

What is an Ecovillage?

by Hildur Jackson

(Based on a working paper presented at the Gaia Trust Education Seminar, Thy, Denmark in September 1998, with minor updates).

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.

— Margaret Mead

Defining the terms "ecovillage" and "sustainability" has become a central and constant topic of debate within GEN — the Global Ecovillage network. There is good reason to believe that this discussion will continue for years to come. The main question is whether a narrow ecological definition is desirable or whether a broader definition containing also social, cultural and spiritual dimensions is preferable. The narrow definition is seen in many both official and grass roots contexts and may make it easier at this time to get funding. The need for framework for education and self-audits as measures of how far we have come and where we go underscores this.

In order to contribute to this debate the following historical overview of the development of some of the visions, conceptualizations and auditing models for ecovillages may be useful.

Gaia Trust mission statement.

Choosing the word of Gaia when we sat up Gaia Trust in 1987 was a clear indication of a new world view perceiving the planet as one interrelated whole and accepting the female, yin aspect of society as in need of more attention. We saw the way society was organized as the female or yin aspect and technology as the male or yang. It was our opinion that it is time for us human beings to decide how we want to organize our way of living with each other and the natural world, and from this basis develop technologies and economic systems that are supportive of this plan. Among other elements a local decision structure was seen as vital.

For 20 years my husband Ross Jackson and I lived in a cohousing project. The ecovillage concept was the next step following our vision of what a balanced, healthy, fun and sustainable lifestyle would be like. So we set up Gaia Villages (yin) and Gaia Technologies (Yang) under Gaia Trust as two entities that should carry out this vision. Gaia Villages took the initiative of creating a Danish network and an international network of ecovillages. We chose the concept of ecovillages as the major focus for Gaia Villages — rather than permaculture, which was another possible choice and close to our hearts, because the social and spiritual dimensions, which were so central to our way of thinking, were not clearly defined within permaculture. Without a world view of interconnectedness and love and without a reintroduction of community and a group of people together taking responsibility and choosing their lifestyle we may easily end up with what Andre Gorz in the 1960s called "eco-fascism", a dictate from the state or the multinationals of how we should live.

The First Global Meetings in Thy and the Gilman Definition

In 1991 Gaia Trust commissioned Diane and Robert Gilman to make a global survey of the best examples of ecovillages they and we could think of as a basis for our future strategy. In their report, "Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities," they came up with a definition of an ecovillage as, " a human scale, full-featured settlement, in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world, in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future." This definition has being much quoted. And is still being used. Its strength is that it serves as a focus for local work and local community as opposed to further globalization. And it is acceptable to all. Its weakness is that it misses the emphasis on the social dimension in the decision-making process and the spiritual dimension. Also the term "full-featured" can be somewhat difficult to translate cross-culturally, as we move between modern and ancient indigenous lifestyles.

In September of 1991, Gaia Trust invited to the first of two global meetings at Fjordvang in Thy (at the same time as we moved up there to live). The second meeting in July 1994 resulted in the formation of the "seed group" of ecovillages that eventually would evolve into GEN.

LOS and the Danish definition

In 1993 Gaia Trust took the initiative to form the Danish Ecovillage Network (LØS). We invited social integration projects, ecological projects and spiritual projects to a founding meeting. They all seemed to come from one of these main motivations. Setting up a mission statement caused problems. However, the different groups agreed, after much heated discussion, on the purpose of the network being "to respect and restore the circulatory systems of the 4 elements: earth, water, fire and air in humans and in nature on all levels." The ecologists focused on the circulatory systems in nature, the spiritual oriented on the circulatory system of the body.

The Findhorn Meeting in 1995 and the Four Elements in an Ecovillage.

The fall conference in 1995 at Findhorn was the breakthrough for the ecovillage movement. 400 people participated — many of them from ecovillage projects around the world, and as many were turned away because of lack of space. After the meeting the seed group from the two preceding meetings in Thy met to discuss next steps and decided to create a global ecovillage network to be called the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN).



