailto:mcclelland.alice@gmail.com)



## Return to Agua Caliente

Most of my documentary films and videos are available on YouTube (under my name). The most interesting result occurred when a former resident of a small town in El Salvador discovered a decades-old documentary about his town. Word spread quickly as the town rediscovered a critical part of its history.

“Notes in Passing” Blog #6 introduces “Return to Agua Caliente” about what can be done in even the poorest of conditions with the will of a community and creative leadership. The story jumps from the mid-’60s with the contributions of a Peace Corps Volunteer to 2011 when he returns at the town’s invitation celebrating what they accomplished.

*[exemplars.world/2020/10/27/paul-freundlichs-notes-in-passing-blog-post-6-getting-in-and-out-of-hot-water](http://exemplars.world/2020/10/27/paul-freundlichs-notes-in-passing-blog-post-6-getting-in-and-out-of-hot-water)*

—Paul Freundlich



## The Molina Center for Sustainability

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## How will your community celebrate the North American Day of Sustainable Communities?



Even in this monumental moment of uncertainty and potential, local communities are taking action and accelerating efforts, for a more just, regenerative, and thriving world. Now more than ever it is imperative to keep our communities and community connections strong. **This is a call for local communities throughout North America to celebrate our achievements large and small, locally and in solidarity with other communities of action around the world!**

**Join in at any time on September 19, 2020, for this synchronized international event.** Register to list your community hosted event and celebrate with the growing movement of communities nurturing and supporting resilience and taking action for the emergence of that regenerative, just, thriving world. Learn more and register your event: [www.sustainablecommunitiesday.net](http://www.sustainablecommunitiesday.net); email [genna@ecovillage.org](mailto:genna@ecovillage.org).

**Participation is easy!** Get creative and plan a simple community activity or event. This can be virtual or in-person, minding social distancing and safety precautions as applicable... It can be small or large, simple or elaborate. Have a garden or other outdoor project work party, share a potluck meal celebrating community, hold a block party, a virtual meet-up or educational offering, host an online film screening and discussion. Hold a Circle to acknowledge and honor ways your community contributes to solutions to the myriad issues we are facing.

**Across North America**, communities are responding creatively to the global challenges of our time. From growing food to generating energy, nurturing local economies, strengthening social connections, and working for social justice, communities are coming together to build a better world. All those who are aspiring to and working toward a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive North America are invited to become co-creators of the day, by hosting a virtual or community-based event, connected to and energized and empowered by this network of communities in action, celebrating with you!

This **second annual NA Day of Sustainable Communities** brings together local community events throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The Day of Sustainable Communities has been celebrated for four years in Europe, thanks to organizers ECOLISE, and is now a far-reaching international event. The NA Day of Sustainable communities is sponsored by Global Ecovillage Network-US, publisher of COMMUNITIES magazine; and hosted by the Global Ecovillage Network North America (GENNA) in collaboration with our Regenerative Communities Alliance partners.

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# BEYOND TOKENISM: How Your Group Can Become More Inclusive

By Crystal Byrd Farmer

*This article is excerpted and adapted with permission from The Token: Common Sense Ideas for Increasing Diversity in Your Organization by Crystal Byrd Farmer, New Society Publishers, 2020. For more information and to order, please visit [newsociety.com/books/t/the-token](https://newsociety.com/books/t/the-token).*

## I'm Your New Black Friend

Hi, I'm Crystal. I'm a Token<sup>1</sup>, which means I often show up in communities as the only Black person. I'm not just Black: I'm a woman, bisexual, autistic, and disabled, and sometimes I'm the only one in all of those categories. When we talk about wanting diversity in an organization, we mean we want people who have different types of identity. That's hard to do, because while our differences make us special, our similarities make us comfortable.

You like being comfortable. You are part of a community or workplace, and you probably have a majority of certain identities in your membership. In the US and Western Europe, most organizations are majority white, educated, and middle-class. When you are in the majority, you make the rules, which means moving through the world is easier for you. When someone who is not in the majority tries to move through the same world, they may have difficulty. That's why those people are called marginalized. They live their lives in the asterisks and footnotes of majority culture. I'm here to explain what the marginalized people in your community experience, and how you can make your organization more comfortable for them.

Whether you are organizing vegans, moms, or local history buffs, you probably want diversity. You heard somewhere that diversity is great, and you've tried to recruit people who don't look like you. You're really passionate about your community, but you're confused why people from [insert marginalized group here] never come out or apply. That's why I'm here. I've spent all of my life in community. From engineers to kinksters, Methodists to polyamorists, I've been a Token in many different situations. At some point I accepted the Crown of Tokenism and ran with it. I've spent my time trying to increase diversity in different organizations as well as speaking and writing about it. I'm usually the bearer of bad news, because diversity is less about the people you're attracting than it is about you—your values, your culture, and your community.

Here are three steps towards making your organization more diverse:

1. Prepare your community.
2. Do The Work.
3. Create culture conscious spaces.

In order to transform into an organization that is more comfortable to marginalized people, you must do what I call The Work. The Work is called anti-racism or anti-oppression work because you are undoing power imbalances to lift up the marginalized voices in your community. I describe how to get prepared for The Work in the first part of this book. In the second part, I talk about the basics of privilege, bias, and microaggressions. Each section ends with discussion questions to help your members start doing The Work. Finally, I give practical ways that you can create meeting spaces that are more

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**You're really passionate about your community, but you're confused why people from [insert marginalized group here] never come out or apply. That's why I'm here.**

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comfortable for everyone.

You may wonder, “Why should I change our community in the name of diversity? Our community is great, and great people will be attracted to it!” The truth is that access is a privilege. If you are privileged, you don’t naturally see the obstacles marginalized people face in their everyday lives. You may have heard things about Black people getting stopped by police more often or being followed around stores. Whether you believe those things happen or not, ethnic minorities have a different experience of the world. It’s a similar story for queer people, people with disabilities, religious minorities, and immigrants. Lack of access is not just in our heads—it has been researched and documented by scholars and YouTubers. The stress from lack of access makes showing up in a community difficult. We have to spend energy coping with implicit bias and microaggressions. When we use all of our energy, we have less energy to do the things we want to do. We might only show a part of ourselves, or we might not show up at all.

You may think, “I already know this! I’m a great ally!” Stay tuned. Even people who think they are helping are sometimes causing harm. I find this to be true when we cross categories of marginalization (sometimes called intersectionality). For instance, you may be white and identify as queer, which leads you to feel empathy for Black people because you have been denied some civil rights. The truth is there could be ways you are alienating your Black members even with some shared experiences. I wrote this book for you, too.

If you are a Token, God bless you. The work you are doing will be thankless and hard. This book will help you to talk to your community’s leadership so you don’t tear your hair out. Before you start, I want you to build layers of support inside and outside your community. Use your self-care tools, and know that it is OK to take a break or stop the work completely. No work in community is worth sacrificing your peace of mind.

There’s a saying in the autistic community: If you’ve met one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism. When you finish this book, you’ll have met one black, queer, autistic woman with opinions. While I hope my experiences translate across space and time, I don’t assume they will always fit your situation. Test my theories on your marginalized friends (with consent). If you don’t have any, start paying people to educate you. If you’re going to be a good leader, you need people who can be honest with you while sparing your feelings.

More on terminology: Why is Black capitalized? A friend started doing it on social media, and I liked it. Black is an identity, not just a social construct. Many white people don’t believe they are white, so they don’t get a capital letter. Why use the word queer? It’s easier than spelling LGBTQ+, but that’s exactly the community I’m referring to. What

about disabled vs. person with disability? I don’t have a preference, but people say they prefer person with disability, unless they’re autistic. If you’ve already started writing me a letter about all that, keep your pen handy.

Why aren’t you using the terms people of color (POC) or Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC)? I am Black and not a representative of other people of color, which could include Latinx or Hispanic, Asian, African, Indigenous, and everyone else who does not pass as white on a regular basis. While I am sure that my tips are relevant and useful to all those groups, I can only speak with authority on those identities I am familiar with.

Furthermore, there is an eagerness on the side of progressives to lump Black people in with other POCs. While many countries experienced the dark legacy of colonization, people of the African diaspora are a unique case. The things that will create an inclusive environment for Black people are not always the same for other people of color. In this book, I encourage you to think about how to include Black people in your community instead of congratulating yourself because you have some people of color. Other marginalized people—especially the ones in your community—can help you understand the challenges unique to them.

Finally, I am always learning, but I’m a little stubborn. I grew up in a time where



*Yana Ludwig, Crystal Byrd Farmer, and Joe Cole at the National Cohousing Conference, Nashville, TN, May 2017.*

Photos courtesy of Crystal Byrd Farmer

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## Unless you have done The Work to cultivate friendships with different types of people, your reach will be limited to people like you.

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bisexuality meant attraction to two genders and transgender was a one-way ticket. Now, people refer to multiple genders and a non-binary spectrum. Language and culture change, and I try to use words that are acceptable in the current time. There may be a point where this book is both outdated and problematic. Call me out or call me in, but I fully believe that problematic writing can be used for good. If my language doesn't work for you, write your own book.

*Note from the COMMUNITIES Editor: "Preparing for Change" and "Doing the Work," the first two major sections of this three-part book, provide essential help in creating the consciousness to most effectively implement the steps in section three, "Creating Culture Conscious Meetings." We include excerpts from section three below, since they are specific, practical steps with special applicability to intentional communities and similar organizations, but we encourage you to consult the complete book for assistance in working through all three stages with your community.*

### Creating Culture Conscious Meetings

Imagine you're in a hotel, and you're looking for your community's conference room. When you open the door on bikers sitting in front of a skull and crossbones, are you with your people? What if it's elderly white ladies knitting? As the Tokens, your minority members are used to feeling out of place every time they come in. The good news is that you can make some

changes so that your events or workplace feel more inclusive. These changes won't guarantee that marginalized people will be lining up to join, but it might be enough to get them in the door.

Know that there is a small slice of Tokens that are comfortable being in majority spaces, either because of their upbringing or by conscious choice. They may not think of their marginalizations until someone brings it up. They are often told they are "one of the good ones" because they don't conform to stereotypes. They may not strongly identify with their identity's culture, but that doesn't mean they don't value it. These unflappable Tokens are not the ones you are trying to bring to your events. They will show up regardless because they want to participate in community. You are trying to reach those who see that your community is full of privileged people and think, "This is not the place for me."

I was very nervous the first time I went to a gay church. The Metropolitan Community Church was a typical church building with a rainbow flag out front. There were mostly middle-class white people, but I saw other Black people too. They all smiled at me, but they didn't turn on the Red Alert for New People. The usher handing out name tags asked if I wanted a hug, and I was happy to receive one. I found a seat in the back, and no one rushed over to chat me up. After the sermon, someone invited me to the fellowship hall for lunch. I sat with people who asked where I was from and what I was doing in the city. They didn't ask me to self-identify, and they didn't change anything about the way they operated because I was there. It was a naturally inclusive place.

### The Invitation

First, consider how and where you are advertising your group. Many communities advertise meetings on social media or in public spaces. When you go to post your flier, check out the people in the room. Are the clientele mostly white and middle-class? Is there a place down the street that might have more young and queer people? Are there more Black Lives Matter signs than Black people? People have to see your message to respond to it. While you may consider your favorite spots to be diverse, the reality is that they often are not. If you are looking for a specific category of people, seek out the places where those people choose to be.

Be realistic about who you are reaching on social media. If you make a post and ask people to share it, the people who see it are very likely to have similar interests and networks to your own. Unless you have done The Work<sup>2</sup> to cultivate friendships with different types of people (your Black neighbor doesn't count), your reach will be limited to people like you.

Appearance is an important part of an invitation as well. If you search for a stock photo of a family, that family is very likely to be white and heterosexual. Have you ever looked at the front cover of Essence magazine? The people on the cover are almost always Black, because that's who they want to read their magazines. Has that ever stopped a white person from reading it? Never. Treat your advertising copy the same way.

When you make an invitation, you might be used to using words like "Ladies and gentlemen" or "men and women." The world has changed, and many people identify as non-binary or gender non-conforming. That means you might be excluding people who don't feel comfortable with the traditional categories. Is it vital to your mission that you call people out by gender? If not, try to be inclusive. Say people, folks, pirates, or something else to signal that you are not enforcing a gender binary.

Many adults have children, and some are single parents. If your community is geared toward families, offer childcare when you can. Parents are less able to participate in community when they can't afford childcare or don't have generous family members nearby. If your events are kid-friendly, say so. Work with parents to create a space that allows for children who will occasionally cry, fight, and run.

When my daughter was a toddler, I started attending Al-Anon meetings. Not only was I the youngest woman there, I was the only one with a child. None of the meetings offered childcare. My toddler was fussy and busy, but the women in the group were gracious. When we were guests at a different meeting, the leader was not so kind. "She



doesn't need to be here," the leader said in my direction. Imagine if I had missed out on healing because I was shamed for bringing my kid.

## The Location

One of my favorite tools is the Racial Dot Map. This map shows the United States population as a series of dots. The dots are colored to represent the racial category each person chose on the census. Take a moment to look up your neighborhood on the map. Is there a whole bunch of blue where you are? Are there streets that show a clear divide between Black and white, or white and Asian? These dots show the legacy of housing segregation. If you think you're exempt because your city is liberal or not in the South, you're wrong.

The reality is that there are white and Black neighborhoods, and, in bigger cities, there are neighborhoods for other minorities too. There are very specific ways the government and homeowners have made minorities feel unwelcome in certain areas. That means that people who don't fit in will be, at best, looked over suspiciously, and, at worst, have the police called on them. It doesn't matter if you personally have never seen this happen. Minorities have a cultural memory, and many will be hesitant about showing up in majority white neighborhoods.

I once dated a white man who lived in the suburbs. He invited me and my daughter to his house to swim in the neighborhood pool. My daughter loves swimming, so we were excited to get to the gate early, along with several other white families. When the pool attendant opened the gate, the white families gave their house number and went on their way. My partner gave his, but the attendant looked at me and my daughter.

"Where are they from?" she asked.

"They're with me," my partner said.

"Do you have ID?" she asked. "We charge \$2 for guests."

My partner was confused, but I knew exactly what was happening. I was a Black woman in a white space, and I wasn't welcome. I was furious. The attendant was young, so I couldn't blame it on old age or ignorance. I knew that she had grown up with a natural suspicion of minorities in majority white spaces. My partner floundered and tried to find cash, but the attendant eventually let us in "this time." Later my partner asked his teenage son about the guest fee, and he said they never enforced it with him.

When your gathering place is in a white neighborhood, minorities may not feel welcome. The occasional presence of one or two people of color does not change that. Think about what your location says when planning your community meetings. Is it a white church in a wealthy neighborhood? Is it the college grad hangout? Is it the community center in the hood? "But I know the people who own the building and they're great," you may say. That just tells me you know how to network with people who look like you. Is it so difficult to go a street over and start a relationship with a minority business owner?

Am I telling you that if you set your event in a minority neighborhood, more minorities will come? Yes, but it's complicated. Minority neighborhoods on average have higher crime rates. Due to higher mortgage interest rates and lower home equity, buildings may be older and less maintained. That's not something this book or your Work can change. If your community members are worried about crime, they may not come out no matter what race they are. If it's a safe place (and you can determine this by talking to the owners, not by making assumptions),

then minorities may still see that your event is majority white and decide they're just not interested. They may (correctly) think that you are pandering to them and wonder if you have actually done The Work to be an inclusive organization. The only way you can fight that perception is to consistently show up in that community and contribute to it as a member, not a benefactor.

If your location is anywhere in the rural backcountry, good luck.

Accessibility is important for community members with disabilities. Does the building have wheelchair ramps that are easy to get to? Is the location too loud for hard of hearing folks to stay engaged? Does the place burn incense that may keep people with sensory sensitivities away? You may say, "None of that bothers me or my friends." If you are able-bodied, you don't understand how certain environments may be unsuitable. The good news is that you can make your location more accessible, and those changes are best made with the input of people with the type of disability you're accommodating. Don't guess at a fix and expect people to come flooding in.

Is your location accessible by public transportation? There are plenty of people that can't afford a car and would appreciate a ride. If you're expecting everyone to use ride sharing, remember that many low-income people don't have a checking account to link to the app even if they own a smartphone. Is it a restaurant where



*Black Lives Matter sign appears in a predominantly white neighborhood in Portland, OR, site of the 2019 National Cohousing Conference.*

everyone is expected to buy dinner? It can be humiliating to attend and not eat, especially when people ask why or offer to pay for their food. Will your members who don't drink or are in recovery look out of place if they don't have a beer at the table? Is your favorite spot the one full of tobacco and vape smoke?

If you're considering an outdoor location, what are the facilities like? I know earlier I said Black people like to camp, but there's a reason we don't have a big presence at Burning Man. Those of us near rural areas have a cultural memory of sundown towns and threats against the out-of-place traveler. There's also the tendency for white progressives to relish in "roughing it" with no running water or heat, when low-income families are "living it" without the benefit of organic groceries.

## Introductions

The actual act of welcoming people can be inclusive or exclusionary. Do you sit in a circle or facing a lectern? Do you have space for wheelchair users or is everyone expected to squeeze through tight spaces? On the other hand, asking everyone to sit on the floor may mean the person with arthritis isn't going to come back. Forcing all the newcomers to sit up front may extract any energy your introverts had for making friends.

Do you insist on hugging everyone who walks in the door? Do you ask for their name and then make a joke when it is foreign-sounding or hard to pronounce? Do you try to pay extra special attention to the minority who just walked in and is still sizing up the place? All of these are ways that you can put people off from attending your event. Yes, it's true: some people don't like hugs.

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## One unfortunate consequence of being a Token is getting confused with other Tokens.

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The language you use when introducing people is important as well. Common practice in progressive communities is to invite people to say their name and their pronouns. For example, "I'm Crystal, and my pronouns are she/her/hers." I don't recommend doing this right away if it is not common practice in your group. If you insist on announcing pronouns during introductions, your gender non-conforming members may feel like they are being put on the spot. Your community may also react negatively to asking for pronouns. They may say, "I don't care what you call me," or "I'm obviously a he." Make sure your community has done The Work around gender so they don't harm people. Invite people to give their pronouns in a one-on-one setting if you are wondering about their gender identity. Once your community feels comfortable giving their pronouns one-on-one, implement the practice of introducing your pronouns with your name.

If you are going to start your meeting with any type of cultural action, please run it by several leaders and Tokens. I don't care if your friend from a reservation taught you the song. Is it appropriate for the space, is it part of your heritage, and is it used with permission? White culture has just as many songs and traditions that you can borrow from without being problematic.

I was out of town at a conference where an uncomfortable number of people were waving at me as if they knew me. Finally one woman walked up very excited to show me her tattoo that said Namaste. Finally I understood: they were confusing me for another Black woman who had spoken earlier. Her name was Namaste. (Black people can also be guilty of cultural appropriation!) One unfortunate consequence of being a Token is getting confused with other Tokens. These situations are always ironic to me because I could honestly be mistaken for someone else—my twin sister, a scholar who attends a completely different set of conferences. Misidentifying someone is embarrassing, and the only way to avoid it is to train your members to recognize people for things other than their skin and hair. Make it a practice to wear name tags or do icebreakers where people talk about a unique trait or favorite activity. If you do trip up, own up to it quickly without self-flagellation.

## Ground Rules

Create a culture of respect for every meeting by establishing ground rules. For example, encourage people to listen to each other instead of waiting to respond. Back someone up if their story is being challenged for authenticity. Don't allow insults or demeaning comments. Make agreements on confidentiality outside of the group. Have a clear process for resolving disputes.

Be conscious of how dress codes can be discriminatory. Face control, a policy practiced in Russia and other former Soviet countries, excludes people based on dress from nightclubs and restaurants. If your location has rules against bandanas, saggy pants, headscarves, or sneakers, minorities will feel less welcome. It's not that Black men don't have belts: they are expressing themselves through their style. If you're ballroom dancing, dress codes make sense. If it's only to make white people feel comfortable, they don't.

If your community has anything to do with sex, sexuality, swinging, BDSM, polyamory, or other types of "lifestyles," set up very specific ground rules at your meetings and events. People often join these groups expecting to find partners for "fun" (sex), and they will assume the environment is more open than traditional spaces. Whether that is true or not, be clear on how people should interact with each other.

If you want people to feel safe, establish protocols about how to ask for a date or "to play." Some groups have a rule that you must meet in person before reaching out online through social media. Some groups require people to be "vetted," or approved by other members, before they attend more intimate events. Do not expect people to follow rules that you have not announced or posted clearly. Have the leadership actively monitor people and step in when someone looks uncomfortable. Follow up immediately on any claims of assault or harassment.

Minority women are often fetishized at events. I attended a sexual play party once, and during the non-sexual beginning activities, women were invited to stand up and close their eyes. The men circled the room and whispered their thoughts to whomever they

cared to. By the time I heard, “You are exactly what I’ve been looking for,” my skin was crawling. Don’t ignore the potential for boundary violations at your sex-positive events. What may seem like a compliment to you could make another person feel unsafe.

### Conversation and Conflict

Vary your meeting styles to attract different people to different events. Some people enjoy free-flowing conversation, while others need structured prompts to be able to participate. Some people like to be active and moving, while others come to sit and relax. Be aware of how culture affects conversation style. In some Black families, loud debates and derisive comments are a form of connection. Acting that way in a majority white space may lead to members saying they feel threatened or otherwise uncomfortable.

In my experience as an autistic person, conversation can be a minefield. I answer questions directly, and I don’t always understand nuance. I am at the point in my awareness where I can warn people that I am this way, but other neurodivergent people may not know why they have difficulty in social situations. Explore the topic in a discussion or in your diversity training. This is the only time I would make an exception to the Token rule: many autistic people love to talk about themselves and what their world is like. Ask them if they feel comfortable leading a discussion about their differences for the community and ask what accommodations will make them feel supported when they do.

If you decide to limit devices at your meetings, consider allowing exceptions for people who use them to communicate or self-soothe. Just because you find them distracting and mindless doesn’t mean others do. These people should not be confronted and asked to defend their use to leadership or other members. As long as the policy has been clearly communicated, trust that they are able to use them without disturbing other members or breaking the perceived peace of the space.

Conflict is an inevitable part of any group process. As a leader, the way you handle conflict will tell the rest of the group how to behave. Do you squash vocal opposition, prompting people to talk behind your back? Do you encourage shouting matches as long as people hug it out afterward? Create guidelines for how your community deals with disagreements. Teach people to debate ideas, not personalities. Avoid protecting people with more social capital. Seek to understand the underlying conflicts instead of just dealing with surface issues.

Nonviolent communication (NVC) has been taken up by a lot of progressive groups for its structure and clarity in expressing feelings. Many people who grew up avoiding conflict have found their voice through NVC. There are, however, power differentials that can make NVC ineffective. If either party is less educated or less practiced in NVC, they will have a disadvantage during a conflict. If someone refuses to engage unless the proper NVC format and/or words are used, they may be abusing the process to get their desired outcome instead of letting both parties express themselves. Instead of defaulting to NVC, think about whether community members need other ways to navigate conflict.

Many progressive communities deal with problematic people by “canceling” or excluding them from the community. This method may work on Twitter, but if you treat all your members this way, you’ll burn through the member rolls. Many of us Tokens are used to sitting through conversations that are blatantly racist, sexist, or otherwise harmful. We don’t point it out because (1) we too desire social inclusion, (2) we don’t know who will back us up, or (3) we don’t have the energy for an argument. Instead of shaming, use your privilege to help others understand harm. When the problem is simply using the wrong words or making an off-color joke, address the issue in private. You in turn can practice being vulnerable with people who are trying to do their best. If you are in an environment where you constantly feel unsafe, you may be more primed for external triggers. Reconsider being in a community that allows that kind of harm.

Another dynamic that happens to Black women is being invalidated when they are

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**Black women are often invalidated when emotional or angry. We are expected to be sassy, upbeat sidekicks all the time.**

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emotional or angry. Showing emotion means we immediately lose any argument that’s supposed to be rational and fact-based. Everyone has bad days, but Black women are expected to be a sassy, upbeat sidekick all the time. Once I had a difficult conversation with a boss, I was on the verge of tears from anger. I asked to be excused. Later my boss told me that I couldn’t handle criticism. Ironically, the people I had chosen to be around for their lack of drama left me without the space I needed to take care of my emotions. 🌸

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*To read more, you can find* *The Token: Common Sense Ideas for Increasing Diversity in Your Organization* *by Crystal Byrd Farmer, New Society Publishers, 2020* *at* [newsociety.com/books/t/the-token](https://newsociety.com/books/t/the-token).

*Crystal Byrd Farmer is an engineer turned educator. She has been an organizer and speaker as part of the cohousing and polyamorous communities. She is the website editor for Black & Poly, an organization promoting healthy polyamorous relationships for Black people. She also serves on the Editorial Review Board of COMMUNITIES and on the Board of Directors of the Foundation for Intentional Community. She is passionate about encouraging people to change their perspectives on diversity, relationships, and the world. Crystal lives in Gastonia, North Carolina.*

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1. I understand Token is a negative term. In the context of this book, I’m using it to identify the people in your organization who may feel left out because of their identity. I don’t recommend calling them Tokens to their faces, but you should ask for their input during this process.

2. See section two of *The Token*.



# WHAT IF?—Scaling Out Regenerative Development Glocally: Building Educational Ecosystems of Collaboration to Improve Planetary Health

*By Daniel Christian Wahl*

The other day I had a conversation with someone who is in an exceptional financial position and connected with powerful influencers—a person with the potential of being a key enabler of scaling-out capacity and action in regeneration around the globe. Yes, there are many people in such positions, yet few who are so switched on to the urgency for redesigning the human impact on Earth.

Our conversation was wide-ranging and encouraging. It made me ask myself the big “What if” questions:

**What if** funding were no longer an issue and billions would be liberated to support the local and bioregional capacity-building for ecosystems restoration and the regeneration of communities, cities, and globally cooperative bioregional economies?

**What if** we were suddenly enabled to convene conversations, planning, and implementation locally and bioregionally to engage in the scale-linking redesign of the human presence and impact on Earth?

**What if** we were challenged to scale out a glocal (global-local) capacity-building and education programme that enables people to learn the needed skills and knowledge while already being an active part of the regeneration rising?

