

Global Ecovillage Network History 1990-2004

Hildur and Ross Jackson, May 2004

Our involvement with the ecovillage movement, and GEN in particular, can be traced to an initiative taken by Gaia Trust back in 1990. This article is a personal account of some of the major milestones along the way as seen from our particular vantage point.

Hildur's interest in ecovillages had its roots in the Nordic Alternative Campaign of the 1980s initiated by Norwegian Erik Damman (founder of the NGO *The Future in our Hands*). The project linked 100 Nordic grass roots movements with the best of the scientific community in order to create a vision of how to tackle global social and environmental problems. Hildur worked in the Danish group all those years as a Nordic coordinator. Preliminary projects, seminars on all possible subjects, exhibitions, and competitions were carried out. The movement applied to the three Nordic parliaments for 100 million kroner each to fund the project. In Norway the funds were allocated, while in Denmark they were one vote short. What became clear to the grass roots participants of this project was that we have all the knowledge and tools we need to change the world. We do not need more reports and studies. But we in the North have to put our own house in order, build sustainable communities, and give up exploiting the rest of the world. This was her background for supporting the founding of Gaia Trust in 1987 and for formulating the Gaia Trust "yin/ yang" strategy. For 400 years technology and economics (yang) had determined how society was organized. Now it was time for people to decide how they want to live in harmony with nature in a sustainable and spiritually-satisfying way that is also globally just. This was the yin part of the strategy. The yang part was to develop technologies that were supportive of this vision.

Ross' background was quite different, being a management consultant specializing in problem solving, more specifically, in Operations Research, with broad experience in many industries. He had for some years been concerned with the neglect of the environment and global trends that tended to increase the gap between rich and poor. He agreed with the conclusions of the "Limits to Growth" model that civilization would be facing very formidable problems in the foreseeable future. He was also in agreement with Hildur that action was most unlikely to come from politicians who were actually part of the problem. In the early 1980s he did extensive research in the foreign exchange market, and tested his theories successfully in the marketplace by trading his own money in 1984-1986. He decided to donate his currency trading system exclusively to Gaia Trust in 1987 in order to provide it with the possibility of generating its own funds to support an activist program to support their vision. Gaia Trust formed a daughter company, Gaiacorp, to implement the business plan, while Ross maintained a 10% interest.

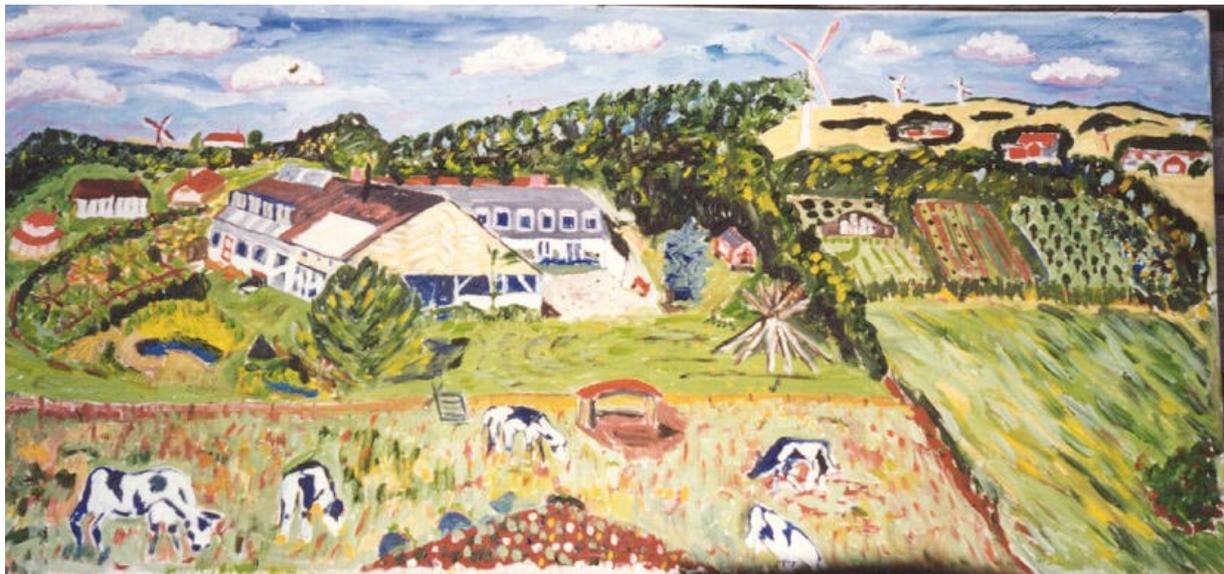
Ross was attracted to the idea of supporting a network of ecovillages because he saw its strategic potential as a response to the coming global economic crisis as we reach the limits to growth. Whether the global economy collapses or we are able to make a planned transition to a sustainable future, it will be necessary in either case to build a whole new culture. At the foundation of this culture must necessarily be sustainable human settlements, and for this we need good models. Thus a network of ecovillages

that provided such models would be an extremely valuable base on which to build. A further incentive to support this particular strategy was the fact that no one else was giving ecovillagers any support at all.