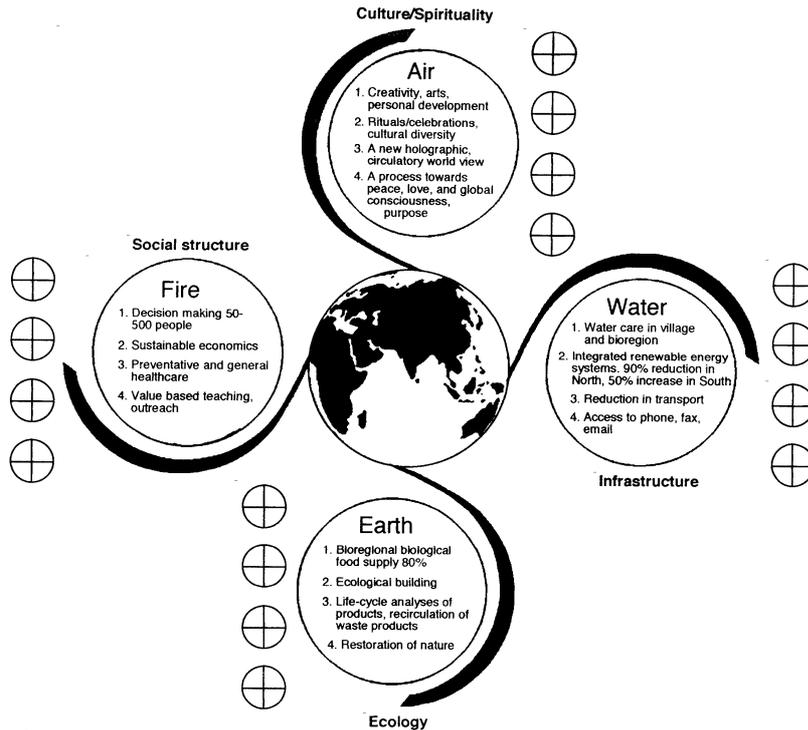
GEN is founded, October 1995¹

One topic on the agenda was reserved the definition of an ecovillage. We wanted membership in GEN to be open, but we also wanted to make sure that the voting power in the network was reserved to projects of a certain caliber so that ideals would not be watered down nor taken over by other interests. So we needed a definition and certain standards for the members of the voting body.

All dimensions that needed go into the definition were listed on a board. Then we got the dimensions together in groups. I came up with the proposal of listing all these dimensions under the 4 elements as part of a circulatory paradigm and we tried to do that. There seemed to be a consensus in this whole process and a feeling of joy that people from so many countries and cultures had so similar a vision of what was needed for our little blue planet Earth.

¹ Key early officers and founders: Front row, from left: John Talbot, The Findhorn Foundation; Max Lindegger, Crystal Waters, Secretary GENOA; Declan Kennedy, Lebensgarten, Germany; Secretary GEN-Europe and first Chair GEN International, Albert Bates, The Farm, USA, Secretary GEN Americas, Second row, first from left Robert Gilman, In Context Institute, USA, Judy Buhler, Findhorn, Diane Gilman, In Context Institute, Linda Joseph, later President, Ecovillage Network of the Americas (ENA). Third row, Patrick Gibbon, the Farm, Hamish Stewart, first Secretary of GEN International; Stephan Wik, webmaster for the Internet site, Ross Jackson, Gaia Trust, Marilyn Mehlmann, GAP Sweden, Jullian Conrad, Robert Tapp, Crystal Waters. Top row, Andrea Borsos, Gyürüfü, Hungary, David Bien, Russia/USA, Bela Borsos, Gyürüfü, Kaj Hansen, first chair of LØS, Hjortshøj, Denmark, Hildur Jackson, Gaia Trust.

Self Audit for Eco-villages / Communities



Self Audit user guide

1. Colour 0-4 quarters in the circles above according to the following scheme:

- ⊕ No colour means: No interest in this topic in the eco-village.
- ⊖ One quarter coloured: Interest in the topic, but have done very little.
- ◐ Two quarters: Quite interested. Have come half way.
- ◑ Three quarters: Very interested. Almost there - but still room for improvement.
- Four quarters: Main area of concern. No room for improvement.