**What if** all of the experienced organizations, teachers, businesses that hold important skills and experience to contribute to this process were suddenly asked to collaborate in building the capacity of many millions of people to get involved and become active healers of the Earth and her people?

In the conversation I was asked whether I had a solution to the converging global crises and an idea how to create a wise response to them. My response was that anyone who claimed he had might be deluded at worst and at the least lacking the necessary humility to match the intensity of the challenges we face.

We will have to find those answers and solutions together. And to do so we need a shared overall vision and to get started so we can learn along the way.

We also have to understand that this will be a continuous learning journey that will need many adjustment of course and constant redesign to adjust answers and solutions to changing conditions.

As I mentioned before, maybe questions<sup>1</sup> rather than answers are the appropriate cultural guidance system—or “deep code”—in this situation?

That said, we do know that bringing carbon back home, restoring healthy ecosystems functions, cleaning up the oceans

and restoring watersheds, reforesting the planet rapidly with biodiversity reserves, productive analogue forests that provide food and biomaterials, creating healthy agro-ecological ecosystems in which farming is also about healing landscapes and safeguarding biodiversity, building capacity for decentralized renewable energy production and catalyzing the massive amount of innovation that will be needed to shift towards regionally focused circular biomaterials-economies and regionalized production and consumption patterns...all of these activities will take us into the right direction.

What is more, engaging in all these activities as and in community will provide a shared context of meaning locally, regionally, and globally that might just take us into celebrating our diversity of opinions and finding a higher ground on which we can collaborate in the healing of the Earth and her people.

We need to find this higher ground to see our diversity as a source of vitality, resilience, and creativity, rather than a reason to argue, go to war, dismiss, and compete.

So **what if** the money were suddenly available to engage everyone who is holding pieces in the complex puzzle of redesigning and transforming the human impact on Earth in a concerted effort to enable this shift through education, community organizing, multi-sector/stakeholder regional visioning and planning processes, and enabling platforms and processes for glocal collaboration, knowledge exchange along with established pathways for flowing financial capital into living capital?

## Are we ready? We better be!

Too often have I seen organizations that are broadly aligned on their higher vision and mission fall into patterns of behaviour that were more competitive rather than collaborative. Budget constraint made people more concerned with keeping their individual organizations functioning—rightly convinced of the importance of their contribution to positive change. It stopped them from feeling able to dedicate time and space to the exploration of how to link up with other players in the field and create synergies that would lead to all agents of positive change working in a concerted effort. This pattern could sabotage an effective scale-out of regenerative literacy, capacity, and implementation.

**What if** we no longer had the excuse to on the one hand admit the absolute necessity of wider cooperation and whole systems design processes that link diverse efforts into a whole

that is more than the sum of its parts, and on the other hand justify inaction by saying that we don't have the funding for it?

Imagine convening a series of meetings that would explore what needs to be done to skill up and build capacity for ecosystems restoration and regenerative development everywhere.

Can we create a list of skilled agroforestry, regenerative agriculture, permaculture design, and holistic land management professionals, of analogue foresters and biodiversity experts for every locality, region, and biome—so we know who to call on as trainers?

Can we create an ecosystem of training and education opportunities that are taking place in existing projects, rapidly spreading “ecosystems restoration camps,” and the growing network of Regenerative Regional Development Hubs—so people who want to become active change agents know their options?

Can we link the different permaculture associations, agroforestry training centres, organic and biodynamic farming schools, demonstration sites and large implementation projects of holistic management and diverse regenerative agriculture approaches into a global network that trains people on the job—so we can begin to make progress while we scale out capacity?

Can we establish multi-sector partnerships that link business, public authorities, and civil society organizations into bioregion-

ally focused collaboration in regenerative development plans and implementation—so we can coordinate efforts that draw on our diversity of skills and experiences in ways that truly enable change?

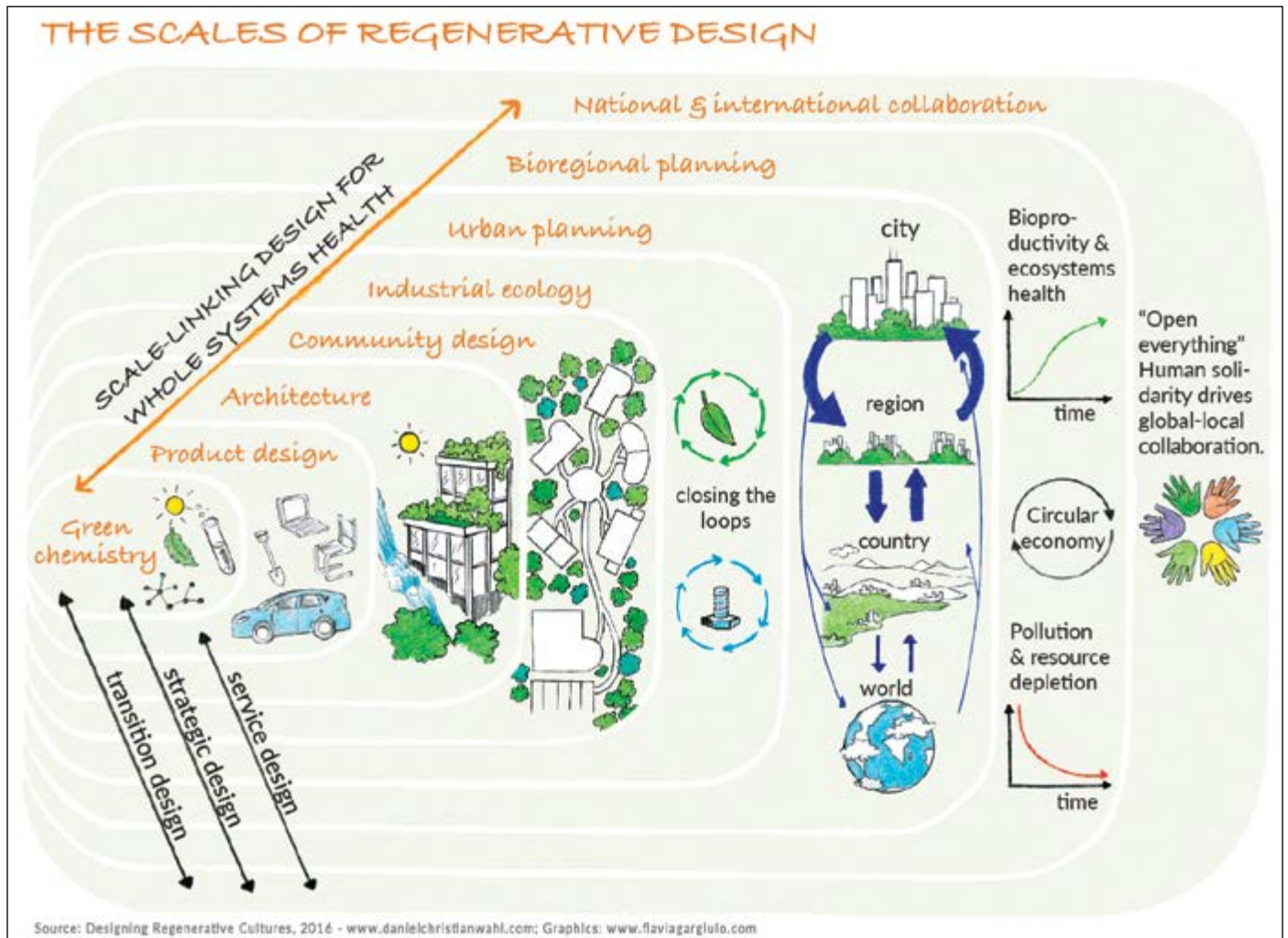
Can we build the appropriate platforms to enable knowledge exchange, skill-sharing, and capacity-building through local, regional, and global collaboration—so we can co-create a more regenerative and thriving future for all of humanity and the whole community of life (as a planetary process)?

I sense soon there will be a lot of funding flowing into restoration and regenerative development. How do we make sure we are ready to scale out when that time comes? 🌱

*This article is adapted from a blog entry initially posted September 27, 2018 at [medium.com/re-generation/what-if-scaling-out-regenerative-development-glocally-9ee4464af681](https://medium.com/re-generation/what-if-scaling-out-regenerative-development-glocally-9ee4464af681).*

*Daniel Christian Wahl is author of the internationally acclaimed book Designing Regenerative Cultures. He is dedicated to catalyzing transformative innovation in the face of converging crises, advising on regenerative whole systems design, regenerative leadership, and education for regenerative development and bioregional regeneration.*

1. [medium.com/@designforsustainability/living-the-questions-why-change-the-narrative-now-a1b6d7d410cd](https://medium.com/@designforsustainability/living-the-questions-why-change-the-narrative-now-a1b6d7d410cd)



Graphic courtesy of Daniel Christian Wahl

# Nurturing Vital Diversity and Resilience: Scaling Out, rather than Scaling Up!

By Daniel Christian Wahl

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**Many regenerative solutions will no longer be regenerative if they are simply scaled up into a mega-project or replicated in a cut-and-paste (cookie cutter) fashion.**

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There is an unfortunate knee-jerk response programmed into many people in leadership positions to want to ask: “How do we scale it up?” every time they hear a seemingly good idea. To a larger or lesser extent, many of the people who have this response have contracted the virus of neoliberal economic indoctrination. Once infected you do not question the economic growth imperative, its hidden subsidies and externalities, the inadequacy of GDP as a measure of positive progress, nor the implied assumption that bigger is better or more efficient and effective. Very often it is not!

Of course we need to find a way that regenerative practice and careful restoration of healthy ecosystems functions can spread from community to community and bioregion to bioregion to reach global impact as quickly as possible. We need to reach scale, but not by scaling up!

Many regenerative solutions will no longer be regenerative if they are simply scaled up into a mega-project or replicated in a cut-and-paste (cookie cutter) fashion. Such expansionist approaches tend to lose touch with the necessity for solutions to be born out of the cultural and ecological uniqueness of a place—its people and its bioregion. We can learn from the patterns of natural system how to *design as nature*, create place-sourced solutions and create conditions conducive to life.

In general, natural systems do not keep growing exponentially in quantity and size. They tend to follow a logistic curve of growing to a certain point and then changing and maturing in qualities, relationships, and interconnections without continuing to grow quantitatively in size or numbers. Just reflect on your own development from childhood to adulthood, if you want an example for that pattern. Our species has long passed the point where we should have switched from quantitative growth to qualitative growth, from more and bigger, to better and more appropriate.

The way to take the design of regenerative systems to scale is by scaling out or spreading patterns that work and increase health<sup>1</sup>, vitality, resilience<sup>2</sup>, and adaptive capacity. Doing this well means doing so always with careful attention to the uniqueness of local culture and the local ecosystem. This would lead to decentralised and distributed systems that have a high degree of redundancy and therefore resilience to external disruption.

That is why the title of my book (*Designing Regenerative Cultures*<sup>3</sup>) speaks of cultures as plural. Our own diversity of culture and even diversity of perspectives is part of life’s diversity. This diversity is life’s secret sauce for staying creative, adaptive, and able to respond to unpredictable change!

We need to learn to celebrate our diversity of perspectives and still find ways to move forward together and address humanity’s existential crisis in so far unprecedented levels of global collaboration between places and bioregions and within them.

I should also say that the paradox embedded in the book’s title is intentional. We don’t really design cultures. Cultures emerge from the diversity of qualitative interactions, relationships, and information flows between all their participants. Nevertheless, all our individual actions and even the ways we think about the world do affect what kind of culture emerges. To participate regeneratively in this complexity is to act



Photos courtesy of Daniel Christian Wahl



from the intention of contributing health and value to the system as a whole.

The art and science of regeneration is about humbly aiming to design for positive emergence in the nested systems we participate in. That is why I work a lot with the deep practice of “living the questions together.” Prolonged collective inquiry is a more reliable pathway towards wise action than jumping for premature solutions or pretending that any solution will be appropriate forever or everywhere.

If we learn to scale out patterns that generate health and well-being, rather than scale up solutions in the mistaken belief they serve everywhere or forever, we will create a scale-linked, place-adapted, diverse and creative nested system that is much more capable of learning.

What’s more, the process of doing so requires local capacity-building, lifelong learning, and the appropriate participation of people in place. So the path of getting there will make us a globally connected and locally adapted species capable of learning and responding to change with transformation. The future is *glocal*, diverse regenerative cultures in glocal solidarity and knowledge exchange which are elegantly adapted expressions of the biocultural uniqueness of place. 🐦

*This article is adapted from a blog entry initially posted November 12, 2019 at [medium.com/age-of-awareness/nurturing-vital-diversity-resilience-scaling-out-rather-than-scaling-up-aaa80dccb5](https://medium.com/age-of-awareness/nurturing-vital-diversity-resilience-scaling-out-rather-than-scaling-up-aaa80dccb5).*

*Daniel Christian Wahl is author of the internationally acclaimed book *Designing Regenerative Cultures*. He is dedicated to catalyzing transformative innovation in the face of converging crises, advising on regenerative whole systems design, regenerative leadership, and education for regenerative development and bioregional regeneration.*

1. [medium.com/age-of-awareness/regenerating-health-as-the-pattern-that-connects-689b7ad9297b](https://medium.com/age-of-awareness/regenerating-health-as-the-pattern-that-connects-689b7ad9297b)
2. [medium.com/@designforsustainability/what-exactly-are-resilience-and-transformative-resilience-a0783595023f](https://medium.com/@designforsustainability/what-exactly-are-resilience-and-transformative-resilience-a0783595023f)
3. [www.triarchypress.net/drc.html](http://www.triarchypress.net/drc.html)

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# From Five Earths to One: Implementing the Change

*By Jan Spencer*

This is Part Two of the article, “From Five Earths to One.” (Part One appears in the Summer 2020 issue of *COMMUNITIES*, #187; Part Three will appear in the Winter 2020 *COMMUNITIES*, #189.)

This second part describes real-life examples of moving towards a one earth economy and culture—transforming a suburban property, repurposing the built landscape, allies and assets, aesthetics, and much more.

But first, let’s have a brief review of Part One.

The basic premise of Five Earths to One is that a sustainable society will require deep downsizing, public and private, in terms of shelter, food, transportation, recreation, urban design, budgets, and employment.

The future will not be a green version of affluence as we know it. A sustainable society will not have as much money as we now have. Just about everything will cost more.

It’s safe to say, for many people, the motivation for deep changes in lifestyle, culture, and economics is not only about reducing damage to the natural world. Rather, humans are capable of near unlimited personal and community uplift to bring out the best in positive human potential.

We could not ask for a better set of ideals to guide us than the wisdom of the world’s great spiritual traditions—care for the natural world, modesty of lifestyle, service to the community, uplift of the spirit, and personal accountability.

Part One explains eco-footprints in terms of “earths.” Used in this article, the term earth is a unit of measure. If every person in the world were to live like the average American, we would need five planet earths to supply the resources they would need and to process the human-created pollution. A one earth lifestyle is a lifestyle planet earth could sustain for everyone.

Part One uses a simple graphic of two circles, one five times larger than the smaller, to illustrate the startling difference between affluence as most people know it in the US and what a more ecologically responsible future might be like.

This one earth assessment of the future calls for big downsizing not only for the one percent but also for the 95 percent.

Everything will cost more because our economic system will need to practice full-cost accounting—that means, the price of products and services will include paying for the damage those products and services cause to public health and the environment. (More on full-cost accounting in Part Three.)

Many products, services, pastimes, even jobs, that are familiar today, will not exist when we live within our environmental means. A sustainable society will not be a green version of today in terms of housing, diet, recreation, transportation, and employment.

I write in Part One that current sustainability discussions, such as those involving the Green New Deal and progressive politicians, writers, speakers, and journalists, include very little content about what a “sustainable” lifestyle and economy might actually be like—and even less addressing the idea that the great majority of Americans would need to downsize.

Important to add, a sustainable United States would not have one-fifth the food, shelter, and opportunity we currently have. Rather, lifestyles and quality of life in a sustainable society could very well improve in many important ways.

The more people making these changes and the sooner they make them, the better.

## **Transforming a Suburban Property**

Let’s start off with suburbia, home to half of all Americans.

This is my place in Eugene, Oregon. I have been transforming my quarter acre suburban property for 20 years. It’s a permaculture landmark in the Pacific Northwest. My intention from the start was to produce an appreciable amount of food, energy, and water on site, to reduce my eco-footprint, and to reduce my participation in the mainstream economy. Literally thousands of people have visited over the years.

There is grass-to-garden front and back. My place has edible landscaping all over, with lots of trellises and arbors over rooftops and pathways. The property is home to brambles, grapes, perennials, and counts over 20 temperate fruit and nut trees. I rarely buy fruit, vegetables, or nuts at the store. I do a lot of food storage and seed saving.

The south side patio is now a 350 sf (sf = square foot) passive solar space that produces food and helps heat the house. There is a 6500 gallon rainwater system and the one-car garage was remodeled into a bedroom. I took out the driveway and replaced it with a shed, grape arbor, and walnut tree. My personal space is a 400 sf detached passive solar structure behind the main house.

Just as important as all the extensive permaculture features, my place is micro cohousing. I rent the three bedrooms. That makes four people on a modest property sharing fridge, bathroom, washer, dryer space, which means a much smaller eco-footprint for everyone. I give a break on rent for housemates who don’t have a car. We are all vegetarian.

Is this place sustainable? Is it one earth certified? According to the footprint calculator, it’s close. Transforming this



property and living here has been and continues to be one of the most fulfilling experiences in my life. I love it!

There are millions of suburban properties all over the country that could be transformed in similar ways. I have biked in affluent Rockville, Maryland, and many of those near-mansions on multi-acre lots could become full-on ecovillages with gardens and orchards.

Almost any suburban home has more potential to produce more of life's needs than most people might think.

### In the Neighborhood

Dozens of properties in my neighborhood have notable permaculture and downsizing features. For the past 15 years we have been organizing educational site tours here by bike to see them.

Dharmalaya, located a couple blocks from me, has been a neighborhood center of interest for almost 20 years. A 1000 sf open space strawbale studio and surrounding grounds have been used for countless progressive occasions such as workshops, yoga trainings, and local permaculture convergences. These events have helped build community culture in the neighborhood along with skills and networks that have gone out to the wider world.

Dharmalaya also has a greywater sys-

tem, food forest, veggie gardens, fruit trees, several small structures, and a small pond. The fences have been removed between Dharmalaya and their closely allied next door neighbors on two sides who also have many permaculture features. Kids run freely between the properties. And one allied neighbor has a fence down with still another permaculture-minded resident who has Eugene's most well known front yard food forest.

Five years ago, our neighborhood hosted the 2015 Northwest Permaculture Convergence. The Convergence took place at our popular neighborhood recreation center where we had 40 or so presentations and plenary sessions. People from out of town camped out in back yards in the neighborhood. We had two bike tours in the neighborhood, with 70 or so riders per tour, many from out of town. The Convergence had an expo with a wide range of planet-friendly exhibits, a bookstore, and outdoor workshops.

This was a suburban permaculture convergence. Much of the event was free to the public. Almost all the event planning was done within the neighborhood. We estimate over 700 people participated. Lots of new connections were made, lots of practical information was shared about permaculture, gardens, neighborhoods, economics, appropriate technology, and lifestyle.

Any group of friends and neighbors, perhaps with help from a neighborhood association or faith group, could organize an eco-education outreach event similar to the Convergence. We had another event in the fall of 2019, again at our neighborhood rec center. The Resilience Festival was a full day with dozens of community groups tabling, plenary sessions, presentations, workshops, and bike tours...all about lifestyles more friendly to people and planet.

### Further Afield

People all over the country are repurposing what's on hand for reducing eco-footprints and increasing social cohesion. Here are several of my favorite examples.

Duma is a well known cooperative household in Eugene. The half acre property in a nice older neighborhood, several blocks from the University of Oregon, is owned by one of the community members. The house is three stories high, has 10 bedrooms, a basement, and it's simply a beautiful place inside and out.

The front and back yards have become mature food forest, there is solar electric production, bike storage, tool shop and share, rainwater catchment system, chickens, cob



*Jan's property. This was a nothing-unusual quarter acre suburban property 20 years ago. A grassy back yard has been transformed with edible landscaping and a new structure.*

Photos courtesy of Jan Spencer



pizza oven, and fun placemaking features by the public sidewalk including a poetry stump, painting on the sidewalk, and kissing booth.

Ten people live at Duma. Meals are cooperative with residents taking turns cooking. Everyone helps keep the place tidy. Members place a high value on positive social interaction and living lightly on the planet. Duma is a model for combining cooperative living with reducing eco-footprints. There are hundreds of thousands of homes across the country that could become more like Duma.

East Blair Housing Co-op<sup>1</sup> in Eugene dates back 40 years. It is a legal cooperative that owns six mostly adjacent tax lots with close to 40 residents, in a vintage mid-1940s neighborhood in Eugene. Residents are mostly modest and lower income. The co-op has many characteristics of cohousing. There are several larger houses divided into apartments, a half dozen town homes, and a community house.

East Blair is a great example of transforming existing properties to provide affordable housing and a range of other benefits for the residents. Certainly, two of the most important outcomes are a collective smaller eco-footprint and building social skills for living together.

One back yard is a playground for kids. Other properties provide garden space for members who live in town homes without space for a garden. There is a shared sauna, washers, and dryers. Members have access to a tool room with a wide range of power and hand tools. Car ownership is low so former parking areas have been depaved and transformed into spaces for play, parties, and edible landscaping.



*Our suburban neighborhood hosted the 2015 Northwest Permaculture Convergence.*



*Site tour at Duma Community.*

East Blair has a number of resident committees including membership, management, house and grounds, and newsletter. Members learn skills for cooperation that allow them to work together for the benefit of everyone.

East Blair is a great example of transforming a nothing-special set of existing properties to make it a model pointing the way towards a more green and peaceful future. We have had many tours at East Blair over the years.

Here are other US locations retrofitting and repurposing existing urban infrastructure, with features and ideals similar to East Blair's: N Street Co-op<sup>2</sup> in Davis, California; L.A. Eco-Village<sup>3</sup>, Los Angeles; Maitreya Ecovillage<sup>4</sup>, Eugene; and Enright Ridge<sup>5</sup> in Cincinnati, Ohio. Certainly there are many more in the US and elsewhere in the world.

### **Further Afield in Portland, Oregon**

Kailash Eco Village<sup>6</sup> in Portland, Oregon was a one-time Hawaiian-themed upscale apartment complex. At its low point before rebirth in 2007, this 32-unit, mostly one-bedroom apartment building was the scene of drug deal shootouts in the parking lot, and a fourth of its units were unusable due to poor maintenance.

Privately owned, Kailash now has a waiting list for rental. A key word, rental. To experience an ecovillage and its many amenities, one does not need to have a lot of money. Kailash apartments are market rate if not slightly less, so that means living here is accessible to lots of people.

The ecovillage has gardens all around, various kinds of composting, bike facility, community social space, outreach to the surrounding neighborhood, emergency preparedness capacity, and much more. Most of the space to park 50 cars is depaved, turned into food production. Residents commit to a minimal amount of community participation but most people come to live here to be a part of the community.

Kailash is more than a residence. It's a live-in school for social and ecological lifestyles. Residents learn a wide range of skills that are practical and empowering for reducing eco-footprints and building social cohesion, not only on site but also in the community. A number of former com-



munity members have adapted what they learned at Kailash to their new homes.

Columbia Ecovillage<sup>7</sup>, established in 2008 and also in Portland, is a 3.7 acre urban ecovillage in northeast Portland's Cully neighborhood. It's a creative variation on repurposing existing buildings and property, a fusion of a declining 37-unit apartment complex and a remnant acre of a one-time farm, with large historical home and outbuildings.

People own their places using the condominium model. More than seven varieties of fig trees grow on site; rainwater catchment, gardens, edible landscaping, and music are also important features. There are shared spaces, work and project rooms, kid space, meditation site, personal and community gardens. Certainly, with all the members and planet-friendly activities on site with less need to go anywhere, eco-footprints are much reduced.

Fosterville<sup>8</sup>, a small residential co-op in east Portland, also deserves mention. Eight to 10 people live on a third of an acre in three homes. The site used to be two properties but in order to join them together, not only the fence needed to be removed but so did the extensive paved driveways. That depaved area is now a thriving cooperative garden and orchard. Importantly, when the properties were joined, the group was legally able to build the third residence.

Members share decision making and maintaining the place and buy food and

garden supplies together. One house on site is the first permitted strawbale house in Portland. A primary goal of the 10-year-old community is to model lifestyles that are friendly to people and planet.

Considering the vast number of homes in suburbia, apartment complexes, and all sorts of other urban residences, there is enormous opportunity for greening cities and towns. All the residential locations mentioned so far in this article are powerful examples of three basic ideals for a preferred future.

First, they are taking existing urban infrastructure and adapting it to reduce eco-footprints. The new uses almost always create more residential density, and when done in a responsible way, greater density means smaller eco-footprints because you have more people using the same amount of residential features—roofs, kitchens, bathrooms, washing machines, and all the rest. Responsible density can also create more green space.

Second, these locations also include a social aspect. People are learning to live with others in a more compact and purposeful way. These cultural pioneers are learning important cooperative social skills that will be increasingly important to share with others as mainstream lifestyles inevitably downsize. A somewhat prepared rough landing is better than a surprise crash landing.

Finally, these transformed locations are all models that others can adapt to their own





use. Nearly all the paradigm shift sites mentioned here have been visited by many site tours. They are invaluable resources for community inspiration and education.

### Allies and Assets

Our homes are critical places to downsize, whether suburban, urban, or rural. They are assets to manifest paradigm shift.

And there are countless other allies and assets for transforming our lives, homes, neighborhoods, and communities.

How we spend our money is a high priority: putting our money where it counts. But just as important is our own time. Our time and money are the base of the paradigm shift pyramid. We have many other tools, allies, and assets to work with.

Our 42nd Avenue<sup>9</sup> is an economic development corporation in Portland, Oregon. Their website describes them as a “collection of residents, business owners, local employees, commercial property owners, community institutions and others who have partnered to ensure that economic change benefits the people of 42nd Avenue in an inclu-

sive way. We are a connecting point and a conduit for community collaboration.”