Gaiacorp was quite successful, and significant money soon rolled in to Gaia Trust: We began asking ourselves how we could best use our new found resources to further the movement towards sustainability.

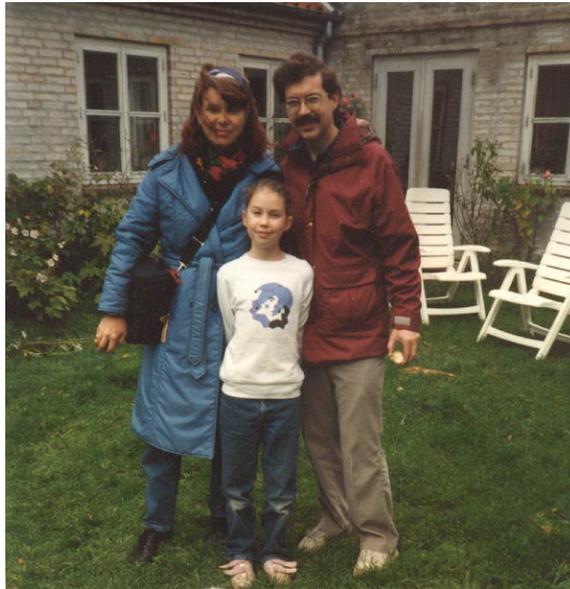
The First Step: Fjordvang 1991

As a first step, we commissioned Robert and Diane Gilman of Seattle, editors of *In Context* magazine, to survey the field and identify the best examples of ecovillages around the world. In way of background, we bought Fjordvang, formerly known (with tongue-in-cheek) as "The World University". This remote farm in Western Denmark had for 25 years been used as an International self-study learning place and seminar center by Aage Rosendal Nielsen. Robert and Diane moved there with us in 1991 with the intention of building an ecovillage together on the beautiful site.



Oil Painting of Fjordvang by Hildur

The Gilmans' report to Gaia Trust, which was delivered in the summer of 1991, showed that, although many exciting and vastly different communities existed, the full-scale ideal ecovillage did not yet exist. But together, the existing projects made up a total vision of a different culture and lifestyle that had great potential. Based on the Gilmans' report, twenty people from some of the best ecovillage communities, and a few broad thinkers with a global social interest, were invited to our home at Fjordvang in Denmark by Gaia Trust and the Gilman's in September 1991 to discuss a strategy for developing and spreading the concept of sustainable communities and sustainable living.



Diane and Robert with daughter Celeste, ca. 1989

The participants at the meeting included a number of the persons who would later be key leaders of GEN — Max Lindegger, Declan Kennedy, and Albert Bates, as well as intellectuals outside of the ecovillage sphere, such as Karl-Henrik Robert, founder of *The Natural Step* and David Korten (who later wrote *When Corporations Rule the World*. Links were established between people who had not known each other before but found that they had common ground on which they could work enthusiastically together. The approach taken was, however, very different for people actually living the alternative and for researchers and global thinkers. We decided to work with the people actually doing it — the ecovillagers.

It became clear to all that forging links was vital to the success of any global strategy, and that, more than anything else, the world needed good examples of what it means to live in harmony with nature in a sustainable and spiritually satisfying way in a technologically advanced society. It also became clear to us that Denmark was ahead of many other countries in developing the ecovillage concept, perhaps because of twenty years of experience with cohousing. We had founded and lived in one of the very first cohousings from 1972 to 1991, and were now ready to take the idea to a new level by establishing Ecovillage Fjordvang in Western Denmark at this time. From personal experience, we were enthusiastic about the benefits, both for young families and for the elderly.