2. Add up your scores. Number of quarters that it is possible to colour ranges from 0 - 64. Notice where you can still improve. Scores above a certain level, which will have to be agreed upon eg. 48 points and higher would be a qualified eco-village, with at least 2 of the points in each element.

This is the self audit of:

.....points.....

Name of eco-village here

Water and Fire caused little discussion. The subject of area of Air (cultural/spiritual dimensions), however, did create problems in defining 4 separate key words at the same time, as this was the area that most people thought the most important, being more intangible and comprising the important "community glue". The divergences were not of a fundamental character, rather difficulty in defining 4 separate areas and finding acceptable formulations. Some persons wanted certain keywords like "purpose" or "community" in the fifth circle in the middle. The essence of the model is that when the 4 circles are balanced and "circling" so is the middle one.

Problems with "The Four-Element Definition"

One problem with using the four-element definition has been that some people feel that allocation of subject areas under the different elements is not clear, or they come from a cultural background with a different concept around

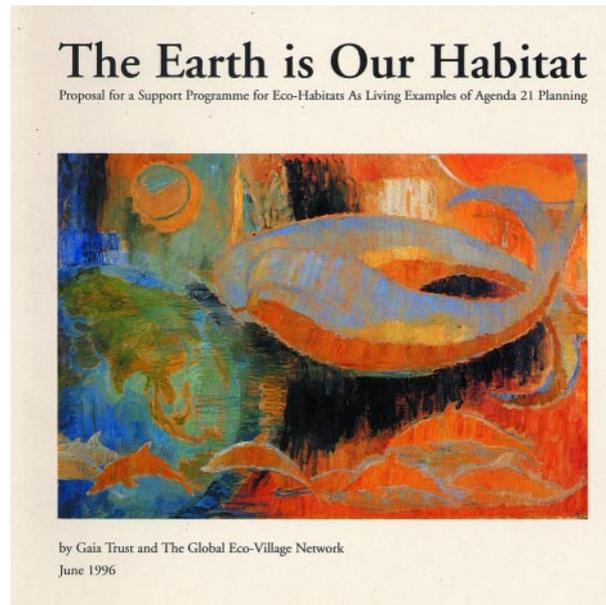
the elements. It was the intention that a four-element model, which is represented in so many wisdom cultures (African, Buddhist, Native American, Chinese and European mystery schools) would be a way of respecting these traditions and demonstrating humbleness towards nature.

As an example of the first, some wanted health care to be placed in Air, where I have placed it in Fire. For me the beauty of the model is reflects the chakra system as well as circulatory system of nature around us. If you see Earth and Water as two sides of the concept of ecology — one the physical/ material, the other the life giving/ etheric side, then the model may be easier to understand. Earth is the root chakra in the body, water is the hara charka, i.e. that which enlivens the physical matter. Fire is then the circulatory system of communication in images and words and everything connected to communication, such as organization, conflict resolution and the building up of health systems. Air is everything connected to values, to heart, to love. Love should be the center and guiding value of all the others. Health belongs on all levels, as this circulatory paradigm also has a holographic dimension where all subject areas in the circles are also contained in the others. We need a healthy physical body and healthy life systems. All preventive health care like dancing, singing and meditation does belong in air as cultural expressions. But as a social system I would place it in Fire.

Another main area of concern is that of spirituality. Every society has its own interpretation of its spiritual culture and traditions. This topic can be very sensitive and yet a change of values and worldview, including the realization that we humans are the major problem, is essential. But it is easier to avoid this topic and suppress it in talks or in applications for funding. I believe we are missing the point and sending unclear messages if we leave it out. What we are trying to materialize is a society based on love and cooperation as opposed to one based on greed and competition. This has to become part of daily language and cultural expressions should support this.