Our 42nd is all about building a green and resilient neighborhood in a specific part of Cully Neighborhood (only a few blocks from Columbia Ecovillage). The most important tool that Our 42nd offers is a way for local people to invest time and money in projects in their own neighborhood that fit the character and values of where they live.

Projects include repurposing commercial space, business incubation, and encouraging urban agriculture. Our 42nd offers technical assistance to help bring about businesses and employment opportunities along with fostering community connections, all with a care for diversity, resilience, and inclusion.

Commerce, employment, providing for peoples’ material and community needs, and the natural environment are all related. Any neighborhood commercial zone has great potential for moving in a more ecological direction starting with the people who own the businesses, people who patronize them, and neighbors who live nearby.

Purposeful economic development, using Our 42nd Avenue as a model, can manage local resources and assets far more effectively for healthy community benefits than the mainstream economic marketplace left on its own.

Virtually every civic organization has great potential for helping to move neighborhoods and communities in a more green and resilient direction. One of the best models I know of is the neighborhood association (NA).

### Neighborhood Associations

Many cities have neighborhood programs which provide city support and staff, services, budgets, matching grants, and other useful assistance to help Neighborhood Associations address the issues important to their neighborhoods. Those issues can be traffic, crime, land use, the environment, or moving towards a one earth way of life.

Typically, a neighborhood association meets once a month with a program about issues important to the neighborhood and community. Most NAs have a board of directors that sets meeting agen-



*Our 42nd Avenue is a progressive economic development agency in Portland, Oregon.*



*Greening the greenway. Citizen initiative can help enhance public space in any city.*



das and interacts with the city and other community players. They may designate subcommittees to address specific issues. Neighborhood associations are the nursery of civic culture.

I am on the board of my NA and it is one of the most fulfilling involvements in my life. Much of my interest in land use planning comes via my NA because transportation and land use are basic concerns of any community or neighborhood. Our NA is currently focusing on racism, proposed bike lights on our greenway bike path, resilience, and our ongoing neighborhood planning process with the city of Eugene.

Neighborhood associations have enormous potential. If people with a concern for the environment and sustainability are on the board, they can put those concerns on the agenda and the NA can put them out to the wider community by way of hard copy or digital newsletters and as monthly programs.

A neighborhood association has standing in the community that an individual doesn't. When the NA takes a position on an issue, supports a cause, or puts information out to the neighborhood, more people pay attention. Again, people involved create the agenda. Neighborhood associations are a perfect place to educate and advocate actions that lead towards reducing eco-footprints.

Here in River Road, our articles and information promoting permaculture, property site tours, and urban homesteading have gone out to 5000 addresses in our neighborhood by way of snail mail and online newsletters. Our monthly meetings have included presentations about suburban permaculture, food storage, active transportation, and other topics that advocate progressive living.

Our neighborhood association is, in a sense, helping to reclaim the commons. The east side of our neighborhood is the Willamette River and Greenway, which also has a beautiful paved bike path away from cars. There are five different sections along the greenway where residents of our neighborhood have agreements with the city to help enhance the greenway and restore the habitat along the river.

The city does not have time and budget for much of the work that needs to

be done. But the city does have volunteer programs to help empower citizens to take initiatives to make their neighborhoods better places to live.

One four acre parcel along the river and bike path was close to becoming a large indoor soccer facility with a companion large parking lot. Neighbors stopped the project. That four acres is now open space under restoration. Over the years, there have been many chilly, muddy but fun work parties, assisted by the city along with native plants, supplied by the city. These work parties build social solidarity.

A quarter mile downstream from the restoration project, I have an agreement with the city to help look after a 65-tree filbert grove. The grove, pre-existing the greenway, was totally overgrown with ivy and blackberries 10 years ago. Thanks to city assistance, the grove now looks great and is becoming an important source of filberts. Anyone can collect the nuts in the fall.

The site is one of my favorite places in the world—river, bike path, no cars, leaves rustling in the tall cottonwood trees, a view of Eugene's iconic Spencer's Butte in the distance rising above the river.

Many cities have neighborhood programs and volunteer programs to channel people power towards useful projects in the community. When people become involved in their neighborhood association, they help create the agenda and that agenda can be as progressive as people care to make it. When people volunteer in the community, they help create the community they want to live in. It's a matter of taking the time.

Many cities also have Neighborhood Watch, emergency response (like CERT), and Map Your Neighborhood programs. These are all totally mainstream opportunities to help citizens organize for mutual safety and protecting property. That's good. These programs can be ice breakers; here's how:

All these programs depend on people meeting their neighbors. Once people meet, they can cook up any kinds of collaborations they want. We have a micro community garden on my street on the property of one neighbor that provides a large raised bed for five neighbors who would not have garden space otherwise. We were able to organize the shared garden space because we used an email list of people on the street thanks to some basic Neighborhood Watch organizing.

Any group of neighbors, once they meet and take the time, can identify common cause, make plans, and take action in any positive way they care to.

Communities of faith are natural allies for social transformation. Many have committees that focus on social justice and the environment. Some faith groups host com-



*The Medford Gospel Mission constructed a garden on a parking lot in Medford, Oregon.*

munity gardens. One I know a mile away has a commercial garden on site and a farm stand in their parking lot along a busy suburban street. Faith groups already have an elevated level of cohesion that can become more ambitious on behalf of people and planet. What is needed in any faith group is a person to take the initiative.

Another faith group in Medford, Oregon that serves meals to the homeless built a dozen raised garden beds on their parking lot with the help of the chamber of commerce, other community groups, many volunteers, and with the people who enjoy the free meals. The produce from the garden is used in the meals prepared. The year it was built, the garden project won a big community award.

Most towns and cities have recreation centers. The rec centers typically feature swimming pools, gym, exercise equipment, and more. Rec centers often host community education programs and just about anyone who wants to offer a class on just about any topic can do so. Teaching a class about resilient living through the rec center can be a great way to reach out to the wider community. Our neighborhood rec center has been the site of many progressive events and classes.

Neighbors can simply come together for a specific project. In one neighborhood in Eugene, neighbors approached the city with the idea of turning an unused street right-of-way into a large garden. The city welcomed the idea, created some reasonable hoops to jump through, and helped the group develop a plan. Three months later, work began on the cooperative garden with a big work party that included neighbors and a group involved with Americorps.

Ten years later, the garden is going strong. It's one for all and all for one. No private plots. They have work parties, workshops to learn about gardening, and celebrations. An information kiosk was built along with a tool shed to contain all kinds of garden tools, bought with money from a sweat equity neighborhood matching grant. Taking the time to recognize a neighborhood asset, to make the garden happen, and to keep it going has created many benefits to the entire neighborhood and beyond.

## Permaculture

Here in the Northwest, there is an appreciable and growing interest in permaculture. Courses are even taught at the university level. Permaculture is a practice with principles and values for designing systems for taking care of human needs in ways that are friendly



*Permaculture is a powerful tool for social and economic transformation.*

to people and planet. Permaculture can be used to design a suburban property or a regional economy.

Permaculture is a powerful tool that can be used to help bring about a society, culture, and economy that could live within its ecological boundaries. There are permaculture practitioners and enthusiasts all over the world. Certified permaculture instructors reside in every state. One can take a permaculture design course, even online, to learn how to apply permaculture to the real world.

Ideals of permaculture include working with nature and designing for multiple benefits. Permaculture is systematic, holistic, and takes in social, economic, and environmental factors. My place here in Eugene is a very good example of suburban permaculture, transforming a suburban property to produce more basic needs on site and to be an educational resource to the community.

Permaculture is becoming a new international language. When you meet another person who knows permaculture, you have an immediate connection. Many parts of the country have permaculture networks, landmarks, and local acclaimed teachers and practitioners.

Permaculture has developed some of its own culture. One of the best known is the "convergence." Typically, a convergence includes speakers, informational displays, workshops, onsite projects, and plenary sessions. It is also a much anticipated social occasion. A search online will reveal many regional convergences in the US and all over the world.

A permaculture network in the Pacific Northwest has organized convergences for many years that now alternate each year between Oregon and Washington State. Most convergences take place in a rural setting but we hosted a convergence here in our suburban Eugene neighborhood in 2015.

The overall ideal of permaculture is to design for the well-being of people and planet. Taking a permaculture course or making a visit to a project site, urban, suburban, or rural, can be a life-changing experience. Cities and states would do well to consult with permaculture professionals for all kinds of development and restoration projects.



## Placemaking

Another organization for greening the community deserves mention. City Repair<sup>10</sup> in Portland is a close ally of permaculture. Their website self-description goes like this: “City Repair facilitates artistic and ecologically-oriented placemaking through projects that honor the interconnection of human communities and the natural world. City Repair has accomplished many projects through a mostly volunteer staff and thousands of volunteer citizen activists. We provide support, resources, and opportunities to help diverse communities reclaim the culture, power, and joy that we all deserve.”

A key word for City Repair is “placemaking.” That means constructing or installing a project in a public place, almost always by volunteers, that causes a positive buzz. A project could be planters, monuments, natural building, cob benches, and/or informational kiosks. An artistic streetside cob pizza oven in one location in Portland has brought together untold numbers of people for tasty social occasions.

City Repair’s most famous placemaking feature is intersection repair, where an entire street intersection is painted in whimsical bright designs. Cars automatically slow down. Companion projects around the residential intersection may include benches, kiosk, kid space, tea station. Intersection repair projects have proliferated around Portland, now numbering in the dozens, and many other cities and towns all over the country and even beyond the US have put this great idea to use.

Placemaking creates identity and caring where people live. It adds life and vitality and reclaims a part of the urban landscape for people and nature. City Repair placemaking is always community-driven.

City Repair also organizes the yearly Village Building Convergence<sup>11</sup>, a nearly two-week event in the summer with dozens of projects, presentations, and social celebrations. The group offers permaculture classes and does outreach at events. There are many City Repair allies all over the country and beyond.

City Repair is a powerful example of citizens taking initiative to reclaim the urban landscape. Any group can adapt City Repair ideas to their own needs. For more details and inspiration, please see their website.

## Aesthetics

City Repair is one of many projects focusing not just on pure function, but on aesthetics and beauty too.

Aesthetics is in the eye of the beholder. A former neighbor on one side of me complained my place drove down his property value. A more recent new neighbor who bought the house on the other side of my place was stoked to move in next to a full-on

permaculture site. Another new neighbor directly over my back yard fence wants me to help them design a permaculture plan for their entire property.

My contention is, if people had more contact with their aesthetic surroundings, both at home and in the community, they would be happier and healthier. If people lived in attractive places, they might reduce their eco-footprints, volunteer more in the community, and be less likely to travel to some out-of-town location for a better view.

Aesthetics is a huge part of paradigm shift. Sitting quietly and at ease at home and just enjoying the surroundings makes for a very small eco-footprint. Entry to this realm is taking the time to create the surroundings, then taking the time to enjoy it. A key part of aesthetics is to resensitize to the subtle.

Human-created environments can be totally beautiful, especially those spaces repurposed from a less inspiring condition. Entire neighborhoods and towns could become beautiful.

My own quarter acre suburban property here in Eugene makes visible my own sense of aesthetics. This short description of highlights is not intended to sound like boasting, rather my home places a high value on aesthetics. Just about anyone can improve the view where they live and enjoy the benefits.

Edible landscaping is everywhere. Attractive pathways define the garden beds. For a nice touch of exotics, I like banana



**Entire neighborhoods and towns could become beautiful.**





trees and palm trees, and unusual for Oregon, I have a huge lemon tree.

There are water features with irregular shapes and gravity waterfalls, lined by chunks of moss-covered concrete from my depaved driveway (verdant green when it's wet). Grape trellises create green tunnels, with some trellis on rooftops. The driveway has been replaced by a walnut tree and shady grape arbor. The entry to the property is a green portal of marionberries and domestic blackberries on the sides with grapes hanging down from above with a large clump of banana trees part of the welcome.

The sunroom is a favorite place to pass some time, especially on a sunny chilly winter day: lots of container plants, glass in the ceiling, comfy couch. You can look up and see the sky. Inside the house, the decor is simple, not quite minimalist, but close, and the common space stays tidy.

It's a beautiful short vegetated stroll from the main house to my detached personal space, a "rustic modern" 400 sf passive solar structure I designed and built mostly myself, with lots of glass both as windows and in the south-facing ceiling. Its post and beam construction includes lots of exposed wood intersecting in many interesting angles inside and out.

Maps dominate the interior walls. There are two small lofts, one for sleeping. My own artwork is here and there, such as a life-sized painted masonite cut-out of a red-tailed hawk high up on one

tall wall, a life-sized cut-out roseate spoonbill on a windowsill, and a large painting of a favorite Sardinian beach on another wall.

The view out from my workspace window is the garden and south side of the main house. Lots of sky. I devote a fair amount of time simply sitting back with feet up on the desk and enjoying the surroundings, both inside and outside.

One of my favorite nearby locations is the Willamette River Greenway, a five minute bike ride away, with many aesthetic features. There are some beautiful front yard gardens between here and the river. I pass a tall palm tree (by Eugene standards) that I have a personal relationship with; I climbed a 20 foot shaky ladder and pruned it once. I love the bushel-basket-sized carved wooden frog that sits over a front yard free library cabinet where the street ends and becomes a dirt path for pedestrians and bikes to access the paved bike path along the river.

The bike path along the river has no cars anywhere near, but there are lots of tall cottonwood trees. There is a Class Two rapid, and many green, shady nooks and crannies along the bank for a cool picnic. Ducks and geese are common, osprey not unusual, and on occasion a bald eagle or beaver appears.

Closer towards town is the filbert grove mentioned before—one of my favorite places in the world. Further along, native plant restoration is ongoing, where the soccer facility was cancelled. Another few minutes and one enters a large park, play fields, benches to relax, community gardens, no cars.

Parks have been part of the urban landscape for thousands of years to be a sanctuary from the business of the city. City streets also used to be full of community life. And then, a bit over a hundred years ago, cars showed up and muscled their way into becoming the dominant species in the urban landscape. That was not an accident.

The automobile landscape is oppressive. Cars are loud, create air pollution, and damage people when they get in the way. A third to over half of an urban area is streets and parking lots—austere, hard, hot in the summer sun, and a poor use of space.

Millions of Americans visit Europe every year and among the most popular destinations are the car-free areas in many European cities: Barcelona, Paris, Copenhagen. People gather, stroll, meet, and greet with no cars.

Most European cities are less oppressed by cars, partly because older parts of these cities predate the car but just as important, particularly in northern Europe, people pushed back against the post-World War Two car invasion in the '60s and '70s to reclaim the historic city centers for pedestrians.

An increasing number of cities all over the world are repurposing streets and parking lots in favor of people, nature, and aesthetics. Barcelona and their Superblocks are leading to cleaner air and more bike trips. There are playgrounds, container trees, pic-

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**City streets used to be full of community life, until cars showed up and soon became the dominant species in the urban landscape.**

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nic tables, and people chatting with their neighbors where there used to be intersections, honking cars, tailpipe exhaust, and cars parking on sidewalks.

In other cities all over the world, bikeways and public transit are very popular—for example, in Bogata and Curitiba. A daylighted stream becomes a park in downtown Seoul, replacing a highway. Bike freeways expand in Holland; Houten’s downtown is car-free. Community plazas gain traction in New York City, turning ugly urban real estate into parks and public places. Aesthetics support public health.

Urban villages are the new plan in Paris. Late June municipal elections in France saw big gains by Green Party candidates—more cities and towns are going more green, with plans for pushing back on cars. Streets are giving way to bikeways in Milano. San Francisco’s Market Street is set to exclude cars, Portland replaced a divided highway along a river with a park, and Sunday Streets in Eugene draw crowds biking, strolling, meeting friends when cars are excluded.

Many other cities are pushing back on cars to turn the urban experience into a more aesthetic and healthy experience. Copenhagen considers bike infrastructure to be an investment in public health and their studies prove that investment in bike infrastructure does pay off in public health savings. In effect, bikes and walking make money for the city and cars cost.

Copenhagen’s transportation/public health equation can apply to city budgets and our own lives. To avoid spending money on unhealthy products and services also means we avoid unnecessary repair costs caused by those products and services. That frees up money, twice, that can be used to help pay for the world we



would rather live in. Part Three of this article, “How to Pay for the World We Would Prefer,” will take a closer look at this “double benefit” and other actions to help bring about systems change.

We have many allies and assets for moving towards lifestyles, economy, and culture that fit within the boundaries of the natural world and uplift the spirit. Suburbia, aging apartment complexes, faith communities, neighborhood associations, public interest nonprofits, economic development corporations, aesthetics, and city streets all have a part to play. But most important for paradigm shift is how we manage our own time and money. 🌸

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*For Part One of this article, see COMMUNITIES #187, Spring 2020, pages 25-28.*

*Part Three will appear in COMMUNITIES #189, Winter 2020. In it, Jan will describe how to pay for the world we would prefer to live in. Part Three will include a critique of market capitalism and profit-driven high tech then describe humane, if challenging alternatives. Part Three will close with a sobering assessment of the nation’s experience with COVID-19 as it relates to social solidarity and one earth lifestyles.*

*Jan Spencer goes into considerable detail about market capitalism, one earth lifestyles, transforming suburbia, pushing back on cars, and ecovillages with his podcasts at [player.whooshkaa.com/shows/creating-a-resilient-future](http://player.whooshkaa.com/shows/creating-a-resilient-future). Check his website, too, for more content and links to YouTube videos: [suburbanpermaculture.org](http://suburbanpermaculture.org). Also see his YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/channel/UCLl0oiYJZvCxb2ruWOodrUg?view\\_as=subscriber](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLl0oiYJZvCxb2ruWOodrUg?view_as=subscriber). Jan is available for making presentations over the internet. Contact him at [janrspencer@gmail.com](mailto:janrspencer@gmail.com).*

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# Green Localist Pathways to Ecological Civilization: Scaling the Impact of Los Angeles Eco-Village

By Audrey Younsook Jang

*This article is adapted from the author's senior thesis at Pomona College, Claremont, California, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Politics/Public Policy Analysis in 2019.*

## **T**he Shortfalls of the Green Technopole Model of Sustainable Development

### **Californian Climate Strategy and Challenges**

Despite the complex nature of global climate change, governmental response has largely focused on the measurable, rather straightforward mission of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.<sup>1</sup> The state of California has emerged as an internationally recognized “climate leader”—establishing the first compulsory GHG reduction program in the country with its landmark bill AB-32 (2006), which ordered the California Air Resource Board to set regional GHG reduction targets. The state has pursued these targets by issuing sweeping top-down regulatory measures and market incentives, with a special focus on investing in clean technologies, including renewable energy production and electric vehicles adoption.

California follows the prevailing mainstream model of sustainable regional development, in which public-private cooperation between government, business, and mainstream financial institutions supports the ecological modernization of industry. The result is what sociologist David J. Hess calls the “green technopole”: a capital-intensive, high-technology industry cluster around environmentally oriented production, which strives to achieve similarly profitable economies-of-scale as existing “brown” industrial production.<sup>2</sup> The green technopole model purports that environmentally conscious policy can also promote economic growth and material prosperity, compromising neither jobs nor the present standard of production and consumption.

Though California has thus far successfully met the AB-32 mandates, reducing GHG emissions by 12 percent and achieving its 2020 target reduction four years ahead of schedule,<sup>3</sup> its slowing GHG reduction rate<sup>4,5</sup> indicates the state is on track to miss its 2050 zero-emission targets.

This slowing progress can be attributed to the state's car cul-

ture. Passenger vehicles and light trucks alone are responsible for 30 percent of total statewide emissions; California's transportation sector remains its largest source of GHG emissions, which have been rising since 2012 even as levels from other sectors have remained relatively constant.

This undesirable trend is compounded by the state's affordable housing shortage, which is driving residents out of job-rich and transit-rich city centers, increasing commute times, traffic congestion, and carbon emission levels.<sup>6</sup> As the Southern California population is projected to grow by four million people in the next 20-odd years, *where* housing production occurs in this region is critical to reducing the number of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by residents.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated suburbanization; 40 percent of urbanites in one study indicated higher likelihood of moving further from the city center.<sup>8</sup>

### **Green Technopole Approach of Large-Scale Market-Rate Development**

State legislation has long recognized the critical implications that unsustainable land use patterns pose for California's climate objectives. Over the past decade, a slew of climate-sensitive development policies have attempted to produce what the state defines as “sustainable communities”: pedestrian-oriented residential clusters near job and transit centers, which allow residents to rely less on personal automobiles.<sup>9</sup> In step with its overarching green technopole climate strategy, Sacramento has issued sweeping top-down regulatory measures and market incentives to shift regional development patterns towards “sustainable communities,”<sup>10</sup> pushing legislation<sup>11</sup> that incentivizes developers to build high-density projects proximate to job and public transit.<sup>12,13,14</sup> The City of Los Angeles—the locality with the highest passenger vehicle-driven GHG emission levels—issued its 2019 Green New Deal pLAN committing to produce 100,000 new hous-



ing units by 2021. Ballot Measure JJJ, which voters passed by a wide margin in 2016, created the Transit Oriented Communities (TOC) Affordable Housing Incentive Program (implementing SB 1818), which reduced parking minimum requirements, added density bonuses, and offered other incentives for transit-oriented housing projects.

Such incentive programs constitute a green technopole strategy to scale affordable housing production in environmentally strategic locations. The primary implementors of a green technopole strategy are for-profit market actors: in this case, developers whose bottom line is and always will be profit—with a much deeper commitment to consumer preferences than to the sustainable development objectives of their governments. Their developments largely consist of high-density market-rate condominiums of the Contemporary Style, blocky high-density structures with private rooftop gardens, commercial storefronts, and gated garages.

***Constituents, Consumers, and Community: What Drives Californian Green Technopole Climate Strategy***

Judging by the outcomes, the green technopole, large-scale strategy has thus far failed to create sustainable regional development patterns. Metropolitan Planning Organizations are now in the third cycle of creating Sustainable Communities Strategies,<sup>15</sup> yet the housing that has been produced has been located *away* from job centers—the opposite of the desired effect. In Southern

California, the most populous and fastest growing region in the state, 76 percent of workers still drive alone to work,<sup>16</sup> and the percentage of housing production targets (RHNA) distributed to high-job-access cities *declined* from 53 percent to 51 percent.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the 2017 Statewide Housing Assessment found that “rents and property values near transit are 10-20 percent higher on average than similar homes further from transit,” forcing Californians—especially those of lower income levels—to over-commute.

Adding fuel to the fire, the worsening homelessness crisis is being used to justify housing development projects anywhere and everywhere—often flung away from employment and transit-rich urban centers, following the lower land prices of the exurbs.

The failure of these state policies to create sustainable communities can largely be attributed to local preferences. A strong consensus in American democracy supports “local control for local land use decisions,”<sup>18</sup> and cities typically resist state interventions in their development. Due to this unique nature of land use politics, even the most coercive directives from Sacramento ultimately amount to indirect incentives in the form of funding or streamlined bureaucratic procedures intended to influence market conditions.

“Community Opposition” was listed as a contributing factor to the challenges facing every one of the City’s seven “Fair Housing Goals and Priorities”; 30 percent of Measure JJJ projects were “terminated, withdrawn, or not expected to progress” because of



*Former Ecovillagers Dave and Ann started new intentional communities in the San Francisco area.*



*EPA Officials from Taiwan tour LAEV.*



*Annual LAEV New Year's Ritual in the intersection.*



*Dia de los Muertos altar to celebrate our loved ones who have passed on.*

Photos courtesy of Lois Arkin



*City of Los Angeles Planning Department staff tour of LAEV.*



*Harvard graduate students tour LAEV, September 2019.*



*Jimmy Lizama in his Relampago Wheelery bike business in LAEV.*

NIMBY opposition. Local government officials face the day-to-day responsibility of responding to constituent demands. These constituent preferences, or at least the ones that are visible and audible to the local governments, often kill sustainable development projects across the state. Despite efforts to make public input meetings more accessible, residents who participate in Community Plan updates are mostly “white, older single-family homeowners who come out in force against the densification of their suburban neighborhood.”<sup>19</sup> Resistance against new transit lines often comes from single-family zoned districts, especially in West L.A.—one L.A. Department of Transportation planner noted, “single-family house ownership could be understood as proxy for a lot of anti-progressive resistance.”<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, Los Angeles continues to drive, contributing tons of greenhouse gases every year with the third-longest average commute times in the 26 metro areas, and struggles with decreasing public transit ridership.

While NIMBY resistance is usually associated with homeowners protesting apartments, the resistance to several pro-housing bills has been led by advocates of low-income and underserved communities—mostly Latino, Black, and Asian American renter tenants.<sup>21</sup> This strain of community resistance to development argues that the profitability of high-density, market-rate condominium development incentivizes landlords to evict and displace current low-income tenants.

Does the climate change crisis create an irreconcilable contradiction between the collective macro-level goal of reducing emissions, and the democratic value of respecting hyperlocal residents’ interests and preferences in determining what occurs in their own neighborhood? California appears to be stuck between a rock and a hard place; its policies—however lauded as progressive and groundbreaking—are frustrated by inherent contradictions in the responsibilities of the public sector.

### **An Alternative Pathway: Los Angeles Eco-Village’s Green Localist Approach**

Interestingly, one small hyperlocal community appears to have actualized exactly the desired outcomes of the state’s failed

policies. Over the past 27 years, a group of civilians have been developing Los Angeles Eco-Village,<sup>22</sup> forming an impressively sustainable intentional community dedicated to creating a regenerative and equitable alternative urban lifestyle in the middle of a sprawling metropolis that epitomizes both the car-centric culture and affordable housing crisis plaguing the entire state.

This is a retrofit project; its first building was acquired in “slum-conditions” following the devastation of the 1992 Rodney King uprisings. The intentional community also owns three multi-family buildings, effectively acting as their own landlord; in a rapidly developing neighborhood where rents have risen to \$1,300 median rent for a single-bedroom unit, the residents pay around \$650.

Occupying a two-block neighborhood on the north end of transit-rich Koreatown, the ecovillagers boast a 50 percent car ownership rate compared to the two cars per household average of L.A. County. The community serves as a hub of radical bicycle activism, with its residents having incubated the L.A. County Bicycle Coalition, the Bicycle Kitchen, CiclaVia, and Relampago Wheelery.

