

low-impact living initiative



LILI

LILI information sheet communities



classic Australian community house: self-built, with a tin roof, porch, hammock, solar hot water panels and garden – this one is at Patanga Community in NSW. Australian communities tend to be large as regards land area, but with houses built as far apart as possible on the property. In Japan, in contrast, the houses are built close together whatever the size of the property, reflecting the more communal nature of the people.

what is a community?

In this case, we mean an *intentional* community - a group of people who have come together *intentionally* to share various aspects of their lives; the extent of the sharing depends on the community. Most people would perceive communities to be 'hippie communes', many of which were set up in the 70s, and some of which are still around. However, longevity usually depends on hard work, responsibility, and solid structure as regards legal and financial matters – nowadays you'd be pretty hard pushed to find much tie-dye or free love (you'd probably find more in the suburbs), although environmental and social concerns are still important.

Communities sometimes call themselves communes, eco-villages, co-housing groups, or alternative communities. They can be very interesting, satisfying, healthy and fun places to live, and there are many different kinds. Some have a shared philosophy, which could be religious, spiritual, environmental, political, or ideas about child-care. Often there is no unifying philosophy except a desire to live in community. There are differences as regards

organisation. Some are very communal, some are loose-knit; some share income, some don't; some share meals, some don't; some share one big house, some have separate houses around the property; some are urban, some are rural; some require new members to have capital, some you can just join and start paying rent.

why are they good for the environment?

- shared resources - such as laundry and kitchen facilities, vehicles and tools
- members can produce a lot of their own (organic) food
- members can grow their own space-heating fuel in the form of firewood
- communities can experiment with the environmentally-friendly facilities found on our other information sheets
- they can educate members and visitors about those facilities
- communities can ensure that chemicals are not used on the land, and that wildlife and habitats are protected
- internal recycling in the form of books, clothes, CDs, furniture etc.



Mvuti Ujamaa Community, Tanzania: one of many thousands formed by Julius Nyerere, President of Tanzania in the 60s, each community consists of around 3,000 people. Groups of 10 families elect a representative to the village committee. The gov't. provided a clinic and primary school to each village. The system was successful; infant mortality fell dramatically and literacy rates rose. Pressure from the US via the World Bank has brought structural adjustment policies to Tanzania, and the link between state and Ujamaa has been broken. Consequently, poverty, malnutrition and child mortality are rising.



other benefits

- provide cheap rural housing
- good places for kids – other kids, lots of other adults to interact with, lots of space, shared toys
- good places for parents – shared childcare, safety
- good places to grow old – always useful things to do, experience is valued, always company
- good places to gain skills – practical, social, accounting, cooking for 40, caring for animals, gardening, meetings, running courses, chainsaw maintenance, building maintenance etc. etc. etc.

what can I do?

- find out what communities there are, and where they are by looking in directories (see resources)
- read more about communities, or attend a course (see resources)
- visit some communities: many communities welcome visitors, either paying or working. Many have regular visitor days. An excellent way to visit communities is by joining



Redfield Community in Buckinghamshire is a registered housing co-op with 18 adults and 10 kids. Set in 18 acres of woodland, pasture, organic gardens and orchards, it has sheep, chickens, bees, straw-bale buildings, wood stoves, solar hot water and compost toilets. Decisions are by consensus at the weekly meeting.

WWOOF (see resources)

- decide what kind of community you want:
 - how much are you happy sharing (meals, bathrooms, income, gardens)?
 - rural or urban?
 - how many members?
 - one with a specific philosophy?
- never just turn up at a community, as they are people's homes. Always write or call to arrange a visit first

resources

- WWOOF (world-wide opportunities on organic farms) is an international organisation (www.wwooof.org) which matches volunteers with organic farms and smallholdings

COURSES

- 'Living in Communities': Redfield Community - (01296) 713661
www.redfieldcommunity.org.uk

directories

- *Diggers and Dreamers*: Directory of British communities c/o Edge of Time Ltd, BCM Edge, London, WC1N 3XX, UK – info@diggersanddreamers.org.uk
- *Eurotopia*: Directory of European communities - tel: +40 (0)3901 82949
eurotopia@siebenlinden.de
- *Communities Directory*: Directory of North American and international communities – order form on www.ic.org, or 138 Twin Oaks Rd, Dept W, Louisa, VA 23093, USA

other books

- McLaughlin & Davidson, 1985, *Builders of the Dawn*, Book Publishing Co, Summertown, Tennessee
- see booklist on www.ic.org

web

- www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk - UK communities
- www.eurotopia.de - European communities
- www.ic.org - US and international communities
- www.gaia.org - global eco-village network

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