Habitat Conference in Istanbul 1996

One decision at Findhorn was to join the UN Habitat conference in Istanbul the following June and inaugurate GEN there. Gaia Trust produced a book-let for this purpose: "The Earth is our Habitat" for which I developed a definition based on the 4 elements and almost identical with what had come up at Findhorn. Heidi Wrighton did the graphics. The reason for putting a lot of work in into this was to have something that was simple, easy to remember and that was not culturally biased.



The Self-Audit Project

Along with the question of definition came the need for the communities to realize where they were in relation to the ideal of a fully featured ideal ecovillage. There is a definite consensus that communities should do the self-audit for themselves rather than outsiders evaluating them. Marilyn Mehlmann and Linda Joseph (now president of ENA — the Ecovillage Network of the Americas) spent considerable time creating a point system that has been used by several communities. I came up with my very simple idea, which is a further elaboration of the definition with 4 circles, each containing 4 dimensions. Every one of the 16 dimensions has a circle next to it split in quarters. You can then fill out 1-4 of these quarters and graphically show where you are in your endeavors. It is useful as a pedagogical tool to create a debate in communities, but not very exact. It has the advantage of giving a picture of a given community without words or numbers. It has been proposed to call this simple tool an ecovillage profile.

Linda Joseph has done a thorough job and come up with a much more comprehensive tool since then. This system is not fully compatible with what I have developed and reminds us gracefully that all images, metaphors and models are only imitations of reality. Personally I have become somewhat skeptical of the idea of audits even if I accept the necessity of it. The situation in different countries makes it very difficult and often meaningless to compare. One audit for every country would be meaningless. We should instead cherish differences. Ecovillages in towns and close to towns have a much more difficult time with ecology. The non-quantifiable areas (and there are many), which may be the most important, will easily be left out. So if we make an audit we should make sure that the non-quantifiable items have their proper weighing in the overview. Using the circles could be one way of securing this. It may focus the discussions in ecovillages on statistics and control and give more power to traditional male areas of concern.

In connection with the audit, some members have proposed simpler more ecological measurements that would make it easier for mainstream society to accept ecovillages and to get funding. The ecological dimensions are easier to quantify and there is increasing mainstream acceptance of the need for evaluating the ecological consequences of our actions. The footprint theory is one such initiative.

Our shared vision: Affirmations for the Global Ecovillage Network

The process of formulating the common vision continues. Communicating by e-mail during the winter of 1996 Declan Kennedy, Albert Bates and Linda Joseph came up with the 14 affirmations that were brought in the summer 1996 special issue of In Communities Magazine, journal of co-operative living.

1. Humanity can live well on this Earth through the process of supporting individual self-realization and co-operative interdependence.
2. We recognize that to restore, sustain and protect the health and integrity of the environment, we begin by changing our attitudes, actions, and lifestyle, individually and in groups.
3. We strive towards a life of honest, fulfilling work; caring and fruitful social interaction; and simplicity of living coupled with abundance.
4. We support the movement toward locally self-reliant ecological communities and neighborhoods that are sustainable socially, environmentally, economically, and spiritually.
5. We educate in ways that honor and empower the whole person and individual actualization- physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.
6. We educate in ways that promote successful co-operative efforts by valuing diversity, and by developing effective communication and community-building skills.
7. We recognize our dependence on the thriving of diversity and work to ensure the survival of all species and cultures.
8. We work to safeguard human rights, and toward the achievement of equality and social justice.
9. We embrace methods of land-use planning and development that honor and protect the health of natural eco-systems, such as permaculture, natural building, and preservation of wildlife habitat
10. We promote the research and use of non-toxic substances and methods in agriculture and industry, on the small scale, individually and locally; and the large scale, corporate levels and community-wide.

11. We resolve conflict by speaking truthfully and with kindness, seeking resolution by peaceful means, at earliest time, with the appropriate people, and seek mediation when it is needed.