L.A. Eco-Village appears to model exactly the “sustainable community” that California seeks to produce. It is an example of what Hess describes as *green localism*, a parallel and alternative emergent approach to sustainable regional development which emphasizes hyper-localism as the *solution*, not the problem. Observing how large-scale actors are often “hindered by lock-in to inherently unsustainable and inequitable macroeconomic models,” green localists reject both sweeping state mandates and market-based solutions—advocating instead for local, democratic control of community-based, -driven, and -owned institutions. Hess observes that such localist organizations have been “incubators” of some “radical innovations” that may provide some value in “thinking through a realistic organizational basis for a society that would do a better job of addressing the pressing issues of environmental sustainability and social justice.”<sup>23,24</sup> Defined by the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) as an “intentional, traditional or urban community that is consciously designed through locally



owned, participatory processes...to regenerate its social *and* natural environment,”<sup>25</sup> the ecovillage is of particular relevance to the interrelated environmental and housing crises facing California.

### ***Intentionally Creating Green Localist Demand***

Since its founding in 1993, L.A. Eco-Village has grown significantly to include about 40 active members. The intentional community’s neighborhood consists of the two blocks of Bimini and White House Place in the north end of the Wilshire Center/Koreatown area of Los Angeles, a densely populated neighborhood with high concentration of immigrants and transit stops.

Legally, L.A. Eco-Village constitutes three separate 501(c)(3) nonprofits: Urban Soil/Tierra Urbana (USTU), the Beverly-Vermont Community Land Trust (BVCLT), and the Los Angeles Ecovillage Institute (LAEVI) (formerly known as the Cooperative Resources and Services Project, CRSP).

Per its mission statement, the intentional community “strives to lower its environmental impact while raising the quality of community life,” implying that it is possible to reject the American Dream of an ever-higher, consumerist standard of living while improving their quality of life. The ecovillagers’ definition of sustainability encompasses the same three prongs of sustainability—social, economic, and ecological—articulated by many government documents. But instead of the subtle emphasis placed on economic prosperity in the government’s rhetoric, this green localist project believes that there can be a mutualistic relationship between the quality of one’s life and reducing an environmental footprint—rejecting the traditional assumption that to live an environmentally-conscious lifestyle is to live a life of abstinence.

Lois Arkin, founder of L.A. Eco-Village, notes that some ecovillagers came from middle-class backgrounds, but have “seen and experienced the vacuousness of that kind of life, and the consumerist culture, and are downwardly mobile” according to the mainstream metrics measuring standard of living.<sup>26</sup> She distinguishes between “standard of living” and “quality of life”—asserting that ecovillagers enjoy a high degree of the latter despite what their fewer material possessions might indicate.

Recounting her own ecological awakening, Arkin explains the ecological mindset behind “giving up” modern conveniences: “As long as you’re *giving up*, you’re sacrificing. But when you’re *getting rid of*, you’re freeing yourself. And this is something that I think

is really, really important for the changes that all of us are making or are going to have to make around global climate change issues. It was wonderfully freeing to finally get rid of my car, and to go about the city that way, and it still is; you smell things that you never smelled before, you see things that you never saw before, you interact in ways that you never interacted before.”

To the common critique that changing individual consumption patterns cannot address the large-scale, systemic pollution produced by industry, one of my interlocutors at LAEV opined that the critique is “very defeatist...a misunderstanding of how personal actions actually do contribute to the whole.” But underlying this “every little action counts” argument was a profound internal commitment to the earth that led this resident to choose a carless lifestyle, because they “feel personally unable to pollute the planet.” Another ecovillager echoed: “I need to sleep at night and say I didn’t fuck up the planet.”

This mindset of permanent lifestyle change, compelled by a deep emotional connection to the earth and reinforced by living amongst peers with similar values, is an institutionalized aspect of L.A. Eco-Village. Not only does the cooperative offer a rent subsidy for its car-free residents, the community itself reinforces the radical consensus that “cars are bad, bikes are good,” and that one can live in Los Angeles without a car. This counterculture extends beyond the walls of its intentional community; by bringing together similarly minded people into a self-organized institution, L.A. Eco-Village also acts as an incubator of political demand—a ready group of constituents who mobilize and appeal to government agencies of various scales with the exchange of a single email.

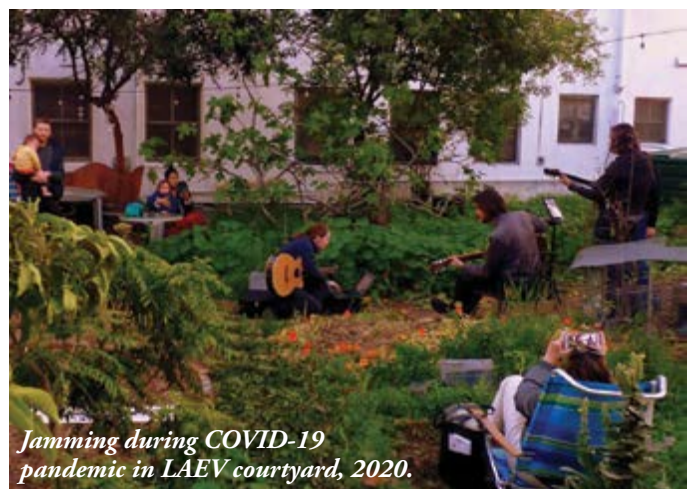
This culture tends to shift internal values and consumption patterns of the intentional community members themselves, as residents influence and support each other in converting to sustainable practices such as urban gardening, veganism, zero-waste living, composting, and greywater systems. The ecovillagers have successfully built a community around forgoing certain “modern conveniences,” including waiving the potential for individual profit from the community’s real estate, for the collective good and the long-term health of the community.

### ***When Residents Develop Their Neighborhood***

L.A. Eco-Village is a community-owned and -driven self-development project; that the residents themselves own and develop



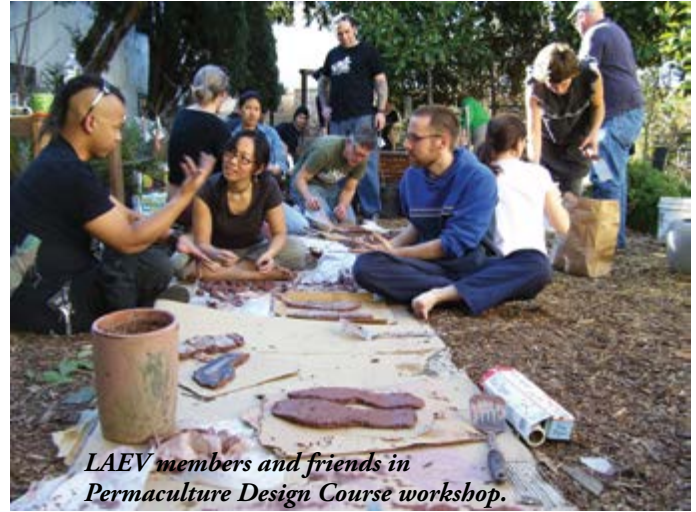
*Kids tour group in courtyard garden holding our beloved hen, Jolly, now deceased.*



*Jamming during COVID-19 pandemic in LAEV courtyard, 2020.*



*LAEV Co-op sponsors EcoMaya Festival on our street.*



*LAEV members and friends in Permaculture Design Course workshop.*

the property and land they occupy is integral to its green localist model of sustainable development. The housing cooperative USTU has developed strong processes for self-governance—from robust procedures for the weekly community meetings, and a consensus-based decision-making structure,<sup>27</sup> to the six-month-long, involved process for admitting new members. BVCLT owns the community's land in trust for affordable housing and ecological development, and LAEVI—the founding organization headed by Arkin—remains the lead developer that raises funds through a revolving loan fund<sup>28</sup> and develops the neighborhood.

In *The Help-Yourself City*, Gordon C.C. Douglas defines “DIY urban design” as “unauthorized interventions and alternative uses in the built environment” pursued by groups who “see a specific spatial problem affecting them and/or their communities, and believe they could fix it themselves.”<sup>29</sup> To develop their own neighborhood without necessarily waiting for permission, out of both civic responsibility and creative enjoyment, is precisely what motivates L.A. Eco-Village.<sup>30</sup>

This self-help philosophy, combined with a deep care for their neighbors and commitment to the earth, led this intentional community to adopt the permaculture design principle of non-disposability. When the belief that every component of a system serves multiple functions and is connected to all the others has been applied to place, to neighborhood, to a community and its people, everything and everyone becomes useful. Not a single person was evicted from the property in developing this 27-year-strong ecovillage from the rubble of urban unrest. No building nor person, no matter how wrecked, burned, or poor, was left behind.

The most obvious strength of the community-driven development model is that there is no moral hazard. Unlike an absentee or even resident landlord who can evict renters according to profit or convenience motives, a community developer tends to stay true to their own needs and preferences. Unlike in the mainstream development model, where residents are sourced only after a construction project is completed, the ecovillagers envision the future of their neighborhood according to their preferences and values. The residents develop a sense of ownership and relationship to their homes—even without the traditional incentive structure of private wealth accumulation.

It is important to note here that communities can be innova-

tive in their development, in ways that professional developers and planners cannot. Because communities are the *constituents* of government, they are able to appeal to various scales and agencies to pursue their projects. Most community-driven self-development projects are pursued by amateurs, and thus they are freed from the biases of experts in their field towards conventional practices. Moreover, as community developers develop for themselves, they are the producers of what they consume—there is no longer a need for constrained community buy-in processes that are often critiqued as belated, insufficient, nontransparent, and holding little water in the final decision-making. Something akin to true democracy arises in the consensus-building at every step of community decisions at L.A. Ecovillage; over a long period of trial-and-error, the group has collectively created its deliberative processes and a “culture of participation” that encourages newcomers to discover what they can contribute.

Because the intentional community self-selected for ecologically-minded tenants, and because they were to live there themselves, the physical retrofitting of L.A. Eco-Village has always been done using the least toxic, most local (conscious of the carbon footprint of sourcing materials globally), nonpolluting materials that the ecovillagers could find at the time, when sustainable building materials that met all three criteria were difficult to find. They refused conventional loans that “are used for who knows what and who knows where, doing damage to who knows who and what and where”—not only rejecting on an ideological level the exploitative impact of global finance, but also the practical financial binds that such contracts could create.

Instead, the founders raised \$500,000 over the course of nine months through their Ecological Loan Fund (ELF<sup>31</sup>), all simple loans without liens lent on a half-page loan agreement by known, trusted friends who understood and bought into the L.A. Eco-Village vision. Subsequent development projects, largely spearheaded by LAEVI, have also been financed by the ELF, comprised of small loans ranging from \$5,000 to \$100,000 on a simple 1.5 percent rate, and used specifically for “acquiring and ecologically retrofitting property in the two-block L.A. Eco-Village neighborhood and/or making loans to small green cooperatively oriented businesses.” ELF claims to have borrowed and paid back “close to two million dollars in the past 30 years.”



Built in this caring manner that intentionally minimized negative impacts on people and the Earth, L.A. Eco-Village is thriving in many respects, touting stable residential memberships, established nonprofit arms, and managing a national and international following—as evidenced by their robust weekly event schedules and copious numbers of academic papers that have cited LAEV in their study of intentional communities and ecovillages.

### Why Hasn't This Scaled?

L.A. Eco-Village has been demonstrating a compelling alternative approach to sustainable development, producing results that meet and exceed the government's desired outcomes in a "sustainable community"—yet the societal problems described from the beginning of this article have only worsened since Lois Arkin first started the project. While it is inherently difficult to ascertain the role that permaculture values have played in getting sustainability onto the mainstream policy agenda in California and Los Angeles, it is clear that the community-based, self-driven and -governed, localized and human-scale development model has not proliferated.

What vision does L.A. Eco-Village have to offer in 2020 and beyond? As a radical, intergenerational project uniquely positioned at the intersection of several strains of progressive counter-cultural values and practices, L.A. Eco-Village is highly relevant to the most salient societal problems today—creating an opportunity to define a collective vision as a *whole, coherent project* for the first time since the founding working group decided to build an urban retrofit ecovillage within the rubble of the L.A. Riots.

All of my interlocutors acknowledged that the ecovillage's ultimate objective of societal change has not yet actualized. From their speculations on why this may have been the case, and from reflecting on my six months of field research at the ecovillage, I have distilled three main roadblocks to system change: a hostile environment, inherent limitations to their scale and positionality, and an incomplete strategy for societal change centered around demonstration. However, even within these constraints, most of my interlocutors articulated a belief that the ecovillagers could be doing more to actualize their vision of societal change.

In order for the ecovillagers to scale their impact, I believe they must *more intentionally* interact with mainstream institutions—the

relevant government agencies and development actors in Los Angeles—with the specific intention of orienting mainstream processes of sustainable community development toward their values of sustainability, localization, cooperation, and affordability.

Everyone I interviewed was interested in more than simply creating a nice environment to live in for the residents of the intentional community. They saw in L.A. Eco-Village's successes the possibility of "stabilizing land and communities by taking more and more land off the speculative market," as well as scaling the intentionally caring and holistically sustainable practices. They shared with passion and charisma their ideas for what the ecovillage could become.

Following my research, I formed a working group with representatives from USTU, BVCLT, and LAEVI to plan a tri-organization retreat. While those efforts have currently stalled amidst the pandemic, it is my hope that we can collectively develop a 2020-2025 five-year-plan with a phasing strategy for the LAEV Project. The following are the initiatives I recommend for this plan, derived from the ideas of my interlocutors and chosen due to their relevance to the conversations occurring among city planners and developers, the mainstream actors in sustainable regional development.

### Strengthen the "Eco": An Eco-Audit

Jess Brown, the new property manager for the intentional community, observed, "If I could score the ecovillage, I think community-wise it does very well... What surprises me is that we don't seem to be revolutionary in our resource use."

The ecovillagers acknowledge this, repeatedly admitting the sentiment, "I think the eco part could be stronger, for sure." Brown conjectured that this slow progress may be largely due to money, explaining that "because everyone has so much energy and compassion for the sharing and community aspect, making money is so far off the radar," and ideas for improving the sustainability of L.A. Eco-Village Project "fall by the wayside" due to a lack of capital.<sup>32</sup> She declared, "If part of our goal is to be less resource intensive, then there is no reason why we cannot have our finances in order" so that these ecological capital investments can be made. As an experienced professional "from a more conventional property management family,"<sup>33</sup> Brown remarked



LAEV moms and kids enjoying time together.



Making music on the sidewalk on Wednesdays with Thiago.



*Los Angeles Chamber of National Association of Commerce enjoys LAEV tour and lunch in Courtyard.*



*National Association of City Transportation Officials tour LAEV.*

that there is a niche that the ecovillage can fill in demonstrating sustainable retrofit of an old, 100-year-old building through collective decision-making.

The private sector is noticing the economic efficiency of sharing, and commodifying the human need for community in order to tap into those savings. Co-living projects pursued by major US technology firms and real-estate startups advertise technological solutions that will change “where and how we live,” touting shared-resource housing developments as more sustainable and efficient land use innovations that also better accommodate mobile young professionals’ need for flexibility and desire for community.<sup>34</sup> Notable here is the bottom line of profit and the neoliberal access to community through shared access to a higher standard of consumption, still ascribing to the allure of standard of living. But as co-living developers are bringing basic features of the cohousing model to the fore of mainstream developers’ attention, if L.A. Eco-Village can articulate the higher quality of life and lower carbon footprint produced by their bottom line of “care for earth,” “care for people,” they may discover opportunities to imbue those values to the burgeoning co-living projects.

From my prompting, a LAEVI board member is currently conducting the first eco-audit for L.A. Eco-Village, measuring the community’s energy and water usage, and carbon footprint. These numbers, if they indeed reflect a significantly lower resource use in the intentional community, would make it easier to communicate the value of the ecovillage—indeed, the value of green localism writ large—to policymakers. Once their ecological strengths and weaknesses are identified, the intentional community can then direct their attention and budget towards filling the gaps, strengthening their ecological demonstration.

Many of the environmental practices of the ecovillage—greywater, urban gardening, vegetarianism, composting—are becoming increasingly common practices in Los Angeles. The most radical ecological position of the L.A. Eco-Village Project in the present moment is its stance on transportation; the ecovillage has long had a concentration of “hardass bike people” driven by a philosophy that bicycles provide a better mode of mobility than cars.

While the conversation around reducing car ownership and usage in the intentional community has been occurring for years, today L.A. Eco-Village has an opportunity to be a truly relevant

demonstration on this issue. The City of L.A. is paying serious attention to the policy objectives of increasing transit ridership and reducing parking requirements—though as Arkin notes, no major public campaign has been employed to remedy decreasing transit usage amidst the present pandemic. The planners I interviewed explained to me that in the City of L.A., parking requirements—which increase the quantity and thus the cost of land needed for development—constrain the type of buildings developers can build,<sup>35</sup> the ability of small-scale developers to develop a small parcel, and the number of affordable units that developers who do build projects can afford to provide. The “Maximizing Mobility in Los Angeles Report” notes that 14 percent of all land in L.A. County is dedicated to parking; developers attest that parking requirements are the largest constraint to produce affordable housing units in their cost-profit calculus. Furthermore, Arkin laments, developers “do next to nothing to promote their projects to people who want to live car-free” and may even resist reductions in minimum parking provisions because they “fear they will not be able to rent or sell their unit in their transit-oriented-developments without, or with absolutely minimum, parking.”

The City of L.A.’s attempts to produce more affordable housing units that incentivize transit usage have been stalled by the assumptions of the car-centric status quo. Herein is a prime opportunity for the green localists and green technopole actors to collaborate on shifting mainstream preferences. L.A. Eco-Village is connected to networks of Angelenos interested in car-light, transit-oriented living; they can conduct that proactive outreach to developers, who will likely welcome the security of interested tenants in a project in development. By demonstrating not only demand for *fewer* parking spaces, but also a more democratic community input process that centers people’s essential needs and contexts and accommodates them, the ecovillage can truly be a model for the City of Los Angeles on the question of reducing car ownership.

### ***Data-Driven Strategizing***

With the input of Arkin, I conducted a “USTU Car-Free Survey” to gather data on existing car ownership and usage as well as on the mobility preferences and needs of the ecovillagers. Of



the 30 respondents, 53 percent (16) own a car, 43 percent (13) do not, with one person expressing that they do not but their spouse does. The Toyota Prius was the most popular vehicle (5), with one respondent owning an electric vehicle. Five individuals who do not currently own cars anticipated eventually becoming a car owner.

Whereas most (19) respondents indicated that reducing car ownership and usage was important to their personal ecological lifestyle and values, there were seven individuals who rated 1-3 (lower priority) on that question.

This reflects the inevitable reality that people, even members of an ecovillage, differ in their needs, preferences, and interpretations of what “ecological living” means. In the survey, the residents named health and safety (7) as the biggest barrier to getting rid of their car. But the other reasons given indicated that the ecovillagers indeed derived enjoyment and utility from the mobility and temporal convenience that cars can provide.

Arkin declared, “The car culture here continues to be an embarrassment, from my perspective,” given the ecovillage’s proximity to transit and their ability to borrow/rent cars from each other. It is my opinion that the intentional community must strive to follow its permaculture care-based approach to decreasing its collective car-ownership—one that respects the car-owning ecovillagers’ self-described need, and works with them to track and reduce their usage.

The survey results indicated that most car-owning respondents would consider getting rid of their car if USTU had two or three zero-emission vehicles or they had consistent and reliable access to carpooling. Setting up a *system* for this sharing to *institutionalize* car-sharing, rather than expecting individuals to ask each other for favors, may prove more effective in actually reducing car usage. Electric vehicles are not radical in California, with the state and city investing much into developing the industry and infrastructure to support them. What L.A. Eco-Village could demonstrate is a process by which a community ascertains their members’ transportation needs in order to design a plan for reducing their collective car ownership and ridership. If the intentional community were to reach consensus agreement that they would collectively invest in shared electric vehicles, design a system of equitably sharing the cars through a deeper analysis of

each member’s needs, and could communicate that to the City, they may very easily receive a charging station, exclusive parking permits in their neighborhood for their electric vehicles, or perhaps an electric vehicle from the City’s BlueLA electric car sharing program. If the implementation is successful, the demonstration would provide a powerful example for government agencies, developers, and other community groups.

### *Scaling Grassroots Outreach and Education*

In order to diversify and add intentionality to L.A. Eco-Village recruitment, I believe the community must think beyond residential membership. USTU, BVCLT, and LAEVI should share an association of allies, a network of Friends of the L.A. Eco-Village Project (acronym FLEP) who can provide professional advice, fiscal support, and relevant connections. Once a collective vision of near-term projects is established, a list of necessary talent could be formed and used to recruit Advisory Boards.<sup>36</sup> FLEP can also include an intern network, recruiting free and interested labor from the concentration of high schools, colleges, and universities in the area—whose time can be used to apply for grant funding to expand paid staffing across the three nonprofits.

There is an increasing mainstream interest in the permanent affordability provided by community land trusts and the benefits of communal living. But essential to this model of development is the leadership of the community—not just buy-in considered as a mere check-off line item by professional politicians, bureaucrats, philanthropists, and developers. L.A. Eco-Village must first and foremost advocate for the community-developed, affordable urban ecovillage model to their peers—the constituents, the consumers, the community, the people.

Most importantly, L.A. Eco-Village must develop tactics to bring in people who are not already preconditioned to finding their way to the movement. The key challenge facing Los Angeles Eco-Village in scaling its impact lies in convincing the skeptics and the oblivious that its lifestyles are indeed desirable. In order to persuade the conservative, the capitalist, the consumerist, the ordinary person who lives the mainstream urban lifestyle, that the ecovillage’s engagement with their neighborhood provides a more meaningful, higher quality of life, the ecovillagers will need to be able to clearly articulate their antidotes to social isola-

*Michael Dukakis, former governor of Massachusetts and former presidential candidate, gives a public talk at LAEV.*



*Some women of LAEV, October 2009.*

tion, interpersonal conflict, eviction, and climate change. They must communicate their vision for societal change in response to people's real needs. The argument for small-scale community development and democratic governance is compelling across partisan lines, and if the ecovillage can articulate that, they can garner mainstream awareness, as well as political and financial support for their model.

### ***Crisis as Opportunity***

The severity of the homelessness problem and apocalyptic warnings from the climate-science world create an unprecedented urgency for innovative, if not radically countercultural, responses. The current development model of Los Angeles is not working, as complicated matrices of mostly well-intentioned policies create formidable barriers to entry for community-based development and constrain both nonprofit and for-profit developers.

All this constitutes ripe conditions for innovative alternatives in building affordable housing in sustainable patterns. L.A. Eco-Village has provided permanent housing security for some 40 individuals, created a lush oasis in the center of Los Angeles, generates organic proliferation of countercultural values, and offers useful resources to those who know to seek them out. It is clear that the intentional community is doing a few things right; it is also clear that its local government is interested in scaling at least a few of the outcomes that they have accomplished. As the government and the market are constrained by structures designed to respond to consumerist demand, those actors cannot meet the yet-unorganized demand for a better quality of life produced by truly sustainable development. The L.A. Eco-Village Project has exciting opportunities to develop a 21st century vision for what they have accomplished and learned in the past 27 years that can help respond to present-day challenges.



*Passover in LAEV, April 2009.*



*US State Department Youth Ambassadors Sister City tour of LAEV, July 2012.*

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11. SB 375, SB 743, SB 827, SB 878, Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program, Transit-Oriented Development Housing Program.
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13. "Governor Gavin Newsom Signs 18 Bills to Boost Housing Production," California Governor, October 9, 2019, [www.gov.ca.gov/2019/10/09/governor-gavin-newsom-signs-18-bills-to-boost-housing-production](http://www.gov.ca.gov/2019/10/09/governor-gavin-newsom-signs-18-bills-to-boost-housing-production).
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It is the role of human-scale actors such as the Los Angeles Eco-Village Project to organize and demonstrate a political demand for the positive benefits of their radical alternatives. L.A. Eco-Village must navigate the pressures to professionalize, in order to stay true to the values of its green localist, intentional community roots. Meanwhile, the government must think beyond the box of market-driven housing production to develop “sustainable communities.” It must “learn from places that do better,” “learn from past times,” signaling to mainstream actors and future community developers alike the feasibility and potential of smaller scale, localized development.

Alternative visions for society do not scale up automatically. It takes coalition building from all different sectors, many different actors in different positions with different inherent strengths and weaknesses. This particular place, in the diverse and promising and flawed City of Angels, holds much promise for this excit-

ing experiment to unfold. Jimmy Lizama, a Honduran ecovillager who has lived in the neighborhood his entire life, remarked that while “here in L.A., it can be seen as a privilege to engage in ecological culture...it is those folks who are the poorest, most disenfranchised, who need to be the most engaged” in resisting the consumerist unecological culture. Referring to the immigrants who flee their home country to come to the United States, often driven by ecological degradation spurred by American consumerism, Lizama exclaimed, “You need to come here to L.A., and not adopt the consumerist way of life! Come to L.A., and engage for the betterment of the city here.” 🌱

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*Audrey Younsook Jang is a lifelong resident of Koreatown, and discovered Los Angeles Eco-Village as the subject of her undergraduate senior thesis. She currently serves as the Co-Treasurer of the Beverly-Vermont Community Land Trust.*



*USTU co-op officers signing share certificates, August 2012.*



*USTU neighbor demonstrates cooking in solar oven.*

18. “Final 2016 RTP/SCS - 2016 SCAG RTP/SCS.”
19. Mehendale, Priya. Interview by Audrey Y. Jang. Personal Interview. Los Angeles, January 18, 2019.
20. Somers, David. Interview by Audrey Y. Jang. Personal Interview. Los Angeles, January 18, 2019.
21. Somers, David. Interview by Audrey Y. Jang. Personal Interview. Los Angeles, January 18, 2019.
22. [laecovillage.org](http://laecovillage.org).
23. Hess, *Alternative Pathways in Science and Industry*, 173.
24. Hess, *Alternative Pathways in Science and Industry*, 177.
25. “What Is an Ecovillage—Discover Innovative Eco Communities,” Global Ecovillage Network, accessed November 10, 2018, [ecovillage.org/projects/what-is-an-ecovillage](http://ecovillage.org/projects/what-is-an-ecovillage).
26. Arkin, Lois. Interview by Audrey Y. Jang.
27. Instead of voting by way of Robert’s Rules or imposing an unrealistic ideal of unanimity, the LAEV opts for consensus-driven decision-making. Dissenters must return to the written mission statement, explicitly specifying which value or objective the decision at hand is about to violate.
28. [laecovillage.org/crsp/ecological-revolving-loan-fund](http://laecovillage.org/crsp/ecological-revolving-loan-fund).
29. Gordon C.C. Douglas, *The Help-Yourself City: Legitimacy and Inequality in DIY Urbanism*, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 21.
30. Douglas, *The Help-Yourself City*, p. 41.
31. [laecovillage.org/crsp/ecological-revolving-loan-fund](http://laecovillage.org/crsp/ecological-revolving-loan-fund).
32. Not all ecovillage members may in agreement with these statements, but substantively evaluating the L.A. Ecovillage’s collective financial and ecological status would require further research.
33. Comments from Lois Arkin in 2020.
34. “The Future Of Housing: From Home Building To City Planning, Tech Giants & Startups Are Reimagining Where & How We Live,” CB Insights Research, June 14, 2018, [www.cbinsights.com/research/future-of-housing](http://www.cbinsights.com/research/future-of-housing).
35. This constraint affects intentional communities and cooperatives; the development regulations in L.A., including parking minimums, prevent the building of mid-rise buildings of architecture types that are structurally more conducive to communal activities. 117 Bimini is a Chicago classic U-shaped building with a central courtyard built in the early 1900s; such central courtyards would be impossible to build today because of the floor-area ratio, setback, and parking requirements.
36. CRSP/LAEVI has always had an advisory board, many pooled from Arkin’s incredible networking ability. Through my urging, BVCLT is slowly making our way to recruiting advisors.