12. We support citizen diplomacy.

13. We work towards the establishment of free and responsible media, and expanding opportunities for exchange.

14. We believe the potential of humankind to make the vision of sustainability a reality, and to apply our creativity so that we and the Earth not only survive, but flourish and thrive.

The International Advisory Council (IAC)

At a GEN network meeting in Russia in June 1997 with the North/ South issue on the agenda a new working group was established, The Vision Keepers, later to be renamed the International Advisory Council. Their role is to advise the GEN board and to assure that the original idealistic objectives are never forgotten. In 2004 the IAC members are: Marti Mueller, chair (Auroville), Helena Norberg-Hodge (Ladakh), Declan Kennedy (Germany), Ross Jackson, Hildur Jackson, Hamish Stewart (Denmark), Vandana Shiva (India), Vinya Ariaratne (Sri Lanka), Bea Briggs (Mexico/USA), Albert Bates, John Clausen and Liora Adler (USA). At a meeting in Copenhagen in October 1997 Marti Mueller, Helena Norberg-Hodge and Hildur Jackson formulated the following statement.

The statement, which is presented as an ideal or vision, starts by acknowledging the still existing ecological villages in the South and is then followed by a statement for those areas of the globe where an indigenous base no longer exists. The next level contains the 3 dimensions of an ecovillage —: the social, ecological and spiritual/cultural. The third level further explains the dimensions of an ecovillage. A fourth layer may be later added: the actual implementation of the ideals or steps to take.

VISION STATEMENT for a SUSTAINABLE EARTH

For millennia people have lived in communities close to nature. Many of these communities, or "ecovillages," exist to this day and we seek to support their struggle for survival.

In those parts of the world where an indigenous base has been destroyed, ecovillages are now being created intentionally so that people can live again in communities that are spiritually connected to the earth in a way that ensures the well being of all life forms into the indefinite future.

ECOVILLAGES

The following dimensions describe the ecovillages towards which we are working:

COMMUNITY

Ecovillages are communities in which people feel supported by and responsible to those around them. They provide a deep sense of belonging to a group. They are small enough that everyone feels empowered, seen and heard. People are then able to participate in making decisions that affect their own lives and that of the community on a transparent basis.

ECOLOGY

Ecovillages allow people to experience their spiritual connection to the living earth. People enjoy daily interaction with the soil, water, wind, plants and animals. They provide for their daily needs-food, clothing, shelter-while respecting the cycles of nature.

SPIRITUALITY

Ecovillages embody a sense of unity with the natural world. They foster recognition of human life and the earth itself as part of the larger cosmos.

COMMUNITY means

- being committed to living in a community- whether rural or more urban based- that is naturally limited in size by a human capacity to recognize and relate to others
- sharing common resources and emphasizing mutual aid
- emphasizing holistic health practices and preventative medicine
- providing meaningful work and material sustenance to all its members
- integrating marginal groups (women, children, the aged, the weak, the handicapped)
- promoting unending education
- encouraging unity through diversity and respect for minorities
- fostering cultural expression

ECOLOGY means

- growing as much food as possible and supporting organic food production in the community bio-region
- creating homes out of locally adapted materials

- using village-based integrated renewable energy systems
- protecting bio-diversity
- fostering ecological business principles
- assessing the life cycle of all products used in the ecovillage from a social and spiritual as well as an ecological point of view
- preserving clean soil, water and air through proper energy and waste management
- protecting nature and safeguarding wilderness areas

SPIRITUALITY means

- respecting that spirituality manifests in many ways in different cultures and different places
- fostering a sense of joy and belonging through rituals and celebrations
- emphasizing creativity and the arts as an expression of unity and interrelationship to our universe
- providing for the development of the inner self

Frequently asked questions.

Some questions are constantly recurring as objections towards the whole concept of ecovillages as a realistic lifestyle. Helena, Marti and Hildur answer a few of them.

Question: Can ecovillages be in the city or in suburbs? We cannot build new habitats. We have to use what is there. What do we do with all the mega-cities of the world?

Ecovillages can be both urban and rural.