# Los Angeles Eco-Village: The Ups and Downs of Reinventing How We Live in Cities

*By Lois Arkin*

I'm vulnerable. At 83, with the COVID-19 surge, I am told to stay in, get help for my groceries, mask myself before opening my apartment door. Since I plan to live to be 100, and the future incarnations of this and similar viruses are uncertain, I wonder if this will be how the rest of my life will go. How will I maintain a decent social life? Get enough exercise? Intellectual stimulation? Maintain a sense of connection to the neighborhood? I notice my speech slowing, my struggle to find everyday words in conversation. Will my virtual life provide me with sufficient interaction and stimulation to prevent my aging brain from becoming demented?

I am using this seeming COVID-19 time warp to begin making a dent in 40 years' worth of organizational files and stacks of paper, library and resource materials. My heart sinks as I put article after article, letter after letter, report after report in the round file, stopping to think first if I should scan it for posterity, and, as a follow-up thought, ask myself, "Who else will ever read this stuff?" Simultaneously, I feel a sense of excitement as I put the final touches on a job description to search for an Associate Director for this four-decade-old organization, now rebranding itself from CRSP (Cooperative Resources and Services Project) to the Los Angeles Ecovillage Institute (LAEVI).

Those items going into the round file include material about the contemporary beginnings of the intentional communities movement, the community land trust movement, the co-op movement, the local currency movement, the eco-home movement, conversion of rental housing to limited equity housing co-ops, and on and on the round filing goes. I fantasize that someone will see some fascinating-looking article in our blue recycling bin, figure it came from me, and get excited enough to stop me. Truly wishful thinking. As one of our co-op members told me 20 years ago, when I inquired if they would like a hard copy resource from the CRSP library on a subject they were researching, "Oh, no thanks, everything is on the internet now," was the response. And so it is, and so it goes.

It is forever and always a trip down memory lane or lack thereof. I startle myself sometimes at how creative I was, how attentive to detail I was, and how often I saw things that seemed so natural to me, but others called visionary. When others would comment on "my achievements," I'd respond, "I don't know how not to do what I do, and, really, it's everyone else in this community that has made it happen. I just try to hang onto the vision." I read things that have my signature on them, but I have no recollection of writing, reviewing, or signing such a document; I smile at my younger self who did.

I have started an "old women's group" of local environmental activists which now meets monthly online. I find I am not alone as I age, and that collectively we have so much to offer, but then again, for most younger folks, "everything's online." And I find that more and more of those young people seek advice and resources from LAEVI, whether for their academic research or a place to live where people know your name and don't think you're weird if you compost and ride a bike, and/or because they want to start intentional communities, cohousing, ecovillages. It has been exhilarating to see the awareness and desire for community grow.

## What Is "Scaling Up" Anyway?

But has what we've been doing, as an urban ecovillage demonstration these past 27 years, "scaled up"? At this same point, even as its primary cofounder, I am personally trying to

scale down, while the organization I founded in 1980 is in the process of reinventing itself to scale up. Sounds crazy, huh?

On the other hand, it may depend on how one defines "scaling up." For the curious, it's worth doing a search for the definition of "scaling up." Are we in the "franchising" business for ecovillages? Do we see ourselves as replicable models? Or rather as simply demonstrations of what a group of people in congenial relationships with a shared vision do or plan to do to improve their quality of life, while reducing their environmental impacts in a geographically discreet area?

Mostly, I don't believe that ecovillages are models that can be replicated. The success of an ecovillage depends on a unique group of people, the skills, knowledge, and dreams each brings to the venture, the relationship the group has to the problems with the life support systems in a given bioregion, how the group relates to its potential neighbors and to its political jurisdiction. Ultimately, if they live their "demonstration" in any kind of a public way, they will have powerful influence on their visitors, neighbors, and through the public media they attract. So it has been with L.A. Eco-Village, and so many other ecovillages across the country and the world: Ecovillage at Ithaca, Earthaven Ecovillage, Dancing Rabbit, Findhorn in Scotland, BetZed in London, Crystal Waters in Australia, to name a few of the more prominent urban, suburban, and rural ecovillages.

So how has our experimental demonstration in urban sustainable community development fared since its beginnings in 1993? Note first that Los Angeles Eco-Village is a place name where the 40-member LAEVI intentional community makes its home in three multi-family buildings within an intensely urban two-block



neighborhood of 13 multi-family buildings housing approximately 500 people. Three nonprofit organizations form the legal framework for the intentional community and its properties: the Urban Soil-Tierra Urbana limited equity housing co-op, the Beverly-Vermont Community Land Trust, and LAEVI (the initial and ongoing organization for new development in the neighborhood). The community's group of small home-based businesses and various activity centers such as tool shop, art studio, gardens, gym, food co-op, bicycle shop add to the resilience of the community.

### What Kind of Influence Has Emerged from L.A. Eco-Village These Past Few Decades?

More than a dozen former LAEVI intentional community members have taken lessons learned and started their own ecovillages, eco-co-op houses, or neighborhood retrofits, both here in L.A. and in other parts of the state, the country, and the world. Those who have come for short visits and extended stays, too, and/or just on a three hour tour, have been inspired to start similar intentional communities or neighborhood retrofits in parts far and wide. Watch for a future article about their take-aways from LAEVI.

The City of Los Angeles Planning Department included LAEVI in its Housing Policies as one of its programs back in 1998; our former City Councilman and now current mayor of Los Angeles dedicated our shared street project back in 2008. Today there are many shared streets, open streets, pedestrian streets, bicycle streets, traffic calming initiatives—both by regulation and by neighborhoods simply taking over their streets for longer and shorter periods of time. Thanks to Eco-Villager Joe Linton and the StreetsblogLA ([la.streetsblog.org](http://la.streetsblog.org)) that he edits, there is ongoing reporting, discussion, and progress in these areas across the city that we were among the first to begin demonstrating in the early 1990s.

Even 10 years ago, Los Angeles had no network of shared co-op, environmentally sensitive housing. A few years ago, I organized a small informal network of eight or 10 such communities. Today, an organized network of more than 20 such

houses meets quarterly to share stories, best practices, and resources. Several are influencing their neighbors in mostly intensely urban neighborhoods as they grow their community friendships.

Twenty years ago when I asked our tour groups, “Who here is familiar with ‘permaculture’ [or ‘cohousing’ or ‘intentional communities’ or ‘ecovillages’] before finding your way here today?,” folks would look at me quizzically. These words were not even on most people’s radar. Today those interested in sustainability, resilience, the circular economy are usually familiar with these terms, even if they cannot define them off the top of their head. In fact, more often than not, tour participants have found us because of their internet searches with those words.

(For those who like to get confirmation from the internet, a Google search for “intentional community” now yields over 75 million results, “permaculture” nearly 18 million, “ecovillage” over four million, and “cohousing community” over two and a half million.)

Even five years ago, people in our tour groups were simply “the curious” and/or looking for affordable housing for themselves, or doing academic research, or were dragged along by a friend or relative. Today, about one-third to one-half of folks on our tours of usually 10 to 20 persons (held two to three times a month before COVID-19; in-person tours are currently on hold) have come because they plan to start an ecovillage, an eco-neighborhood, cohousing, or shared-house intentional community—not including the occasional professional and academic tours that come to explore our demonstration for their academic and public policy considerations. But all of these folks are on the cutting edge of society, and so LAEVI is stepping out on that edge with them. We are expanding inclusivity to all kinds of folks who want to live more cooperatively and more ecologically, whether they use the common terms in our communities movements or just want to adapt some of our systems to their particular neighborhoods or communities.

### About Our Future and Those Big Corporate Architects and Engineers

“Who! You wanna what?” I inquired in amazement a few years ago when a few months after coming on one of our public tours, an enthusiastic engineer from one of the world’s prominent engineering firms, BuroHappold ([www.burohappold.com/about](http://www.burohappold.com/about)), indicated that a small team at his firm wanted to help design the eco-retrofitting of LAEVI’s then-recently acquired new property (a quarter acre site with a former auto shop and café on it, adjacent to our large building on the north end of the LAEVI neighborhood) and that their services would be donated via their internal grant system! That engineer, Gideon Susman, later became one of LAEVI’s board members, resigned from the firm, and came to live in LAEVI for awhile.

Word travels in those circles and not too long after the BuroHappold work was in



process, a small team, led by Ashley Stoner of the internationally prominent architectural firm Perkins and Will ([perkinswill.com/studio/los-angeles](http://perkinswill.com/studio/los-angeles)), wanted to continue that work, also on a pro-bono basis, initially redesigning that same quarter acre site with our LAEVI vision for it. To do that, the firm held a half-day rapid redesign workshop with all 100 of its Los Angeles staff. Known as a *charrette*, the workshop yielded a colorful 22-page brochure of the group's designs. By late 2019, the small teams from the two firms wanted to continue this work together to design the retrofitting of our nearly 100-year-old whole two-block neighborhood to a vision they are calling LA2050, with our input. By the time this story is published that neighborhood retrofit redesign will have been presented during a forum at the US Green Building Council's 2020 Annual Municipal Green Building Conference & Expo ([usgbc-la.org/programs/mgbce](http://usgbc-la.org/programs/mgbce)).

So, urban ecovillages, and their most basic ecological, economic, and social systems, may get a big boost this year, at least among green building professionals. Members of the BuroHappold and Perkins & Will teams emphasize the fun they're having working on this "tiny" project because most of their professional time is spent on huge new development projects.

Here are a few things that might be included in that future retrofit design:

- An urban teaching farm (even now a dozen-member group is ready to make progress on this when COVID-19 is a bit more under control)
- Geothermal energy
- Neighborhood solar
- The acquisition and retrofit of the dozen other multi-family buildings in the LAEVI two-block neighborhood
- Eco-co-op hostel of 10 tiny houses
- Small green business incubator and coworking spaces
- Community Hub with larger community venue space
- Three more cohousing communities
- Urban forest and orchard
- Research center for remediation of toxic soils
- Car-free streets in our two-block neighborhood
- Biological living machine for grey and black water

## Scaling Up while Scaling Down, or What We Need to be Doing with Inherited Wealth!

Why is CRSP, the nonprofit organization I founded in 1980 to be a training, education, and development center for all kinds of co-ops, rebranding to LAEVI (Los Angeles Ecovillage Institute)? Because clearly, several other organizations in the Los Angeles area, nationally, and internationally have become resources for developing co-ops of all kinds: housing, worker, consumer, producer. Co-ops are sexy today, as they have been traditionally over the past 100 years or so during economic recessions and depressions. Co-ops are included in the Green New Deal, and there is even an embryonic "Cooperative Party" ([www.cooperativeparty.com](http://www.cooperativeparty.com)) in the US, though it is a longstanding group in the UK.

At the same time, personally, I'm trying to "scale down," which may be a bit of a roller coaster for a while since, as a board member of LAEVI, along with the rest of my board, we are planning on "scaling up" or reinventing our organization to be an education and research center for urban ecovillages. A big problem for ecovillages and intentional communities for founders like me is that I have been a volunteer for this organization's 40-year history, living through periods of extreme poverty, credit cards, small stipends here and there, and family gifts on special occasions—and then inheriting quite a bit of money when my parents passed on. But parents were always there for any emergency needs; knowing that, I struggled on.

Some of us face the issue of being white and privileged, and how to use that privilege to help make a better world. This is a great challenge in these times. But it is also a time that great wealth will be (or has been) passed on to many Boomers, GenXers, and even Millennials. As the effects of Climate Change accelerate the degradation of our life support systems, becoming an ever-increasing threat to all of us, will we see that wealth put to good

use in demonstrating changed living patterns worldwide? In healing the degraded ecosystems that so much of that inherited money contributed to? In doing planetary reparations? Or will that wealth, too, continue to feed an ever expanding consumer culture to its ultimate death and perhaps the death of us all or at least most of us?

## And What Will Become of Me Personally?

As I personally scale down, my board and I are also on the search for an Associate Director who can assume some of our organizational responsibilities and take LAEVI to the next level. This will be an exciting opportunity for the right person, being that our new commercial property is highly visible, will be the Los Angeles Eco-Village Community Hub, and ultimately will include an urban teaching farm, ecovillage/resilient neighborhoods educational center, small green co-op business incubator, a special event venue, café, and eco-co-op hostel made up of 10 tiny houses ([latchcollective.com](http://latchcollective.com)), along with being a research site for remediating brownfields ([epa.gov/brownfields/overview-epas-brownfields-program](http://epa.gov/brownfields/overview-epas-brownfields-program)).

That defines a little bit more about why I plan to live to be 100, hopefully sitting in a rocking chair in the middle of the street (that has become a public plaza), and holding court with whoever wants to stop by and chat with an old lady about how this all came to be. And, of course, being as place-based as I've become, by that time, it will be cool to bury me directly into the earth in our courtyard gardens, no coffins, please; just me and the worms! 🐛

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*Lois Arkin is cofounder of Los Angeles Eco-Village and 40-year resident of the LAEVI neighborhood, board member of GEN-US, former board member of the FIC, former editor of COMMUNITIES' "Ecovillage Report" column, board member of the Global Village Institute, former member of the Community Advisory Board for the former Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency, and author or coauthor of numerous articles and two books, Sustainable Cities: Concepts and Strategies for Eco-City Development and Cooperative Housing Compendium: Resources for Collaborative Living.*



# Living Your Natural and Social Dream: A journey into eco-projects and intentional communities in Southern Europe

By Adriano Bulla

*“A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at...  
Progress is the realisation of Utopias.”*  
—Oscar Wilde

Have you ever dreamt of leaving it all and going to live in the countryside? Have you ever thought of saying goodbye to your nine-to-five job and all its stress, goodbye to chemically produced food wrapped in plastic advertisement? How about starting a life in the Sun and where you and your friends and family can finally be free from the oppressive and stressful society that is devouring lives like cattle and making minced meat of all our childhood dreams? In short, can you still hear that voice at the back of your mind telling you to take back your freedom and live outside the “system”?

In truth, this choice seems remote to most of us and it requires courage and determination, but it is becoming more and more popular all over the world and in particular in the South of Europe. With cheap land, a summer season that lasts most of the year, and a short winter where flowers, rather than snow, carpet the fields and hills, a phenomenon called “the return to Nature” now sees thousands of people starting a new life of independence and sustainability.

I have spent two years working with and travelling around eco-projects and intentional communities in a land kissed by the Sun and blessed by gorgeous warm weather, where people live their dreams during daytime, and not just at night. These are dreams made of sweat and often even sacrifice, but still they may be worth much more than grey nightmares we often endure in a dull office.

But when dreams come true, they may also reveal all their faults and difficulties. Like all new phenomena, these pioneers should be remembered with fondness and gratitude, their efforts should be celebrated; but we should also look at this new movement with a pinch of salt, or better as critical friends, and, why not, give a helping hand whenever we can. And

this is exactly what I would like to do...

With some notable exceptions—like the self-named Federation of Damanhur in Piedmont, Italy, which counts 600 residents and which, though it may not be to everyone’s liking, proves one point, that size matters—most are small communities. In some cases, they are homestead size; in others, they are a group of friends or a handful of families. They wake up at dawn and retire for the day soon after sunset in most cases. They grow organic food, very often even saving old varieties of tomatoes, wheat, and other crops that have not made the cut of supermarkets’ “unnatural selection.” They bring forward traditions while at the same time reinventing them, in a perspective that puts personal freedom from an oppressive, levelling society first. They work hard, eat well, and go to bed tired but with a great sense of achievement.

Most try their hand at new, even revolu-



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## These places are wonders of ingenuity and creativity.

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tionary, agricultural techniques. Walking on a path that coasts a rolling hill, you will suddenly find a food forest, permaculture, and even regenerative agriculture in action. Where these people find the energy and time to plant new trees just for the benefit of the environment they live in, with all they have to do, is anyone's guess. But one thing is sure; all these projects spell words on the landscape that no one can ignore: love and freedom.

Days working on these projects are fairly long and full. There is a lot to do. From farming to building small places where people can work and live, often with traditional methods that thanks to our collective amnesia have nowadays become innovative, like mud and adobe homes, to transforming the food to preserve it without using any chemical additive, these places are all wonders of ingenuity and creativity.

For example, sugar is disappearing, and in its place, you will find the syrup from a local tree that till only a few years ago was used to feed pigs. The locust tree produces fruits that look quite ugly, but are perfect to replace sugar and even cocoa powder, and oddly enough are rich in vitamin B12. At the same time, acorns, once only used to fatten pigs, are now being turned into wonderful pesto

sauces, flour, and even a liquor which can match any famous brand you would find on the shelves of large and small retailers.

It all looks so idyllic, doesn't it? Only to a point though, because these communities face difficulties, and these can have serious consequences on their success. When you focus so much on your project that you hardly have time off, it is difficult, for example, to look at your own reality from a distant and alternative perspective.

I have been lucky; I have had the chance to travel and have had the chance to see that very perspective that people miss when they are fully focused on one big project. I am no better, of course, but I have this experience, and I feel I have to share it. Let's see some examples.

A problem that these communities often have is that they have no way of selling their surplus produce. Where a farmers' market is available, this can provide that little extra income that can make a huge difference when you have to face expenses. Despite wishing to sever the umbilical cord with the "system," in fact, these communities can hardly manage this overnight, and there are still cases when they have to use money to bring forward their projects.

It so happens that far too often, members go out to work on an occasional or at times regular basis. This does have a serious negative impact on the work they can put into their eco-project. Abandoning a crop even for a week can unfortunately spell disaster. But how can this be solved? Bear with me, because the answer is, in my view, in what is at this stage another problem.

While in Spain these intentional communities have a closely connected network, in Southern Italy this is not the case. Far too often these groups of people remain isolated, and this has major consequences. What is missing is in fact a mutual support system that allows the sharing not only of goods and produce, which is often done with nearby farmers, but of knowledge and experience.

These projects have the potential of growing enormously, if only they could talk to each other, share and develop ideas. How can you, for example, sell your knit-work, necklaces, and other products of your creativity when you are in a community of a dozen people? Nor can you always go to the little market in the local town and hope that one of the thousand or so inhabitants will buy your lovely jumper.

This can become discouraging, because spending a whole Saturday waiting for someone to fall in love with the beautiful, but often niche, work of your craft can see you go back home with a sense of not being appreciated. You may go once, twice, and even three times, but then, little by little, hope gives way to practical needs, and your produce and artefacts will most likely disappear from the market.

Wouldn't it be better, instead, to form groups, and send one or two representatives from each group of communities to the different markets in turn? Having even one joint stall, with many artefacts of different sorts as well as produce (or even two distinct ones or more) that travel around the region to different markets will have three advantages. To start with, it would require less working time from each community or project, and this can be very precious indeed, as the task is shared. Secondly, it will allow for more varied and interesting stalls, and if one product does not sell well, others may compensate for it, making the stall itself still viable. Third, it would bring more flexibility in the choice of markets. One week you may go to one town, the next to another.

But we should not forget an advantage which is not just practical, but which I think will pay back in the long run: by having a rota of people from different communities to undertake this job, you would have discussions, you would share ideas, and who knows,



maybe the coming together to realise them is just around the corner. Education and implementation would be much simpler.

There will be logistical problems, of course, like getting a van to go around to the different communities on the day before the market, and even to go back and return perishable goods. But even these can be sorted fairly easily. To start with, many of these communities are quite close to each other. As they are “growing like mushrooms” in some regions you may have quite a few within an hour drive. Then again, the expenses could be shared and divided among the different communities. This alone could make a huge difference to the smaller and the less well-off realities of this new underground green world.

Some goods can be stocked only once a month or so, like artefacts, and this would reduce the time spent collecting. But coming together to create an alternative distribution network for these projects is not only desirable. In fact, the vast majority of these communities spring from the tradition of organic farming. Few people, however, know that the roots of organic farming are in a movement called “humus farming,” and this had already set out three key principles when it first appeared on the European scene between the two World Wars: crop rotation, feeding the soil and not the plants, and then creating an alternative distribution network.

The third principle was seen as fundamental to real change, and we can simply see that it has not been fully implemented. Most organic food has to compete with industrially produced crops on the shelves of supermarkets and, in general, within conventional distribution chains. Only now we can see small steps in this direction around Europe with farmers’ markets and groups called “GAS” (from the Italian “gruppo di acquisto solidale” or “supportive purchase group”). This shows that there are real efforts in this direction coming “from below,” through inventiveness and imagination, in order to bypass that hegemony of large-scale distribution and their crushing payments to farmers and producers in general.

But if this works, then eco-projects and intentional communities can make a step into the future that can really revolutionise the world; they can become a real, tangible, palpable alternative in streets and squares that will offer a true alternative to that globalisation that was promised as a global village and turned out to be a global megalopolis of homogenisation at the service of ruthless corporatism.

While they are still small, and still making their first steps, these realities have the potential to become a tapestry of different hues and social dimensions that can cover the whole planet with a sense of integration that respects differences, rather than as an empty promise to handed out by the state.

And this takes us to the next point: their cultural development. These projects come from a rejection of the dominant culture combined with a wish to lead a different life where Nature is a companion and a sister, not a resource to be simply exploited. There is no doubt about it.

The conversation over a wholesome, very often vegan or vegetarian meal you can experience when visiting these places is far beyond anything you would expect from a household stuck in front of the television, which has stopped sending its conditioning airwaves to these places. Instead, you will find yourself talking about the real green revolution, new ways of farming, the importance of sustainability but even more; art, philosophy, and literature all come together to interlace worldviews that feed on each other respectfully and with that great desire, maybe the whole meaning of our existence in this life, to leave a better world than the one we found.

For those who grew up after the Second World War, this idea has in many cases become a remote memory; people are far

too pressed to answer for their own lives in the most despicable and degrading ways; they have to pay bills, they have to second their boss’s whims; they have to buy more to feel that they are worth something. But is this all they will leave to their children? A list of things they have managed to stack up during their lives?

Moving out of the mainstream not just with ideas, but with your whole life and livelihood, is not easy, as you may expect. And one big problem these communities face is the lack of information. Unfortunately, information runs in the English language all around the world. This includes information about new farming and building techniques as well.

So, unfortunately, I have seen people experimenting for example with permaculture and food forests but lacking the right knowledge to do that. Then, when crops turn out to be disappointing, they can be tempted to abandon them, and maybe go back to digging.

This, again, is due to isolation; when you do your best, it is hard to see that maybe a small change can literally transform your results from underwhelming to satisfactory. And this change can be

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**Seeing the problem  
is heartbreaking,  
but finding a solution  
is liberating.**

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as small as choosing a different type of mulch. For example, choosing between wood chipping and straw as mulch can make all the difference between encouraging fungi and not. This, when the soil is mainly clay, can bring the soil to full regeneration with little effort, or can be fighting a losing battle.

But how can these people know about these new discoveries? Many of them do speak English, but maybe not at a sufficient level to read the many texts and studies or follow technical videos. Falling behind on innovation even by a small step can make a huge difference. Instead, I have seen people turn to the neighbour, who has been using herbicides, chemical fertilisers, and pesticides for an answer. And the answer was conservative and wrong: “you can only be successful at permaculture if you have lots of water.”

Oddly enough, when I came across this situation, I was only about 100 miles from another eco-farm, in a much drier area, and permaculture, there, worked perfectly well. Now, seeing the problem is heartbreaking, but finding a solution is liberating.

These communities do not have a forum, a central virtual meeting point where they can share ideas and experiences. This is more true in Italy than in Spain, where, in fact, intentional communities are faring much better and even thriving in many cases. Italians are not very good at English, but if we pulled different minds together, key information could surely be translated for all, and this could make a huge difference. Nowadays, these new methods of growing crops are studied even scientifically, and one, a metastudy entitled “Comparing the Yields of Organic and Conventional Agriculture,” signed by Verena Seufert, Navin Ramankutty, and Jonathan A. Foley, appearing in *Nature* on 25th April 2012, clearly identifies lack of specialised education and knowledge as one of the major factors in the gap, which is anyway closing very quickly, and in many cases it has reversed where “best practice” is used.

Growing a conventional crop is heavily dependent on following the instructions on the back of the fertiliser bag. Chemists and other scientists do a lot of your work for you. This disappears when you decide to grow organically; you need to learn a lot, from how plant nutrients work to how

you can produce them naturally and with the limited means you have. You need to get to know the specific microclimate of your own land and crops; you need to understand the whole process of pest control through re-establishing a balanced environment... The list is huge.

While it would be great if there could be experts who travel around these communities, or at least if local authorities invited them for free lessons to offer at the local town hall, this may be a bit too much to hope for at this stage. But having mutual help forums can not only help these pioneers with what is in fact a whole new science, but may even promote visits and encounters.

On the wings of this sharing of agricultural innovation, other ideas may fly, and these are as core to these realities as air is necessary to breathe. I am talking about the many topics of conversation that you hardly find on social media, and that enlighten the minds of these people when they finally put down their tools and meet around the dinner table.

And yet, talking about integration and the sharing of culture, I have even seen communities, such as the small but enchanting Mater Felicia in Calabria, Southern Italy, offer afterschool courses and cultural meetings with the local community. What I have noticed in my journeys is a great will to communicate and share, and yet the general lack of means for doing so.

An open dialogue with the neighbouring “conventional” community can work wonders for these projects; I have seen people come to help, even offer resources and goods to support these social experiments in their sometimes difficult steps. This osmosis between different ways of life can also teach that respecting those whose life choice is different from yours does not mean losing anything; on the contrary, it can mean a cultural enrichment.

Left to their devices by states that at most have tried to legislate (and awfully so) on the phenomenon, these groups of people need to find a way of coming together, of bridging the physical distance between them and breathing as a vaster and mutually supportive organism, rather than as many disconnected cells.

In my opinion, this is the time to create this network. The EU has just funded the colossal sum of one trillion Euros in its

green deal, arguably the biggest investment in the green economy in the history of Humankind. How can you get EU funding? Simply by presenting a well structured and presented project proposal to the EU. It is hard for a handful of people to find the time and ways to get these funds, but a large network of different though similar-minded communities does have the time, know-how, and means to do it. Wouldn't it be sadly strange if the pioneers of a green life are left out from this green deal?

But I strongly believe that when this happens, eco-projects and intentional communities will become the windows and even doors of dreams. They will reopen the opportunity to many people of following that beautiful dream we once all had, and then put in a drawer when we started our working life, when we were welcomed to the machine, as Pink Floyd would say. They will offer a multitude of solutions for a different, sometimes hard, but certainly much more satisfactory lifestyle, where self-respect does not depend on whether you can afford the new smart phone, but is born from and grows with the respect of the place you live in and Nature as a whole. A self-respect that is truly worth the name.

Once they start forming a network, sharing mutual support, ideas, and techniques, these communities and eco-projects will blossom like a multitude of flowers in the now dry prairie of society, and people will have the chance, like butterflies, to fly from flower to flower, bringing their own ideas and life choices with the gentle flapping of their wings, and a small breeze of whispers will arise all over the world, the wind of awakening and of a new world, the buzzing of bees that will show people all over the world that a new way is possible, a different path is possible, one in the light of harmony and cooperation, one that leads away from the darkness of the corporate nightmare and back to your childhood dreams that can blossom in the Sun. 🌻

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*Adriano Bulla is an alternative voice and a voice for the alternative. Author of poetry, prose, and nonfiction, and former academic, he left his “normal grey life” in the city to travel around ecovillages and intentional communities in Southern Europe, working there, learning new lifestyles and agricultural innovations, and writing about organic gardening.*



# Scaling Up a Community Nature Reserve

By Dr. Adrian Cooper



**F**elixstowe's Community Nature Reserve (FCNR) was created in May 2015. Its aim is to form a network of backyard gardens in our town, where each of those gardens has at least three square yards devoted to some kind of wildlife-friendly features—e.g., pollinator-friendly plants, bug houses, wildlife ponds, hedgehog homes, composting, bird feeders, etc. Previous editions of *COMMUNITIES* (issues #175, #182) have covered the early development of this work.

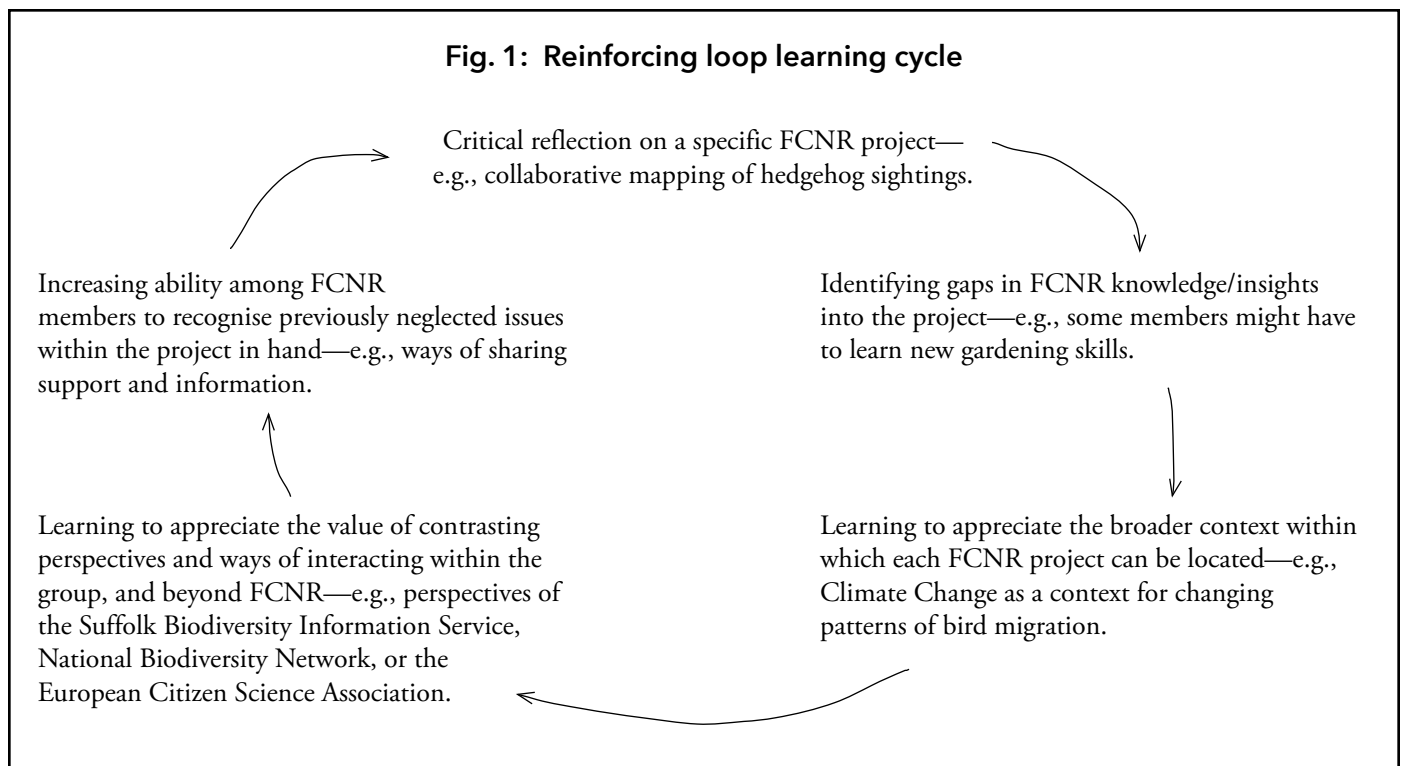
Over the last 12 months, FCNR has seen unprecedented growth. This article reflects upon that time of scaling up, and offers lessons to other community-based conservation groups.

Early in 2019, FCNR was coming up to its fourth birthday. Its leaders decided that although the organisation was doing

OK, it was time to become more ambitious. We wanted to grow—not only within our home town, located in southern England, but we also wanted to share our ideas with neighbouring towns in a more coherent way.

The first step we took toward this scaling up was to become a learning organisation. That meant that, instead of continuing to do what we've always done, we decided to introduce more reflection into our practice. Almost immediately, we realised that reflection meant thinking in a more systems-oriented way. In practice that meant that we looked seriously at gaps in our knowledge, and decided to do something about them. The following diagram shows how that combination of reflection and learning worked in reality:

**Fig. 1: Reinforcing loop learning cycle**



When we found gaps in our knowledge, we set out to find the answers. We asked local people for help, and they responded. Many of those local people had never heard of Felixstowe's Community Nature Reserve, but when they did, they loved the idea and wanted to join in. They also enjoyed the fact that we were asking them for help.

One thing leads to another, and over the last 12 months, our numbers of participating backyard gardens, which have wildlife spaces, have increased to almost 1,600. If you added together all those small areas of backyard garden which are devoted to this type of community-based conservation in Felixstowe, our total area is more than one full-sized soccer pitch.

But our scaling up hasn't just developed in our home town. Through social media, local towns in our county have also become curious about our approach to community-based conservation. Previously, they had been distantly aware of what we are doing, but with such rapid growth over the last year, it really cap-

tured their attention. However, the key to firmly engaging with the active and sustained interest of those neighbouring towns was when they sent teams of members to meet our leadership team.

At those meetings, our leaders explained what we do in Felixstowe, but emphasised that each town has to develop its approach to community-based conservation in their own way. With that point firmly established, it became liberating to those other community representatives. As a consequence, although they have all chosen to follow the idea of encouraging their local people to devote space within their own backyard gardens for wildlife-friendly features, they have added extra ideas which Felixstowe has not yet developed. In time though, it will not be a surprise if Felixstowe starts to learn from, and actively develop, ideas from these neighbouring towns.

One of the ideas which the Woodbridge Community Nature Reserve has developed is that of a scattered orchard, where each backyard garden might only have two or three small trees within its area. However, taking a bird's eye view of those gardens, it becomes clear that an entire orchard has been planted, even though the density of those scattered trees is not as great as a conventional orchard. One of the immediate advantages of developing a scattered orchard in a community is that the cost of the orchard is shared among participating members. Responsibility for watering the trees is also shared among home owners.

So far, five other local towns within a 30-mile radius of Felixstowe have started to actively develop their own community nature reserves. Every few months, those other communities meet up with the Felixstowe team for the important work of enjoying coffee and cake together, as well as pizza and ice cream. Somewhere within all that essential work, discussions also continue on learning from each other about what has been working well, and where the opportunities for improvement lie.

Even since the coronavirus outbreak, those meetings have continued using Skype



Photos courtesy of Dr. Adrian Cooper





and FaceTime. The main point is that communities still learn from each other.

One of the most important features within Felixstowe's Community Nature Reserve has always been the role of plant swapping, as well as swapping garden pots, and other garden equipment. It is therefore encouraging to report that friends and neighbours still leave plants, pots, and other small items on each other's front steps, or in their porches, as a way to encourage and support each other.

Using social media, and especially Skype and FaceTime, these informal exchanges of information between people in each town's community nature reserve has developed in its regularity. As such, it is possible to think of these six towns, including Felixstowe, as becoming a network of learning organisations, each with its own identity and integrity, but with a shared vision of making community-based conservation accessible to as much of their population as possible. This is a significant scaling up of cooperation between these towns, and continues at the time of writing, despite the progress of coronavirus. No one has to physically meet each other when there are so many opportunities to share through digital media.

Looking forward, it is clear that inclusiveness will be a theme of growing importance within this network of community-based conservation projects. That means that young people will be offered opportunities to participate in this work in ways which will appeal to them. Already, some of them have created digital media projects which encourage others their age to join in. Schools have also started to develop their own wildlife gardens.

Other forms of inclusiveness involve local artists and musicians where they allow their creativity to respond to the increasing activity involved in this growing collaboration of community-based conservation projects.

The lessons from this scaling up of community-based conservation work in our part of England are clear. First, stop! Reflect. Become aware of the gaps in your own community-based conservation work, and then actively seek solutions to those gaps from within your community. Then share what you're doing through Twitter, Facebook or any other social media. In doing so, always remain aware that many elderly people will not have access to those digital resources, so make sure you use print media in the form of notices on community boards in local libraries etc. Local radio and even local TV can be hugely important in attracting the interest of others from neighbouring

towns in what you are doing. Then, meet teams from those neighbouring towns. Learn from each other. Prioritise what you want to do. And then keep those new networks of learning organisations going through physical meetings when they become possible, but also through Skype and FaceTime during the current situation. Finally, be patient. Although this scaling up is incredibly exciting, it is best to allow it to develop at its own pace. There will always be problems with any community group, so be as supportive as you can.

To learn more about the latest work of Felixstowe's Community Nature Reserve, please visit our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/felixstowecommunitynaturereserve](http://www.facebook.com/felixstowecommunitynaturereserve).

Also, check out our Twitter account @CommunityNature.

Finally, we have a growing citizen science group. You can learn more about their projects at [www.facebook.com/Felixstowe-Citizen-Science-Group-110577793666042](http://www.facebook.com/Felixstowe-Citizen-Science-Group-110577793666042). 🐛

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*Dr. Adrian Cooper is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. He has worked in 101 nations across six continents to develop his involvement in the public engagement with conservation spaces.*

# Scaling to the Pandemic: Community Perspectives

By Indra Waters

Since the onset of COVID-19, intentional communities all around the world have been asking themselves: Should we scale up or scale down during this pandemic? Unsurprisingly, every group has had their own unique response, ranging from near-complete isolation from society at large to continuing to welcome new visitors and members.

Since March, reports from communities adapting to the pandemic across the globe have been collected thanks to the efforts of the Intentional Communities Desk (ICD, headquartered at Yad Tabenkin Institute in Israel), eurotopia (publisher of the Directory of Communities and Ecovillages in Europe, and based at Sieben Linden in Germany), and the Foundation for Intentional Community (FIC, based in North America). When viewed together, these reports show numerous trends, including steps that the majority of intentional communities are taking to scale down in some ways, such as canceling public events, closing common houses, and reducing the number of outside visitors, to name a few. (Outliers of course exist: Dancing Rabbit in Rutledge, Missouri still accepts new residents as long as they isolate for two weeks before joining the ecovillage.)

Lists of these reports appear on the “Communities Respond to COVID-19” page on the ICD website: [gen-us.net/covid19](https://gen-us.net/covid19). Many of the quotations which follow

come from these reports, collected initially by Michael Würfel for his article, “Communities and the Pandemia” (see [eurotopia.directory](https://eurotopia.directory)) or by Anton Marks for the Intentional Communities Desk’s C.A.L.L. newsletter.

Naturally, there is often disagreement on how communities should approach COVID-19, as MagnyEthique in France explains: “It is quite difficult for our group to hear each week at our meetings how different the members feel. There are two opposing groups: those who already live on the site [...]. And those who are not yet residents and still have their homes outside, [...] who also often express their frustration at not being allowed to be here in the ecovillage.”



Sieben Linden/private



Every community experiences a plethora of these kinds of conflicts; a member from *Nachbarschaftlich Wohnen* in Dormagen remarks how COVID-19 has exacerbated all group issues, not just the ones concerning COVID: “I also notice that on topics that have always been difficult and the discussion has been heated, the differences of opinion become even more obvious and the skin is thinner.”

A prime example of one such issue is the case involving Frits from Amsterdam Catholic Worker, who, at the time of writing his report, was isolating with his family, although not of his own volition. As he explains, Amsterdam Catholic Worker’s method for handling sick/infected members is to confine them to their rooms in order to prevent them from accessing any of the facility’s public spaces. While Frits is unhappy with this rule, he knows others in his community feel that it is necessary. His predicament raises another pertinent question for the communities movement: How should communities balance the needs of the individual with the needs of the group? Although there is no universal answer, the search for one can nevertheless be a fruitful endeavor; for those communities willing to seek, they may develop covenants and rules for self-governance, and members might also discover what they truly want most from their communal lifestyle. For better or worse, COVID-19 has forced all groups to discuss how to live and on what principles to live, which will certainly outlast this pandemic.

For several communities, this much-needed discussion has already happened and incited some important changes. To address conflicts as they arise, one of the few things many communities are scaling up right now are their bodies of self-government. Forgebank Cohousing (UK), Kibbutz Amiad (Israel), and Ganas (New York City) all have created or expanded their crisis committees whose current focus is on containing the spread of the coronavirus. As a resident from the Vale in Yellow Springs, Ohio puts it: “The good news is that there now is a general agreement that our community should objectify its decision-making process and make it much more clear by putting it in writing.”

## Nachbarschaftlich Wohnen in Dormagen (Germany)

*A community member's reflections, published in Michael Würfel's "Communities and the Pandemia"*

At the beginning we felt quite a bit of uncertainty in our group. Some members had great fears, others much less. We held two meetings on the property (with appropriate distance) where everyone could express their concerns. In the meantime we have stopped all meetings or moved them to the internet; we meet regularly via Zoom. What is interesting here: Our by now very constructive culture of conversation obviously has to be practiced “anew,” but in the meantime it also works virtually. Of course, we have also cancelled Info-Cafés and generally limited visits from outside. Currently there are no free apartments, so the question of choosing new roommates does not arise with us.

The situation was especially difficult for the families with children, who met several times (but then always via Zoom). The result: we have two groups: Parents with school-age children form one group and those with pre-school children form one group. There are fixed “garden times” during which the respective families spend time outdoors. Very cautious parents who do not participate here have their own “starting times.” There are no agreements with the authorities, but we have not been approached here yet.

Apart from that, the mutual support runs as usual: With the necessary distance we help each other when needed, buy groceries for each other, have built up a small stock of things (toilet paper and flour) that can be accessed by everyone—there the community works well even in these times.

All in all the life is on the one hand calmer, more contemplative, many are in the home office or have cancelled their holidays, others have more time than usual. But I also notice that on topics that have always been difficult and the discussion has been heated, the differences of opinion become even more obvious and the skin is thinner—a little camp fever maybe?

## Kibbutz Mishol (Israel)

*Reflections by Anton Marks, published in C.A.L.L. #46*

Tw #socialdistancing and #stayinghome are a contradiction in terms. I've spent half my life removing my front door, intentionally, hinge by hinge. Now I need to put it back on, I haven't got a clue where to find it, and even when I do, I don't even know which way up it goes.

I've had text messages expressing envy that we have lots of people around during a time when others don't. However, since we have lots of people coming and going in and out of the building, those that work in health services or the voluntary work that we are doing, in order to protect our most vulnerable (we have a significant number of people with pre-existing conditions which puts them in danger), and to protect those that we are working with outside, we need to distance ourselves from one another, something which is emotionally, but also practically, a real challenge.

No, I'm not going to lose my job, or the roof over my head. We'll definitely take a significant hit economically, but will probably only start to feel that in the months to come. I won't succumb to this disease personally and I don't have my own parents or grandparents to worry about.

The life I have chosen is an attempt to actualize an antidote to rampant capitalism. An alternative to the fractured society that we see all around us. Aspiring to create a society that challenges the blind acceptance of poverty, violence, racism, sexism as “that's just how life is.” It's an alternative for ourselves, but also for those we meet and create new realities with.

And suddenly we are thrown into a new, unknown, and unexpected crisis situation which challenges us both physically, mentally, and financially. But the social side is the most confusing, where our all-encompassing togetherness actually works against us.

I'm not writing this looking for sympathy, but to share the complexities of being part of a very intentional and close-knit community that is also committed to taking responsibility for our surroundings.

Due to the hardships posed by COVID-19, many communities are taking time to reflect on what constitutes a healthy, fulfilling lifestyle—in other words, on what lies at the heart of the communities movement. For many, the pandemic has been a wakeup call to the world’s many ongoing problems; for example, the Kirschblute Community in Germany has expressed solidarity with the world’s refugees, poor, hungry, imprisoned, and otherwise overburdened peoples, who undoubtedly now suffer even more on account of the virus. Moreover, there is a general acknowledgment of how privileged one is who lives in an intentional community with a close-knit circle of friends, family, and neighbors. A member of Solens Hjerter in Denmark says, “It is certainly a comforting and empowering feeling to stand together and to work together in this special time of crisis; to use the skills we all have to make the everyday smooth and running and to be able to talk things through and find security and perspective in this time where it is so important.”

Everywhere, members of intentional communities have found ways to show their commitment to one another, from social-distancing birthday parties to virtual games to more frequent gardening (the latter of which probably has been the most consistent pressure relief valve for groups worldwide—makes sense!).

Unfortunately, while communities provide an intimate social circle which can act as a support net during the pandemic, this very social circle might further spread COVID-19. As Anton Marks, editor for the ICD and founder member of Kibbutz Mishol, points out, “#socialdistancing and #stayinghome are a contradiction in terms. [...] [T]he social side is the most confusing, where our all-encompassing togetherness

actually works against us.”

If staying home means being in frequent contact with multiple families, then social distancing is made all the more difficult, and the chances of contracting COVID-19 are increased. This is one argument for the communities movement to temporarily scale down. Many groups who have come to the same conclusion as Anton have closed their common rooms, insist that members maintain the 1.5 meter distance from individuals outside their families, elect certain people to run errands for the community, and hold virtual meetings, and some, like Birchwood Hall in the UK, have canceled the process for all prospective members.

It is important to note that, although intentional communities might seem like petri dishes for the virus to spread, there is actually little evidence of this being the case. Overall, communities report very few numbers of coronavirus infections; even Ganas, a community located in Greater New York, reported zero cases of coronavirus as of April 12.

Moving forward, intentional communities should take what they have learned from this pandemic for when the world recovers. The organizational structures that some have implemented will certainly serve them well after COVID-19, and the core principles by which communities live, and which they discover bubbling to the surface during these trying times, thus forge a clear identity for the group as well as the movement as a whole. Intentional community is an alternative to the systems that continually fail to serve the marginalized yet protect old power. In the words of the Ecovillage Los Portales in Spain: “[M]ost importantly, we investigate and appreciate to the fullest extent the hidden meaning of the situation, the ‘gift’ or learning that it offers us: to increase efforts for personal and community autonomy and empowerment and to foster the deepest and most effective relationship with the place where we live.” 🌱

## Birchwood Hall (UK)

*A community member's reflections, published in Michael Würfel's "Communities and the Pandemia"*

I'm writing from Birchwood Hall Community, in a rural setting outside Malvern, Worcestershire in the UK. We have 10 adult members and around 15 people altogether, spread across two residential buildings about 50 yards apart.

The biggest change for us is that whereas we all used to eat our evening meal together in one house or the other, we've now separated the two houses to help with social distancing and minimise interaction, so we're now, in effect, operating as two (mostly) separate smaller groups. Also, a couple of members who are still working are living outside the community for now rather than coming and going. Although the community spans a wide age range (9-78), we have a few older and potentially vulnerable members and we're trying to protect them as much as we can.

Our biggest “weakness” in terms of isolation is that we need to shop for food, since getting deliveries from nearby supermarkets is impossible; but we're using small shops and farm shops or local farmers as much as possible to keep away from crowds of people. We'll have fruit and veg of our own by late spring and over the summer, but of course we don't have that now, and we will never be self-sufficient in food.

We aren't receiving visitors, and we have suspended what we call our “potential new member” process for three people who had started it, a couple and a single woman. We are planning to stay in touch with them occasionally by Zoom, but we won't be able to fully resume what can be a lengthy process, culminating in a six-month trial period, unless the epidemic recedes and we feel it's safe.

Apart from all that, life is pretty good, and the garden and grounds are getting more attention than they have in a while. Many of us are still working full-time or part-time from home, and filling time doesn't seem to be a problem, except perhaps for the teenagers here. We are discovering what games can be played while maintaining social distancing; for example, we're about to have a “pub quiz” using Zoom, and we can use our table tennis and pool tables as long as just two people are playing. With the weather getting better, we can play boules or croquet outside and still keep two metres apart from everyone else.

Of course, we're only a couple of weeks into full lockdown, not enough time for people to feel too claustrophobic as yet, and having eight acres of grounds to wander in (mostly woodland) helps. It remains to be seen what strains might become apparent if this goes on for months.

*Indra Waters is the Senior Acquisitions Editor for the literary magazine Open Ceilings, which is run and published in Davis, California, and a new volunteer with COMMUNITIES.*



# Lessons from the Pandemic Lockdown at the Danthonia Bruderhof, New South Wales

By Bill Wiser

*Danthonia sunset during lockdown.*

**W**hile some of the insights below may date this piece within the early weeks of COVID-19 lockdown, the historical context alludes to larger questions and to change as the essential ingredient to lasting regeneration and renewal. We have much to learn from those who sought for a new social order following the global crises of the two World Wars of the last century. May the immense challenges of today's pandemic stir us toward a similar search and open us to new revelations. And may the death and suffering of millions today give us ears to hear and eyes to see the signs pointing to new possibilities of human flourishing as we continue to share life together on this precious planet.

Storms often sweep in without warning in the Northern Tablelands of New South Wales where my wife Grace and I live. A few days ago I found myself, bald head uncovered, standing wind-whipped and pummeled by a cold rain. In that moment I felt at one with the souls across the centuries who have likewise stood in storms—those who have known times of trouble and testing that come to us all, often descending out of nowhere. At the same time, I felt the raindrops' promise, despite their sting, beating back the worst drought in living memory<sup>1</sup> millimeter by precious millimeter. Hope rises out of despair. Storms bring destruction, but also regeneration.

A century ago, the tumult of World War I gave rise to the Bruderhof, the community to which I belong. Germany was in shambles.<sup>2</sup> Millions were dead, millions more were unemployed. There was little food. In droves, the youth rebelled against authoritarianism and abandoned the institutions that had failed them, including the churches that had blessed the war.

And so it was that a small group gathered in post-war Berlin. They were nationalists, pacifists, atheists, communists, and Christians united in a common search for a guide to rebuilding amid the ruin. Despite their alienation from institutional Christianity, they found an answer in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It was time for action and so, in June 1920, a few of them left the chaos of Berlin to start an intentional community in a small rural village.<sup>3</sup> In a couple of rented attic rooms, the Bruderhof movement began.

As Germany headed toward a second world war, Bruderhof members dared to live a visible and public alternative to the madness of National Socialism—that is, until they were hounded from the land, eventually finding refuge in the United States.

It was there, in post-World War II America, that my parents and Grace's first encountered and joined the Bruderhof. Their search started in different places: my dad had been a war objector<sup>4</sup>; Grace's father served as a sailor in the US Navy. Both married and started families after the war.

But it wasn't the American Dream they were after. They, like those "enemy" Germans who founded the Bruderhof, were determined to find a blueprint to guide the building of a new social order. They banded with others to form intentional communities in Georgia<sup>5</sup> (my parents) and North Carolina<sup>6</sup> (hers). Eventually, this search brought both families to the newly-established Bruderhof in New York. There, Grace and I grew up, surrounded by the original German pioneers who were by then in their 60s and 70s.