The global ecovillage is a concept that transcends the urban/rural dichotomy and is basically a post industrial way of organizing society. It is established from the grass roots level and is based on a circular "bottom up" paradigm. Ideally, everything is organized first in terms of relevance to a local and regional area, but always with a consciousness of a planetary "eco-vision" For example food is grown locally, waste is composted and wastewater re-circulated locally. To speak of urban ecology as opposed to rural ecology doesn't make any sense. The ecological systems based on permaculture design will be the same in both contexts. What is important is that the design and lifestyle is decided by the people who live in each community. Experience has thus far shown that, when given freedom of choice, the majority of people choosing to create new projects seems to prefer a close contact to nature.

Question: Are there land and resources enough for ecovillages as a basic structure? Do big cities not use fewer resources and are they not more efficient?

Ecovillage living reduces the "ecological footprint", encouraging city people to move back on the land. Rural communities are both more efficient and require fewer resources than cities. In a decentralized society operating at the human rather than the global scale, energy needs can be met using resources and technologies appropriate to the local environment. Transport networks do not need to be as extensive or traversed, as most essential goods are produced and consumed within a relatively short distance, and the "commute" to work does not require a long trip by car.

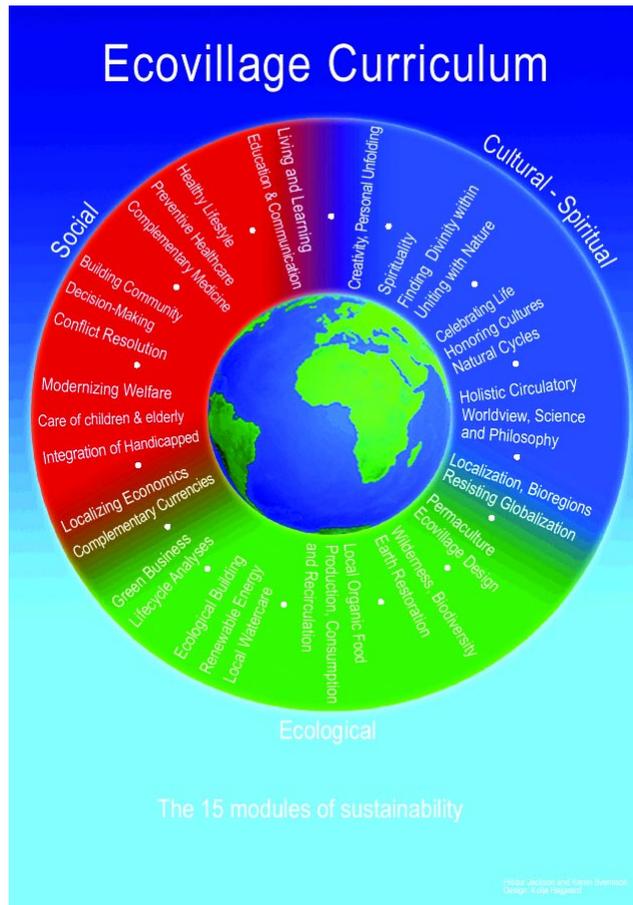
Smaller communities are also more likely to engage in a more rigorous form of participatory democracy — one that is truly representative and responds to real human needs. In addition, a shift to smaller scale habitats allows people to reduce their "ecological footprint" — the impact of their consumption and lifestyle patterns upon other parts of the world. Locally based economies confine their ecological footprint to the immediate vicinity — encouraging stewardship for the environment and a much more ecologically sensitive and efficient model of development

By living in more decentralized settlements with strong local economies, people can reconnect to the land. This would not only breed a healthier, more diversified, human environment, but also generate local alternatives to the over-consumption and ecological degradation, which currently afflicts much of our planet.

This is an ongoing process. There will probably never be an authorized definition, but hopefully we will achieve a sustainable culture.