Who would have predicted that 2020 would prove such a volatile year, so reminiscent of a century ago? At least this time around, it's not a war of "us" and "them." This time we are united in a fight against a common, invisible enemy—the coronavirus. But again, millions are out of work and tens of thousands are dying. Nations that once boasted of their GDP have been brought to their knees. The measure of a nation's worth now is how well it cares—or does not care—for its weakest and most vulnerable citizens. Could this be another historic turning? Could it be that once again a cataclysmic event will open eyes to see and ears to hear?

Regardless, now it is our turn, and our children's. This pandemic is our war, and our chance to rebuild. We are in the early stages, but perhaps even now, in a time of worldwide lockdown, lessons are emerging—both within intentional communities and in a wider context—that may serve as signposts for the future.

## Lesson one: Change is good

Church looks different already, and it should! After all, Jesus didn't found the model of church organization we're used to

today. Rather than asserting the right to carry on like before, as some pastors did initially, believers should embrace the call to change and take the lead in repentance, renewal, and rebuilding. Church has changed here at the Danthonia Bruderhof<sup>7</sup>, too. With no communal gatherings, each member has had to take up the spiritual task of servant-leadership in his or her own household. I doubt children will forget watching their parents break bread and pass wine in our Easter celebration of the Lord's Supper at home.

Although separate, no longer are we split denominationally, fighting our turf battles; we're simply believers collectively at work in the neighborhood. One memorable Zoom conference with other local, Inverell-area pastors became the means to organize distribution of food hampers from a single, centralized base. Those delivering the food were instructed to say, if asked, that the hampers came from "the church of Inverell."

### Lesson two: The home front is part of the battle

Grace and I have been active for years in prison ministry and chaplaincy<sup>8</sup>; yet now,

we don't leave the Danthonia property. But we find plenty to do, from singing a birthday song outside a window to saying a prayer (at appropriate distance) for an anxious soul. Or we pick up the phone to talk to a neighbor in town, or respond to a request that comes in on a chaplaincy hotline. Though our hearts remain at the frontlines, we've realized that an army is a single fighting unit: its effectiveness is directly related to every soldier sticking to his or her assigned role. We have discovered the blessing of doing the immediate task with joy, inventiveness, and humor. Every soul, whether the person next door, an inmate in the local prison, or a nursing home resident facing COVID-19 without family, has equal worth in the eyes of God.

### Lesson three: Isolation is not separation

Surprisingly, confinement has served to connect us more robustly than ever with family, colleagues, and church members across the planet. Though I had never been a fan of technology because of its ability to make us "alone while together," it has been invaluable for keeping us

"together while apart." Whether Zooming, making phone calls to elderly in the area, or emailing with children or church members thousands of miles away, I find immense fulfillment in making deep connections several times a day. Perhaps most meaningful to me is keeping in touch with health care professionals and chaplains serving in hospitals and hospices.

### Lesson four: Learn to balance doing and being

We've not yet got this one right. Oddly enough, we still find ourselves exhausted at the close of each day—even more so than before. We've always been doers. Sure, we took time each day for prayer, reading, and contemplation in nature, but that was just to gain energy for all the doing. Now we find it is important to take a long walk together. I run regularly outdoors and find it the best time for prayer and reflection. And we love the quiet. It was never really "noisy" in our part of the world, but the stillness now is deeper and longer than it was before. It has been a season to "be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).



First US Bruderhof, 1950s.



1920s Germany.



Grace's parents 1950s Celo.



Bill's parents, 1950s Macedonia.

Photos courtesy of Bill Wisner





*Danthonia after the rains,  
March 2020.*



*Danthonia granddaughter  
with flowers.*



*Danthonia bread  
and wine porch.*



*Grace with  
Kairos trio.*



*Chaplain Bill with  
mother and child.*

### Lesson five: Try to find humor in the friction

It took some time before I managed to find the humor in the irony that a lady who shares our house swears she will die—not of the coronavirus, but at the next whiff of my Indian cooking! Here I am, with more time than I’ve ever had to practice my favorite culinary pastime, and I cannot so much as reach for the cumin without setting off our housemate. Just wait: when this is over, Australia will not be large enough to contain the fragrant odors of my curry, biryani, and dahl.

### Lesson six: The little things matter more now

Before the pandemic, I literally did not take time to stop and smell the roses that bloom outside our house. Nor did I linger as long as I do now when a rainbow or a particularly spectacular sunset graces our rural

sky. One of our daily highlights is the visit of our one-year-old granddaughter with her parents. She does not understand why Nan and Pop don’t hug and kiss her anymore, but she gives us a big smile anyway, knowing that at her “Peas, peas” (please), Pop will pick two bright yellow marigolds and toss them to her. And we linger as we watch her depart, perched on her dad’s shoulder, a bright smudge of yellow in each hand.

### Lesson seven: Have patience with yourself and others

Grace and I say sorry to each other more readily and more often than we did before. Maybe that’s because we see life so quickly and arbitrarily snuffed out across the world, and we want to make sure we end the day forgiven and forgiving. But, honestly, we’ve also had more need of both. It was really bad at the beginning, when I burst out in frustration at not being able to do my usual

local chaplaincy work. Obviously, Grace could not fix this and shot back. Now we’re learning to be more patient with ourselves and with others.

It will take not just patience, but also peace of heart, to await the Spirit’s inspiration and guidance so that the blueprint is God’s and not ours. But even now we are joining others in prayer, that by God’s grace, we are ready for the rebuilding. 🕊

*Bill Wiser lives with his wife Grace at the Danthonia Bruderhof community in New South Wales, Australia, where they serve in a pastoral role and coordinate ecumenical activities with area churches and state-wide councils. Bill and Grace have deployed to fire grounds in Victoria as Rapid Response Team chaplains with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and are active in prison ministry through Prison Fellowship and Kairos Outside for Women.*

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# Quarantining at Camphill: Distance, Warmth, and the Unknown Future

By Matthew Goetzke and Diedra Heitzman



*Kimberton Hills' 92-year-old pioneer, Helen Zipperlen, takes a walk.*

**M**atthew writes:

I'm a 20-year-old Michigan native seeking to connect with the natural world. Previous to my arrival at Camphill Village Kimberton Hills in Pennsylvania I lived downtown in a major city with my companion, a rabbit, in a windowless bedroom. I worked at a bakery in an international marketplace down the block from my apartment. I was on my way out the door from that job to do a five-month internship in a farming community, when COVID-19 struck. My strategy from then on was finding fellow workers to cover my remaining three shifts so I could avoid interacting with 100-plus people a day, and immediately head to a rural location.

Being quarantined upon arrival to Camphill is comparable to my first assigned task: sprucing up a tree patch. On the first day, I couldn't see the whole mess I was working with. Terribly overgrown thorn bushes towered overhead. Fallen branches and decaying logs scattered the forest floor. Twisting vines tangled around saplings, lowering their odds to survive and thrive. With my gloves and clippers I began to face the physical work of chopping wild rose bushes at their bases, and dragging logs into piles. I began seeing the results of my labor after the passing of a couple days.

Inadvertently, my mind began organizing the cluttered thoughts which occupied it as solitude advanced. After nine or 10 days of trimming, pulling, cutting, and ripping out the unneeded, potentially harmful things growing and rotting amidst the woodland, the mess transformed into a clearer and open scene. Similarly, the fog in my brain was dissipating.

My being here is a manifestation come true. Before knowing this type of place existed, I wrote about moving to a farm with my rabbit and being greeted by friendly faces, shown to a bedroom with a view, and a hot meal waiting on the table. Each of those things happened within 10 minutes of pulling up to the door. There have been people every step of the way who check in with me to see if my needs and desires are being

met. I carried a mask for times I would be involved in conversations or gardening in the same vicinity as people, while being sure to maintain proper distance. The folks here genuinely concern themselves with my well-being and want to know how I'm getting on. It is unmistakable that kindred spirits surround me. Every person, plant, and creature I've encountered has centered me in thinking positively, in appreciating beauty in the details of life.

The idea that crystallized for me is that I choose which things will continue to grow and which will be pruned in nature and in life.

• • •

**D**iedra writes:

Slow down, shut down, close up, open. What is our temperature today? Warm? Overheated? Cool?

The 110 or so people in our inclusive Camphill community are used to living, working, and celebrating together. Are we a closed community? Certainly not up un-



til sometime in March of this year, when, like the world at large, our permeable boundaries became nearly impenetrable. Our Café closed; our day volunteers, tour groups, concert audiences, craft store customers, and our friends and families from outside the community were told: stay away. Luckily, nearly all the tasks we take on together are deemed essential: land work and caring for each other. Our orchard, raw milk grass-fed dairy, herb garden and processing, estate work (tree and wildflower planting, bluebird enabling, beekeeping, grass mowing, sign making, invasive weeding), and our large CSA garden—all using biodynamic practices—could keep us busy and productive.

We could continue to buy cooperatively from our neighborhood grocer, Kimberton Whole Foods, pick up mail at the local post office, and drive in at our area bank and pharmacies. We could keep picking up surplus food from Kimberton Whole Foods and nearby Trader Joe's and drive extras to a local foodbank. We could close our craft studios and do art work at home, continue to have a rich and supportive life in our households, and take walks on paths and roads within our village. We could take our health concerns to two nurses who are long-term residents here.

But what about that temperature? Can those of us, the nearly half of our adult population who have intellectual and developmental challenges, keep to physical

distancing? Can we learn to be farther away from each other and still closer to friends in other ways? Can Ina bear to forego hugs from everyone she meets? Can friends and families from outside the community understand our need to isolate—so foreign to our usual lives? Can we forego vacations, trips here and there, see each other less regularly, and have fewer meetings? We have answered yes. We have even managed to keep our social cohesion relatively intact despite different opinions about the efficacy of various public health advisories, theories, projections, and concerns for well-being beyond our community. The continuum of opinions of those who want to shelter in-home (we live in this house, we all stay here) and those who are OK with some in-village mixing (at six feet or more), has been recognized and blessed. Quarantining of those who were away before the “distancing” started was quickly arranged.

We have managed, at least at this writing, to stay respectful and caring of each other to the degree we can. We had a good starting point to address a crisis: a shared mission, a nearly 50-year history of community life, and horizontal inclusive organizational structure. A managing group has delegates from each diverse enterprise or activity within the community. Three people were quickly chosen as the “Covid” group to help arrange the new normal, and followed up with long-term resident approval. Our Covid group includes our Village Coordinator/Executive Director, a resident BSN nurse, and a person in admissions who has a particular ability to get details communicated well. So many bits of info, videos, talks, news releases to integrate!

Each of us is as likely as anyone to have our “bubble,” a preferred theory, concern, worries. We have continuous work to do to share our concerns and respect our differences. That requires serious and respectful conversations. Many of us have developed respect for each other over time, but fewer in-person meetings can yield hasty emails or texts that “land” in ways different from how they were intended. Long emails can be scanned too quickly—life is busy! How can we create times of listening deeply, of putting aside our perspectives and hearing each other, learning from each other while still doing daily tasks? Doesn't this seem like a microcosm of our country and world? We seek times of contemplation, study, and meditation, especially of Rudolf Steiner's work, which is the basis of our community. We hope to recognize the deeper meaning of this world experience, and possibly contribute to a better future.

We regularly have over 20 new people from many countries come volunteering each year. Lately, they have included people from China, the Philippines, Germany, England, Botswana, Korea, India, the US, and so on. Some come in on B visas, some on student visas to study in our Camphill Academy (camphill.edu). Long-term members are from the US, Italy, England, Denmark, China, Latvia, Scotland, and Germany. Cam-



*Mask making and exchange in our weavery.*



*Planting potatoes for our CSA.*

Photos courtesy of Diedra Heitzman

phill communities exist across the world, begun by refugees from central Europe during WWII, and we have remained committed to multicultural weaving of destinies.

It didn't take the pandemic to bring concern that we might not be able to welcome people from other parts of the world. The US borders were already becoming harder to traverse. Then, when the pandemic was growing, the young German volunteers were suddenly recalled to Germany. Many of these young volunteers felt committed to be here in this community for a year and wished to see their commitment through. Each one felt their own connection to the people and animals that they have created relationship and community with in this time. After much emailing back and forth, soul searching, and figuring out how to interpret this layer of directive, two of these wonderful volunteers did opt to return to Germany, and the others chose to make the personal stand and, of their own free choice, opted to stay.

One wrote, "I am doing international voluntary service in Kimberton Hills, I am 25 years old and from Germany. At the beginning of April it was said that all German volunteers who started their voluntary service with a state organization should come back to their home country. It was a strange feeling to be torn out of my life; the return journey could endanger me more and life in Germany would be no safer. I can't do better than in a Camphill like the one in Kimberton. We have organic food from our own farming, as well as dairy products and bread. For me there was no reason to start the return journey; I canceled my contract with my organization."

Suddenly we have an influx of applications for short-term service opportunities: Peace Corps members were being called back to the US, and WWOOFers no longer have possibilities to go abroad. Our intentional community, with its gardens and farm, beckons. That's where Matthew, who began this article, came in.

We are grateful that our way of life, established and evolving as it is, has long-term experience with organizing tasks and supporting each other. Pivoting quickly has been relatively seamless: new daily schedules, a new CSA pick-up process, complete with boxed shares, masks, and deliveries to cars of the many members beyond our community, and regular communication from and with our Covid committee.

At this moment none of us truly knows what this will mean going into the future. We know that many in the unique population with whom we share our lives have potential health risk factors. We are aware of the need to take this situation seriously, practicing physical distancing, developing awareness of personal boundaries and yet also of the need to maintain social warmth and caring for each other.

We worry about the world, gaze at the clear skies, listen to the birds, put our hands on the plow, so to speak, and give thanks that we are here, in a beautiful burgeoning spring. What can come next? Will our model of a caring, ecologically conscious, income-sharing community stay healthy enough to continue to help others? Will the world suffer unimaginably?

We see with joy how other budding communities are forming, with folks helping each other as jobs fade and incomes decrease. We hope soon to be able to relax our

boundaries and welcome others to experience daily life with us. But in the meantime, we are doing well! 🌸

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*Diedra adds: "Post writing the article, our community supported Black Lives Matter by sending several hundred sandwiches we made with Sweetwater, the village-partnered bakery's bread, donations from Trader Joe's, and lots of veggies from our garden to the protests in Philly. While our health-challenged population makes it harder for us to be in crowds, we have 'unlearning racism' and racial justice as topics for village study and further action."*

*Matthew Goetzke is currently enjoying the moment, and invites you to do the same. Breathe in, breathe out. He says: "Grand Rapids made me. Grandma praised me. Thank you to the woman who saved me and my parents who raised me. The Natural world is my inspiration. I'm forever thankful to the supporters in my life. My partner Divine and I just celebrated one year together. Nimbus is my pet rabbit who lives the high life. My favorite foods are raspberries and chocolate."*

*Diedra Heitzman, a community member since 1983 and lifelong student of anthropology, now administers the Camphill Academy in Kimberton Hills. She has undertaken a long line of various community tasks including homemaking with her three (now grown) children, her husband Michael, and friends with and without so-called disabilities. She has enjoyed administering, celebrating, and generally helping out where needed. She is currently managing a building project and delighting in three grandchildren, one of whom lives next door.*

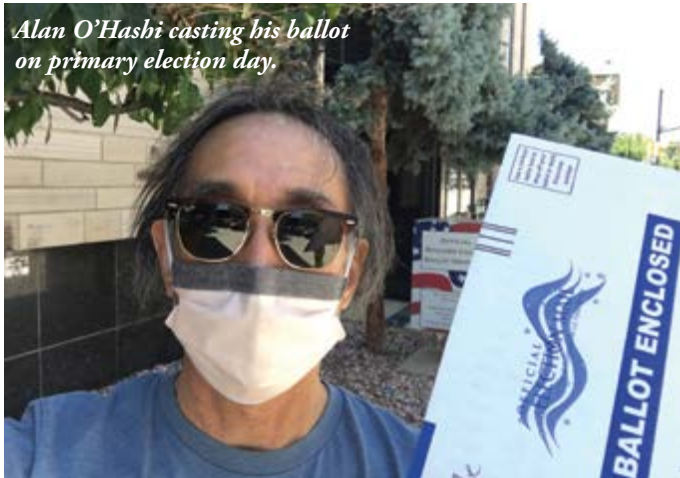


*Tilling with horses, pre-potato planting.*



# Cohousing Is a Vaccine against COVID-19 Isolation, Loneliness

By Alan O'Hashi



*Alan O'Hashi casting his ballot on primary election day.*



*Silver Sage Village residents Connie Cantu and John Huyler shake their legs at a recent physically-distanced birthday gathering.*

Photos courtesy of Alan O'Hashi

One thing I've learned over the years: there's nothing like a good old-fashioned emergency to bring a community of any size together, from meeting your neighbor for the first time as a result of a power outage during a huge snowstorm to quickly spreading diseases like the coronavirus. Cohousing communities and their residents are well equipped to deal with crisis situations, such as implementing current COVID-19 prevention measures without resorting to martial law, even though we all have various levels of risk tolerance.

Internationally, nationally, and locally, hyper-vigilance will create political heroes, increase ratings on cable TV talking heads shows, sell more toilet paper—but in the long run, save lives, and bridge social and cultural divides.

We cohousers are predisposed to be hedges against isolation through collaboration, sharing of time and resources, and keeping track of one another. We're big on meetings and getting together to make decisions about stuff, not to mention socializing given any opportunity for a party of some sort.

Cohousing Association of the US ([www.cohousing.org/webchats](http://www.cohousing.org/webchats)) held a national online webchat about what other communities are doing around the country to respond to COVID-19, part of a continuing online series. Recordings are available for those unable to participate live.

At my place, we had several neighbors self-isolating because of actual illness, having returned from travel, or just being cautious. That hasn't deterred the community from getting together.

My community has convened a series of Zoom.us online conversations and reached consensus together on a set of common sense guidelines around how to use the community common house and courtyard during lockdown. We have all of our team and community meetings online. To tell you the truth, the meetings go much smoother, IMHO.

Since self-isolation started in March, our resident opinions

have been all over the spectrum from "This is a hoax" to "I'm not worried" to "Put on the haz-mat suits."

Myself? I'm more of a "Business as usual" guy, as far as my being "freaked out" quotient goes, but do comply with the community guidelines. I've been living the pandemic vicariously by catching up on movies and TV shows. Early on, "Outbreak" with Dustin Hoffman and Rene Russo was on Prime Video. Hoffman played the ever-vigilant Dr. Fauci-type character.

On Netflix, I watched a TV series called "Containment" about what happens among frustrated people during a viral outbreak in a quarantine area where there are too many "rats in a cage." Next are the classic "Andromeda Strain" and "Contagion" with Gwyneth Paltrow. There's a good one called "Flu" from Korea, but it's subtitled—I'll watch that when I can concentrate more.

My behavior while in or out of the community is to observe the most important lowest common denominator, which is hyper-vigilance. I wear a mask all the time. Besides that, I'm part of the most vulnerable population—being old, have recovered from a usually deadly lung disease, and I'm a guy with A+ blood type.

Silver Sage Village COVID-19 guidelines generally prohibit outsiders from entering the common house and the courtyard, and sparse, itinerant use by community members.

During normal times, the building is seldom frequented except for a few people using the laundry, residents checking the mail, getting items from the storage room; the new social distancing criteria aren't much of an inconvenience. The mailman is asked to wipe the mailboxes.

Most Baby Boomers, including myself, were around during the 1950s and 1960s toward the end of the polio pandemic and the swine flu that spread in 2009, which coincided with the financial system collapse.

My family provided support when the oral polio vaccines came out. In my grade school, one kid recovered from polio and wore

a leg brace à la Forrest Gump. He was bullied because he also wore a hearing aid—back then, they were very conspicuous, with earphones wired to a receiver the size of a Band-Aid box.

Jonas Salk developed the first vaccine that was administered by injection. Being jabbed with what seemed to be a needle the size of a railroad spike was my first shot. I don't remember being freaked out about it. Living on top of others is not new to me. One time, my grandfather, who had diabetes, stayed with us. My grandmother was unable to care for him at the time since she was running the family business, the Highway Cafe.

I had to give up my bedroom, but went in to see him every morning because I was curious about the insulin shots he administered to himself. He let me poke him with the big syringe. It was a glass barrel connected to a stainless steel contraption. I don't know how sterile it could be, since it was only wiped off by a cloth and some alcohol.

Anyway, I didn't have a fear of needles, still don't.

Back in the 1960s, the vaccine development competition was fierce. In the case of polio, Albert Sabin won the oral vaccine contest. Polio vaccines were risky in that some people who were vaccinated contracted polio, but the number of cases prevented outweighed the risk.

I remember a big family social event was gathering at my grandparents' house on 8th Street in the Southside of Cheyenne. We walked over to the fire station and stood in line with all the other neighbors to get a sugar cube with pink fluid dropped onto it. Seems like there were boosters necessary, but the most memorable was the first one.

What about the swine flu pandemic from 2009? That was a pretty big deal. Obama had a lot on his plate back then keeping the auto industry and banks stable. He eventually declared swine flu a national emergency. I had to look it up to refresh my memory. I don't remember anything about self-isolating, wiping doorknobs with Clorox, social distancing, or anything like what's happening now—but 500,000 people died and a billion were sick around the world. Turned out, saving the world economy was more important than saving people. To date, more people have died from COVID-19, and the death toll continues to rise and the economy is in the tank.

There were warnings about the swine flu contagion, but no mass closures of schools or businesses, nor were employees self-isolating in mass numbers.

The coronavirus outbreak is turning out to be a lot like the swine flu and the crash of 2009. So far, with COVID-19, we tried to get ahead of the disease and propped up the economy

the best we could, but calling the subsequent public health and economic effects “disruptions” is an understatement.

Well, we got it partly right.

Regardless of what's happening in mainstream America, cohousers have the theoretical wherewithal to fast-track hyper-vigilant responses to control the COVID-19 virus. The US government reluctantly got out in front with the economic stimulus CARES Act that included Andrew Yang-esque Universal Basic Income payments of \$1,200 to most people, providing a short-term shot in the arm.

What about the loneliness and lack of connection that people and families who live isolated in a cul-de-sac or an apartment experience?

Cohousing communities are more important now than ever. We need to reimagine the American Way through collaboration and consensus, like old-fashioned neighborhoods where everyone knows and provides support to one another.

I don't know about you, but I have plenty of toilet paper in the bathroom cabinet—I'm a hoarder from way back. I'm eating up all my emergency food, though. Next crisis, I'll stock up on my least favorite snacks.

I mentioned at the start about meeting my neighbor during a snowstorm. It was when I moved to Laramie for graduate school in 1976 or so and was living at my parents' townhouse.

There was a power outage and I saw my neighbor out on the walk. We were both checking out the situation—snow drifted to the side of the house and no power.

Turned out, he was a University of Wyoming alumnus and former offensive guard for the Wyoming Cowboys. He and his family lived in Laramie during the off season when he wasn't on the field playing for the St. Louis football Cardinals—it was none other than Conrad Dobler, the NFL's “Dirtiest Player.”

Conrad turned out to be a nicer guy than was reported in *Sports Illustrated*.

If you do anything over the next few weeks, make a point to meet and get to know your neighbors, even if it's from six feet away. Your lives may one day depend on your neighborly friendships. 🐦

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*Alan O'Hashi is President of the board of directors of the Cohousing Association of the US. For more of his writings, please visit [alanohashi.wordpress.com](http://alanohashi.wordpress.com). This article is adapted from a column originally posted March 17, 2020 at [alanohashi.wordpress.com/2020/03/17/cohousing-is-a-natural-vaccine-against-covid-19-loneliness-and-isolation](http://alanohashi.wordpress.com/2020/03/17/cohousing-is-a-natural-vaccine-against-covid-19-loneliness-and-isolation).*



*Lindy Cook takes a whack at the coronavirus piñata.*



*Brownie and Jim Leach mask up while harvesting some greens for dinner.*



# Community Is Everything: Upheaval and Renewal

By Niánn Emerson Chase

Photo courtesy of Global Community Communications Alliance



*Outdoor hikes and excursions bring healthy diversion and recreation as well as great coming-of-age experiences for the Soul Sisters Society, a group of teen girls at Global Community Communications Alliance cofounded by Niánn Emerson Chase.*

In her book *The Sun Is a Compass*, wildlife biologist Caroline Van Hemert describes a 4,000-mile “human-powered” journey that she and her husband took in 2012 into the Pacific Northwest wild lands—starting from Bellingham in northern Washington and ending in Kotzebue, Alaska, far above the Arctic Circle. In those months of being constantly in the natural world, away from human-created societies and environments, Dr. Van Hemert gained a broader and more attuned perspective of life, experiencing a gamut of emotions and situations as she and her husband blissed out in the majestic wonder of rose-tinted dawns, gold-laced dusks, and other peace-bringing incidences, and, paradoxically, at other times struggling in their fear and desperation to simply stay alive in a harsh and unforgiving environment.

In a recent article about one episode on this trip,<sup>1</sup> Dr. Van Hemert describes how closely observing a herd of hundreds of migrating caribou for a couple of days taught her some very important life lessons, which we need in these times of the Coronapocalypse.<sup>2</sup> We humans are very much like our animal counterparts in our needs and tendencies. Like the caribou, we are individuals by ourselves or with small nuclear-family units for whom we try to provide and protect, and we also have an innate need to belong with a herd in order to survive all of life’s challenges.

In her observations of the behavior of the animals in their mass migration, Dr. Van Hemert saw at times what appeared to be chaos and confusion as they encountered various challenges that blocked their rhythmic and orderly travel. However, solutions were found, often by one or two caribou, who would take the lead and the herd followed. It was as if “behind the chaos was a collective need to move” forward and so solutions naturally emerged.

It was as if “each animal’s actions were driven by something larger than itself.” She never saw any shoving or pushing aside in those very crowded conditions, even in times of “frantic motion.” “It was as though a safety bubble hovered around each animal with an unspoken, absolutist rule shared among the herd: *Do not harm thy neighbor.*” Though at times the caribou’s movements might not have seemed synchronous, Dr. Van Hemert “could see how they were intimately and essentially connected.”

If only more of us humans would allow that innate knowing of certain universal laws of survival within divine pattern to come forth in us and learn to flow in those rhythms, then we too would deeply know “like the caribou, that community is everything.”

• • •

I was a nature child, who spent more time outdoors than indoors, roaming the vast desert lands around my home in Arizona, and through osmosis I began to “know” some of the Creator’s laws found in the natural world. Like all peoples of all generations who try to live in harmony with the laws and lessons of the earthly ecosystems, I sensed the essence of the Universe Mother Spirit within Mother Earth (Gaia).<sup>3</sup>

I too have experienced the easy-going aspects of nature as well as the more brutal parts, though to a much less extent than Dr. Van Hemert (on her 4,000 mile adventure into the wilderness) or those who are suffering great loss from the current pandemic and its domino effects on the economic, medical, educational, and other social systems of society. Nor have I yet been impacted by great personal loss from the effects of global weirding,<sup>4</sup> which in-

cludes worldwide extreme-weather events that result in increased crop-killing droughts, copious snow and rain followed by ravaging floods, destructive winds (including more-than-normal tornadoes and hurricanes), or raging fires due to extreme heat and drought-like conditions. Neither have I personally suffered from debilitating emotional and mental illness, which in these times of anxiety is increasing.

However, deep within my being I grieve over the terrible loss Gaia (Earth) is experiencing worldwide, including diminishing and disappearing animals and plants (due to harmful human encroachment of habitats), decreasing clean water, air, and soil (due to human-behavior-caused toxicity), and entire ecosystems collapsing (due to human-generated acceleration of global weirding).

In the southwest bioregion where I live, I feel great sadness as I observe the near disappearance of Gila monsters, tarantulas, and horned toads, and I see much less of jackrabbits, the various raptors, varieties of water fowl, several species of songbirds, butterflies, bees, and so on than in the past decades.

My heart literally beats erratically to the rhythm of my awareness of the unraveling web of life on earth and of the human instigation of this tragedy. My lungs strenuously breathe in and out the tainted air particles caused by human selfishness and greed. And at the same time, my heart and lungs rejoice in all that is good and true and beautiful on this world, and there is much of that too. So I and my body reflect the paradox of joy and sorrow, but more joy, and an underpinning of a “peace that passes all understanding,” for I know that in spite of the Coronapocalypse and global-warming calamities that threaten so many lives, a new world will emerge in the near future.

• • •

These current times of great upheaval have been spoken of and foretold for hundreds of years, and today they are referred to (by those with a more philosophical and positive outlook) as the Great Turning or Great Transition, both terms indicating a great change from one reality to another. Many with a scientific leaning refer to these times as the Anthropocene—“anthro” meaning man and “cene” denoting a recent geological epoch—which is a term defining “Earth’s most recent geologic time period as being human-influenced, based on global evidence that atmospheric, geologic, hydrologic, biospheric, and other earth system process-

es are now altered by humans,”<sup>5</sup> and not in a good way. Elizabeth Kolbert explains these times in her 2015 Pulitzer-Prize-winning book *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*.

I mention just a few terms that fit the nature and description of the times we are living in, but there are many others. And though I have focused more on the degradation of the natural world and extreme climate change due to centuries’ worth of culminating human choices, those choices—based on selfish and materialistic values, outside of the Creator’s divine pattern—have also caused the degradation of societal systems. Thus we have debilitating poverty, burgeoning social inequities, soul-destroying immorality, expanding mental illnesses, dismantling of humanitarian services, and unbridled, peace-threatening militarism.

However, in spite of this dire situation, there is always the possibility for this era of the Great Turning or Great Transition to transform our violated earth and troubled societies into regenerated ecosystems and redeemed cultures, actually becoming a new, or renewed, world. I (and I am sure many others) have carried within us a knowing of a beautiful reality here on earth, coexisting with the ugliness and devastation, and also having an assurance of a better future that is based on harmonious existence with God, the Creator of everything. After all, good does eventually completely overcome and transform evil.

However, we humans must take part in this Great Turning. As is pointed out in *The Urantia Book*, “The ideas, motives, and longings of a lifetime are openly revealed in a crisis.”<sup>6</sup> The afflictions we suffer now can awaken us to the root of the problems troubling us and our world. We are forced to reflect deeply on the circumstances we are in and reassess our own values, choices, and behavior. As we become aware of the causes of the dismantling of that which is good, life-giving, and health-sustaining—within ourselves as well as in our social systems—then we can take action to make the changes necessary to heal ourselves and our earth.

As we recognize our fragility and mortality, realizing that there is something much larger than “us,” we begin to walk the path, the Tao, that leads to the Source of all life, all truth, all beauty, and all goodness—the Universal Creator Father/Mother. Love and goodness are of eternal value; the hateful virus of evil, in all its forms, is temporary and will eventually dissipate; its evil contagion will fade away. However, “love is truly contagious and eternally creative.”<sup>7</sup>

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1. “What the Caribou Taught Me About Being Together and Apart” by Caroline Van Hemert, published in *The New York Times*, 4/6/2020. “Coronapocalypse” became almost overnight a meme used in social and other media in reference to these times of the COVID-19 pandemic and the domino effect it is having in other areas of our lives.

3. According to Greek mythology, “Gaia” was the ancestral mother of all life, the primal Mother Earth goddess. In more recent times, Gaia is also used as a synonym for Earth.

4. “Global weirding” is a term that identifies what happens as global temperatures rise and the climate changes. In these times, the acceleration of the natural cycle of climate change, which usually happens over thousands of years, has been accelerated at an alarming rate due to the human-caused greenhouse blanket around our planet, which holds in heat. This is blamed on the huge amount of carbon released by human activity, especially through machinery and industry.

5. Definition from *Encyclopedia of the Earth* by Erle Ellis, published in 2013. The term “Anthropocene” was popularized in the year 2000 by atmospheric chemist and Nobel laureate Paul Crutzen.

6. *The Urantia Book*, Paper 187, Section 2, Paragraph 4.

7. *Ibid.* Paper 188, Section 5, Paragraph 2.

8. From *The Cushion in the Road: Meditation and Wandering as the Whole World Awakens to Being in Harm’s Way*, a collection of contemplative journaling by Alice Walker.



•••

On a lighter ending note: In “A Recipe for Difficult Times: Anxiety Soup,”<sup>8</sup> Pulitzer-Prize-winner writer and poet Alice Walker gives three essential ingredients needed for “this period of emotional, psychological, ideological, and financial instability.” Her soup for these difficult times is meant to help us manage our anxiety, to lessen it, to put it into proper perspective.

“First of all, Anxiety Soup keeps growing and expanding; it is eclectic, it is self-choosing, and it is already within your reach. The main thing it assumes is that you are coming to it in your right mind: that you’ve put the liquor bottle back on the shelf, said no to drugs of all kinds, and made the manly or womanly decision not to pick fights. In fact, it assumes you consider yourself free. That being so, you are ready for ingredient number one.”

Ingredient number one is dance, and ingredient number two is sitting meditation. Ingredient number three is actual soup that “you make yourself from scratch” with a variety of vegetables and anything else healthy you might have on hand. “Soup, no matter what’s in it, always tastes good. This is part of soup’s magic; you can only go wrong if you have no sense of taste whatsoever.”

As we dance, meditate, and cook through these tough times, taking the higher way of truth and goodness, as Alice Walker says, “May we continue to be a hardy race that outlives our tormentors.” And may we no longer be tormentors ourselves. 🍷

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*Niánn Emerson Chase is a world-renowned spiritual leader, educator, activist, and prolific author with many articles on culture, society, spirituality, and sustainability. She is coauthor of the book Teachings on Healing from a Spiritual Perspective and cofounded Global Community Communications Alliance, a multifaceted global change nonprofit, comprised of approximately 120 change agents from five continents ([gccalliance.org](http://gccalliance.org)). She is the cofounder and Director of The University of Ascension Science and The Physics of Rebellion located in Tumacácori, Arizona ([uaspr.org](http://uaspr.org)). She is also a counselor. Niánn’s website is [nianneemersonchase.org](http://nianneemersonchase.org).*

# Grasshopper Man, Driving Through

(for Gary Snyder)

By Stephen Wing

*I live on a planet,  
the rising moon  
reminds me,  
huge and round and low  
above the wires  
and rooftops of the city*

*I live in a watershed,  
brown water reminds me,  
slow and quiet  
and powerful,  
curving through trees,  
reflecting sky  
as I cross the interstate bridge*

*I belong to an ancient  
mountain range,  
the first unmistakable  
distant blue  
shape of a mountain  
reminds me  
as I round a curve  
on the highway north*

*I am one cell  
of an unimaginably immense  
multicellular  
creature,  
sunlight  
glinting from the bright green  
multitudes of spring  
reminds me  
as I pass between two  
towering mountainsides*

*Just one small part  
of something grand...  
Does that make me small  
or grand?*

*Stephen Wing is author of Free Ralph! An Evolutionary Fable ([www.WindEaglePress.com](http://www.WindEaglePress.com), [www.StephenWing.com](http://www.StephenWing.com)), about which Taylor Stoehr, professor of literature at University of Massachusetts, writes, “An utterly convincing philosophy of evolutionary ecology is the deepest layer of this profound and hilarious book.”*

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## COMMUNITIES WITH OPENINGS

**LOST VALLEY EDUCATION AND EVENT CENTER HAS OPPORTUNITIES** for new residents and our volunteer work-trade program. We are an intentional community of about 35 people located a half-hour east of Eugene, Oregon. Founded in 1989, our nonprofit focuses on sustainable and holistic education, permaculture, ecstatic dance, and personal growth and healing events. Our center hosts retreats that align with our vision of a deep connection with the Self, each other, and nature. Our current residents range from young children to elders. We have 87 mostly-forested acres with cabins, apartments, RV/tiny home sites, tent campsites, a lodge, two dorms, a creek, a large camas meadow, an outdoor kitchen, several gardens, a sacred yurt, a wood-fired sauna and hot tub. Community dinners are served Monday-Friday. We offer affordable housing and meal plan options. Some residents run their own small businesses, many have staff positions, and some work off-site for their income. Work trade involves between 15-25 hours a week of work in exchange for accommodation and food. Inquiries about residency: [sitemanager@lostvalley.org](mailto:sitemanager@lostvalley.org). Inquiries about work trade: [volunteer@lostvalley.org](mailto:volunteer@lostvalley.org). No unannounced visits, please. Visit us at [www.lostvalley.org](http://www.lostvalley.org) to learn more.

**COZY, FRIENDLY HOUSEHOLD.** Three 40-ish folks sharing a house in Charlottesville, VA ISO fourth, non-smoking co-habitator. We enjoy food, gardening, and community. One cat, no more pets. Very COVID cautious. Hoping to make cooperative home purchase, hope to invite the right 4th to participate, but not required. \$525/mo plus ~\$100 utilities. Contact [5iveFridges@gmail.com](mailto:5iveFridges@gmail.com).

**ELDERBERRY COHOUSING** welcomes you to visit our active senior community in a lovely rural area north of Durham, NC. If you're a couple or single 55+ who wants to own your home and share our community, check our website: [elderberrycohousing.com](http://elderberrycohousing.com) to learn about our membership requirements and available homes.

**VALLEY OF LIGHT** is a community for Cultural Creatives that rests along the New River in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. With \$2 million invested, our 23-acre campus is debt-free and includes 7 homes, 5 new building pads, campground, barn, garden, "Peace Pentagon" conference and community center, and other amenities. We share our campus with The Oracle Institute, an educational charity that operates a spirituality school, award-winning press, and peacebuilding practice. We seek co-founding members in five Paths: Native (farmers, animal & land stewards); Scientist (health & tech); Artisan (art, music, construction); Peacemaker (teachers & activists); Oracle (spirit seekers). Visit: [www.TheOracleInstitute.org/about-our-community](http://www.TheOracleInstitute.org/about-our-community) & [www.PeacePenta](http://www.PeacePenta)

[gen.net](http://gen.net); Contact [Info@ValleyofLight.org](mailto:Info@ValleyofLight.org).

**COWEETA HERITAGE CENTER AND TALKING ROCK FARM** are located in the mountains of Western North Carolina in a beautiful and diverse temperate rainforest. CHC is looking for others who would like to join together to form an Intentional Community embracing the principles of Voluntary Simplicity and Healing the Earth and Each Other. Simply put, we wish "to live simply so that others may simply live." It is a recognition that nature provides us with valuable services and resources that we can use to enrich our lives. Utilizing local resources, appropriate technology, and working cooperatively, we can discover creative ways to meet our needs as "directly and simply as possible." Come join Coweeta and learn how to live lightly on the land and enjoy the Earth's bounty! Contact Coweeta for more info or to schedule a visit!! Contact Paul at [coweeta@gmail.com](mailto:coweeta@gmail.com). Visit Coweeta on the web at [www.coweetaheritagecenter.com](http://www.coweetaheritagecenter.com)

**COHOUSING A LA MEXICANA!** Located near Ajijic Lake Chapala, 3 Acres are now being developed with new homes. We stand for Sustainability, Community, Multiversity and Aging in Place. We are seeking quality VISIONARY and ADVENTUROUS members/investors to embrace and help us manifest this shared dream. Contact Jaime Navarro at [info@rancholasaludvillage.com](mailto:info@rancholasaludvillage.com) or [www.rancholasaludvillage.com](http://www.rancholasaludvillage.com)

**MORNINGLAND COMMUNITY** is offering work/study opportunities for those interested in deepening their meditation practice to include contemplative service. Some co-housing available. Our community is offline, digitally unplugged, and a great place to catch your breath. Call 562.433.9906 for more information and to apply. "Simple living and high thinking" - Yogananda. 2600 E. 7th St, Long Beach, CA 90804.

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**RALSTON CREEK COHOUSING ARVADA CO** - Imagine an energetic group of eclectic families who value treading lightly on the land. They come together near Old Town to design a vibrant common house and 20 private dwellings. What if this whole urban village called Geos was powered by solar and ground source energy (net zero), had a community garden and a view of the mountains. Picture being near a creekside bike path with 300 days of sunshine. You unplug your electric car, hop onto I-70 to ski and come home to relax with a glass of wine and dinner with friends. [www.ralstoncreekcohousing.org](http://www.ralstoncreekcohousing.org)

**WICUHKEMTULTINE KINSHIP COMMUNITY:** Donate to help purchase land in Maine for an Indigenous-led learning community to share teachings on Earth-based living, climate change, social justice, and transformational



spiritual change. See [spiret.org/wicuhkemtultine-kinship-community-donations](http://spiret.org/wicuhkemtultine-kinship-community-donations) or call Ethan at (207) 338-5719.

## SERVICES/OPPORTUNITIES/PRODUCTS

**ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR.** Los Angeles Ecovillage Institute (formerly CRSP) seeks Associate Director to co-manage organization, including fundraising, membership development, asset management, public advocacy, media, project management, more. Experienced communitarian, knowledge of/experience with permaculture, urban planning, public speaking, writing, bookkeeping, cities. Track record required. See [www.laev.org](http://www.laev.org). Resume to Lois Arkin, [csp@igc.org](mailto:csp@igc.org).

**CLIFFORD PAULIN: LEGAL, MEDIATION, AND FACILITATION SERVICES** for individuals, businesses, communities, and non-profits. I work with existing and newly forming communities of various scales and backgrounds to create robust and responsive legal structures, provide transactional and non-profit law support, and offer dispute resolution solutions. Contact me through [cliffordpaulin.com](http://cliffordpaulin.com) or at 707-228-9118.

**FITCH ARCHITECTURE & COMMUNITY DESIGN** is internationally recognized as one of the most experienced firms in cohousing programming and design. Working with over two dozen communities across North America, we have evolved an effective and enjoyable participatory process. Laura Fitch is a resident of Pioneer Valley Cohousing in Amherst, Massachusetts. Her experience as a member helps her to understand the issues facing other cohousing groups and gives her unique insight into the group dynamics that affect the design process. Laura served on the Cohousing Association of the US board for five years and regularly leads workshops at their conferences. Contact her at 413-549-5799 or [www.facdarchitects.com](http://www.facdarchitects.com).

**WELCOME TO THE ENERGY REVOLUTION: LIVING ENERGY LIGHTS.** We offer reliable, durable products for stand-alone solar energy systems. Whether you are building an off-grid homestead, exploring microgrid options for your neighborhood, or looking for an affordable and dependable emergency backup system, Living Energy Lights can help meet your energy needs. See [www.livingenergylights.com](http://www.livingenergylights.com) or contact us at [info@livingenergylights.com](mailto:info@livingenergylights.com). See also Living Energy Farm's articles in past issues of Communities (#187, #183, #179, #174, #161, and others) for more information about our work.

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## PUBLICATIONS, BOOKS, WEBSITES, WORKSHOPS

**SAGEWOMAN** magazine, celebrating the Goddess in Every Woman, still going strong after 30 years. **WITCHES & PAGANS** magazine covers Pagan, Wiccan, Heathen, and Polytheist people, places, and practice. 88 pages, print or digital (PDF). Mention this Communities ad for a free sample. 503-430-8817, P O Box 687, Forest Grove, OR, 97116. [www.bbimedia.com](http://www.bbimedia.com).

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN INDIANA-CENTER FOR COMMUNAL STUDIES (CCS)** - The Center for Communal Studies (CCS) was created in 1976 as a clearinghouse for information and as a research resource on communal groups worldwide, past and present. Located on the campus of the University of Southern Indiana in Evansville, the Center encourages scholarship, meetings, public understanding and learning about historic and contemporary intentional communities. **ARCHIVAL RESEARCH COLLECTION:** We invite researchers to use the Center's Collection of primary and secondary materials on more than 500 historic and contemporary communes. Our Collection is housed at Rice


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Library and has over 10,000 images and a reading room with an extensive library. Online resources may be found at [www.usi.edu/library/university-archives-and-special-collections](http://www.usi.edu/library/university-archives-and-special-collections). Email the archivist at [jagreene@usi.edu](mailto:jagreene@usi.edu) for information. REGIONAL RESEARCH: The CCS is part of a rich array of historic communal resources within a 30-mile radius of Evansville that includes the famous Harmonist and Owenite village of New Harmony. New Harmony's Workingmen's Institute Library and the State Museum collection also offer unique research opportunities. PROGRAMS: The CCS sponsors lectures, conferences and exhibits. The Center sponsors a minor in Communal Studies at USI. WEBSITE: The CCS website ([www.usi.edu/liberal-arts/communal-center](http://www.usi.edu/liberal-arts/communal-center)) serves scholars, students and the interested public. CENTER PRIZES AND RESEARCH TRAVEL GRANT: The CCS annually awards a Prize of \$250 for the Best Undergraduate Student Paper and a Prize of \$500 for the Best Graduate Student Paper on historic or contemporary communal groups, intentional communities, and utopias. Deadline for submission is 1 March. The Center also annually awards a \$2,000 Research Travel Grant to fund research in the Communal Studies Collection. Applications are due by 1 March. LOCATION AND CONTACT: CCS is located in Room 3022 of Rice Library at the University of Southern Indiana. Evansville has a regional airport with jet service from Chicago, Atlanta, Dallas and elsewhere. You may contact the Center by phone 812/465-1656 or email director Casey Harison at [charison@usi.edu](mailto:charison@usi.edu).

FREE GROUP PROCESS RESOURCES at Tree Bressen's website: [www.treegroup.info](http://www.treegroup.info). Topics include consensus, facilitation, conflict, community building, alternative meeting formats, etc. Workshop handouts, articles, exercises, and more!

QUAKER CURIOUS? Learn more about modern Friends at [Quaker.org](http://Quaker.org). Watch short video interviews at [QuakerSpeak.com](http://QuakerSpeak.com). Or dive deep into Friends Publishing with daily, weekly, and monthly Friends Journal articles in print and online at [Friendsjournal.org](http://Friendsjournal.org).



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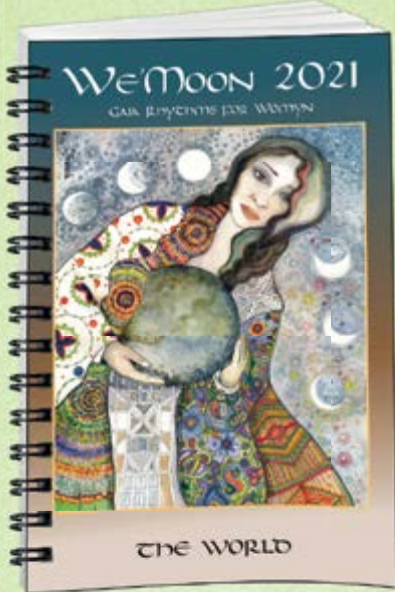
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Casa Ubuntu is our living/working space, activity and design hub. Its 9 bedrooms, terraces, courtyard gardens, and flexible shared living and working spaces foster creative interactions as we make this important transition. *Is this for you?*

[HTTP://8THLIFEPANAMA.ORG](http://8thlifepanama.org) / [HOLA@8THLIFEPANAMA.ORG](mailto:hola@8thlifepanama.org)

# Viral Poetry for a New Age

## TP Measures Up!!

hey!! six feet away, you must keep your distance!  
i'm healthy, no virus, and building up resistance.  
take one TP roll from your closet and give it a measure  
(and yes, quick, put it back in your secret-hoarded treasure).  
4 1/2 inches wide is how ours met the ruler  
then do some third-grade math—this couldn't be cooler.  
roll after roll after roll—16 in all you will need  
that's 72 inches—hey!! that's six feet, indeed!!  
so, out and about? tote your 16 rolls with great pride  
and be ready when someone crosses into the Healthy Divide.  
when folks stand too close and encroach in your zone  
set out your measuring rolls as you do 'round your throne.  
have them respect the safe social-distance you need.  
and if they do, but they're sad, and begin a thin-paper plead  
give them one roll as a favor—you're making safety-zone friends  
(and we all know you have TP galore—you'll be flush till this ends).



## it's just a balloon...

i got it from him  
who gave it to jim  
when he went to the gym  
who gave it to john  
on the door of the john  
who did a slight cringe  
when he looked on the hinge  
and he gave it to sarah  
who didn't preparah  
who shared it with molly  
who liked it, by golly  
and she gave it to jose  
on a bright sunny day  
and he gave it to cyrus  
who said nope, it's not the virus  
it's just a balloon  
in the shape of the moon  
so give it to him  
who will give it to jim...



## Election Day Blues

jack be nimble jack be quick  
jack got the virus, now jack be sick.  
he put on his mask, went in the sunshine to bask  
and gathered his friends to make one last ask.  
“please help me now”—so what do you think  
they gathered together for one last drink.  
jack got hopeful and very expectant  
“hey give me a pint of the best disinfectant.”  
lysol it is, he slurped and then burped  
he read part of the label, just a most brief excerpt.  
“what have i done?? goodbye to you all”...  
and jack won't be here to vote in the fall.



*Retired from 38 years of teaching in high school, Ron's an amateur poet in the tradition of Geisel (Ron Gordon—Here's His Who).*



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## What Readers say about COMMUNITIES

I love COMMUNITIES magazine. Deciding to be communal is the best decision I've ever made in my life. COMMUNITIES has been there from the beginning.

—Patch Adams, M.D.,  
author and founder of the Gesundheit Institute

COMMUNITIES has become one of our go-to sources for thought-provoking pieces about people opting out of the rat race and living life on their own terms.

—Christian Williams, Editor, Utne Reader

Each issue is a refreshing antidote to the mainstream media's "me, me, me" culture. COMMUNITIES overflows with inspiring narratives from people who are making "we" central to their lives instead.

—Murphy Robinson,  
Founder of Mountainsong Expeditions

Community has to be the future if we are to survive. COMMUNITIES plays such a critical role in moving this bit of necessary culture change along.

—Chuck Durrett,  
The Cohousing Company, McCamant & Durrett Architects

For more than 40 years COMMUNITIES has done an outstanding job of promoting the communitarian spirit as well as serving intentional communities and other groups coming together for the common good.

—Timothy Miller,  
Professor of Religious Studies, University of Kansas

For many years we've been associated with and have strongly supported COMMUNITIES because we're convinced of its unique contribution to the communities movement in the United States and the world.

—Lisa and Belden Paulson, Ph.D.,  
cofounders of High Wind community

COMMUNITIES has been important to me ever since I began researching intentional communities back in 1980.... The Editors have always been willing to include critical articles which challenge accepted norms.

—Dr. Bill Metcalf,  
Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia

COMMUNITIES is an invaluable resource.

—Professor Emeritus Yaacov Oved, Tel-Aviv University

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# The Problem

There are 3 existential threats facing humanity right now:

**Ecosystem Collapse:** Insect populations have been decimated by 25% each decade over the last 30 years (United Nations).

**Soil Erosion:** According to the UN, we only have about 60 years of topsoil left on the planet. Other estimates are as low as 30 years.

**Climate Change:** Atmospheric Carbon levels are off the charts. Scientists have been able to use ice core samples to look back over the last 800,000 years and have documented the correlation between temperature and CO<sub>2</sub> levels.

# The Solution

Restoring the world's soils to a natural state could potentially solve all of these problems. Think about it, the living part of our planet is its skin (the soil) and of course the oceans. We have drastically altered the balance of microbes on the skin using the plow (over the last 10,000 years) and chemicals over the last 100 years.

The good news is that soil biology can be rebalanced in a matter of months!

Dr. Elaine Ingham has developed a holistic approach to soil biology. The Soil Food Web Approach is all about restoring natural balance to soil biology. It's a simple 3-step process in which mother nature is given a helping hand.... Then she does the rest!



Quantify the Microbes



Balance the Soil Biology



Enjoy the Results!

We offer a simple 2-step training program that has been specifically designed for people with no background in agriculture or biology.

Once we have introduced all the major groups of microbes that make up the Soil Food Web, in approximately the right balance, the symbiotic relationships that these organisms enjoy with plants ensure that the perfect balance is achieved. The plants feed the microbes and the microbes feed the plants. Having all the right predators in place ensures a natural balance is maintained.

## Step 1: DR. ELAINE'S™ FOUNDATION COURSES (FCs)

This is where you will learn all of the underpinning science of the Soil Food Web, as well as all the information required to implement Dr. Elaine's™ Approach in order to regenerate the soils in your community. This is a theory-based course, comprising 63 online lectures and quizzes that you can take at your own pace.

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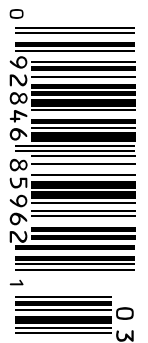
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