The Sustainability Circle

In the book: *Ecovillage Living, Restoring the Earth and her People* (Hildur Jackson and Karen Svensson , 2002) we developed the sustainability circle as a way of defining sustainability and ecovillages using it as the structuring principle of the book. The 3 dimensions — ecology, social and spiritual/cultural were subdivided into 5 dimensions each so that we have the 15 dimensions of sustainability. The circle gives a feeling of wholeness and creates a balance between the different dimensions. People seem to have accepted it and are using it. We see it reproduced in the most unexpected places. It is easy to convince people that the 5 ecological dimensions are not enough to define sustainability.



The Sustainability Circle

GEN Charter

The Board of the Global Ecovillage Network made a charter for GEN in 2001. Philip Snyder from the international office came up with the first version and Albert Bates finalized it.

GEN Mission, Vision and Purposes:

Vision: We envision a planet of diverse cultures of all life united in creating communities in harmony with each other and the Earth, while meeting the needs of this and future generations.

Mission: We are creating a sustainable future by identifying, assisting and coordinating the efforts of communities to acquire social, spiritual, economical and ecological harmony. We encourage a culture of mutual respect, solidarity and love, open communications, cross-cultural outreach, and education by example. We serve as a catalyst to bring the highest aspirations of humanity into practical reality

Special conditions in Africa

Marian Zeitlin from Eco-Yoff in Senegal offers an interesting perspective on African ecovillages in the following.

The founders of the Senegalese ecovillage network (GEN Senegal), which is a member of GEN Europe, were faced with a social, ecological and political environment that differs from the North

Senegal has 14,000 rural villages that could claim to be ecovillages because they practice a traditional lifestyle of living lightly on the land, following natural ecological climatic and crop cycles, and practicing psychologically nurturing community lifestyles. However, with continuous population growth, the poverty of these villages leads their inhabitants to destroy their natural environment by burning their remaining forests for cooking fuel, extending their agricultural lands into wilderness areas, and hunting and eating their endangered wildlife. The relatively illiterate village dwellers also don't have a conscious awareness that their conditions of life are desirable and in need of protection. Most villagers in the remote area of Vélingara, Kolda Region that we interviewed for UNICEF in March 2004 have as their highest hope for their children to escape from the village to the city or to one of the foreign countries they see on television when they visit nearby market towns.

A reason they give for this defection is that their previously good life has been destroyed since the days of colonialism, and that they have given up hope of being able to restore the golden age of their ancestors. The ecovillage movement restores this hope.

The need for accreditation arose from the need to choose a limited number of villages in which to concentrate funding resources until several truly sustainable ecovillages can be developed to serve as model solutions for the intractable vicious cycle of poverty and environmental destruction, which entraps most of Senegal's villages. So ecovillages were those of a number of traditional villages chosen to be accredited

I want to explain how the founders' group of about 6 Senegalese villages created the criteria. Demba Mansare and his wife Elise (Danish) contributed a lot to this workshop. I served as the main facilitator since I had facilitated similar sessions for environmental action research classes in the past.

The criteria were created during a workshop using a participatory consensus process. This workshop is based on the assumption that the group attending the workshop is varied enough to represent the interests of the network(s) that will be using the criteria that are created in this way.

We started with a closed-eye visualization in which each person explored his or her vision of his/her ecovillage (project) as it should look in 5 to 10 years. Next everybody shared his or her visions. We started to record the elements of these visions on a central blackboard, but as soon as each theme in the different visions started to be repeated in the reports coming from two or three persons, we moved that theme onto its own large paper on the wall. The

amazing discovery was that the visions were in a sense "the same vision." This unified the group. The themes fell under the major categories in our accreditation forms: Habitat, Economy, Natural Resources, and Culture and Society (we included spirituality in the subsections of this last theme, but didn't use the word spirituality in the title in order to avoid misunderstanding that we were a religious group.)

In this way, the assessment forms used in accreditation have a double purpose. The first is to determine the dynamism and determination of the village leadership and whether they already have started activities to protect their environment and their culture. Second, the accreditation visit is an awareness building experience designed to bring hope to villagers that their villages can be restored to their previous vibrancy. They tour around their site with the assessor and discuss each item in the list. As they do this, they gain an understanding of the concept of an ecovillage and how it can allow them to reclaim their community. They also are encouraged to question the assessor, and argue their case for accreditation. Non-accredited villages are not rejected but are put on a waiting list and encouraged in the types of community actions that will count towards their accreditation.

Healing biotope, community and peace village.

Tamera in Portugal, as also expressed in Dieter Duhm's book: *The Sacred Matrix*, and the new German women's movement (the magazine *Frauenstimme*) talk about creating communities, peace villages and healing bio-topes. They do not use the word ecovillage as such. In a way the 3 words express the 3 different dimensions of the definition of ecovillage: the social, the spiritual and the ecological.

The Alfa-omega project/ the White Mountain project.

When meeting with a group of people recently in 2003 in Denmark to start a new ecovillage project, we discussed the terms that we felt comfortable with. We called the project as above, just to have a working title. "White Mountain" is the most common village name in flat little Denmark (maximum height over sea level 186 meters). The snow probably stays a little later on hilltops. I find it so heartening and optimistic. The alfa- omega points to the wish for a holistic approach. We see ecovillages as a holographic representation of the society, the part containing all elements of society within the walking distance of a child. It is then further defined by a social partial vision, an ecological partial vision and a spiritual partial vision much like Helena's and Marti's above and as the sustainability circle.

The Village Design Institute

Christopher Mare, of Antioch University, USA, made up his own ecovillage education and Village Design Institute and did his Ph.D. thesis on this topic. His work is not yet in print. He writes, "I am saying the word "ecovillage" gets used rather loosely; it's being indiscriminately applied as a blanket term to a wide variety of settlement patterns with a wide variety of forms and functions. These

various settlement types could be labeled: "cohousing developments", "shared group housing" "retrofitted urban blocks" " land trusts", " multi-dwelling farms", "villas", "aldeas", "homesteads", "healing and or conference centers", "educational demonstration sites", "spiritual communities", "retreats" even "unintentional communities" (Findhorn insists that they began unintentionally) He continues, "There is a kernel of identification with something grander in this word "village" that people intuitively align with and that is the heart of the matter...."

When he put the question "what is an ecovillage" at his first ecovillage course in Australia, Max Lindegger answered: "A village is large enough to have a church". Christopher Mare writes, "This is my point: There is something deeply meaningful about association with this word village. There was a sense of belonging, of purpose, of trust and confidence, of security and certainty in the world. At the core there was an intimate identification with something greater, something primordial and timeless, something spanning countless generations, something very sustainable.

We will not realize true sustainability until we learn how to design, recreate and bring forth genuine, authentic villages with all that implies and so we must begin with the fundamentals. ... The fundamentals are that a sustainable village cannot be created--- it must be designed to create itself. The challenge is to design a living system that can assume a life of its own".

Steps Towards Realizing the Vision.

No ideal ecovillage exists today with all the above characteristics, but many ecovillages exist with some of these features. The movement towards the ideal is a long but empowering process. It depends on the initiative of the residents of each ecovillage. A full description of how to build an ecovillage does not yet exist. Communities, organizations and individuals aspiring to or interested in furthering these ideals are welcome in the [Global Ecovillage Network](#) (GEN)

Recommended Reading.

Malcolm Hollick, The University of Western Australia, has written a report from a study tour of 10 of the best villages: *Achieving Sustainable Development: The Ecovillage Contribution*, (Jan 1998). He is now residing at Findhorn.

Hildur Jackson, editor, *Creating Harmony: Conflict Resolution in Communities*, (London, Permanent Publications, 1998). This book contains a wealth of knowledge, including the stories of many of the old communities and of how they succeeded (and failed) in realizing their vision.

Hildur Jackson and Karen Svensson, *Ecovillage Living: Restoring the Earth and Her People*, (Barcelona, Green Books, UK, 2002).

Diana Leafe Christian, *Creating a Life Together; Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities*, (Gabriola Island, BC, Canada, New Society Publishers, 2003).