The First Ecovillages

Who were the first "ecovillages"? It is a difficult question because many of the current members of GEN were founded before this word existed. In the 1960s several spiritually based projects were initiated in different parts of the globe: Findhorn in Scotland, The Farm in Tennessee, USA, Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka, and the NAAM movement in Bukino

Faso. Solheimer in Iceland has roots going all the way back to 1930. A major impulse came from the Indian philosopher and sage Sri Aurobindo and his French counterpart the Mother, who put forth the vision of Auroville in India in 1968. So there is no easy answer. The idea of Community goes back much further as described by Geoff Kozeny in his video: Visions of Utopia from 2003 (geoph@ic.org)

Second Meeting in Denmark, 1994

In 1993, Gaia Trust brought together a number of established and embryonic Danish ecovillages as the Danish Ecovillage Network — the first national ecovillage network anywhere. Other networks were slowly taking form. A second strategy meeting was called at Fjordvang with a smaller, strictly ecovillage group. A network was informally initiated with a secretariat in Denmark funded by Gaia Trust under the daily leadership of Hamish Stewart. Early members included the Findhorn Community, Scotland; The Farm, Tennessee, USA; Lebensgarten in Steyerberg, Germany; Crystal Waters, Australia; Ecoville in St. Petersburg, Russia; Gyûrûfû, Hungary; The Ladakh Project, India; The Manitou Institute, Colorado, USA; and the Danish Ecovillage Network. At that time we had no contacts in Auroville and had not yet heard about Damanhur

The Findhorn Conference 1995; GEN Takes Form

The movement took two major steps in 1995. One was the establishment of its website at www.gaia.org inspired by Stephan Wik, who moved from Findhorn to Fjordvang, Denmark with his family in 1996. The other was a conference at Findhorn: "Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities for the 21 Century" which was organized by the Findhorn community and the evolving informal ecovillage network (primarily John Talbot and Diane Gilman) with financial assistance from Gaia Trust. It was a great success. The proceedings were published in 1996 by Findhorn Press — *Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities; Models for 21st Century Living*. The weeklong meeting was attended by over 400 people from forty countries, while another 300 who wished to be there had to be turned away.

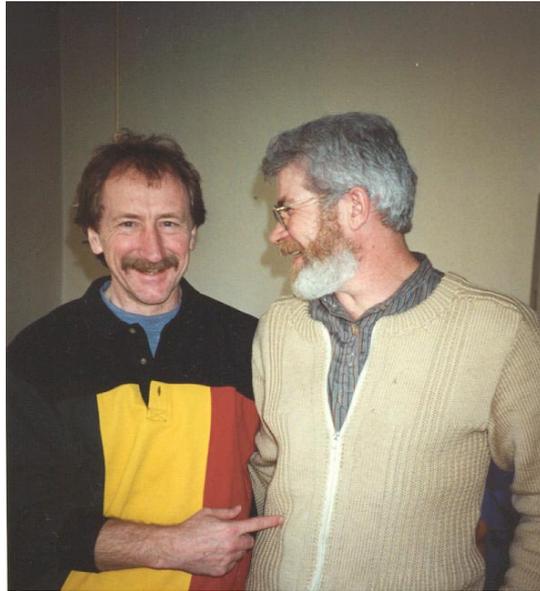


Founding group at Findhorn, 1995

Immediately following this meeting, 20 people from different ecovillages meet for 5 days in the Community Center of Findhorn, where it was decided to formally establish the Global Ecovillage Network, consisting of three autonomous regional networks to cover the globe geographically, with administrative centers at The Farm (USA), Lebensgarten, (Germany) and Crystal Waters (Australia), with an international coordinating office at Gaia Trust, Denmark. Gaia Trust committed to covering the expenses of the network for 3-5 years. The plan was to focus initially on forming regional networks that would link existing projects. At the same time a second goal was set to create global services, like an education network, that would cut across regions, as soon as budgets and manpower permitted. But that never happened. We are only now getting to this point in the spring of 2004 of creating a global educational network and a common educational curriculum.

The Habitat II Conference in Istanbul 1996.

At the Findhorn meeting it was decided — inspired by Rashmi Mayur's passionate speech in Universal Hall — to join the Habitat II conference in Istanbul the following summer. Hamish Stewart, together with Heidi Wrighton did a lot of preparatory work at Fjordvang and drove all the way to Istanbul in a van with Kai Hansen from the Danish network and set up a major exhibition in the biggest hall of the architect school at the NGO forum. Together with David Bienn from Russia they built a long straw bale wall down through the hall and plastered it so that it made a nice wall for posters with photos from all the ecovillages to exhibit. A windmill, solar cells and running water contributed to a pleasant atmosphere. Videos from ecovillages and a computer with our Internet pages were much used. GEN acted as distribution desk for several NGOs that could not afford their own stand. Hildur had prepared a booklet in 5000 copies to distribute, called *The Earth is Our Habitat*.



Kaj and Hamish

Every afternoon at three o'clock Declan Kennedy, who was a professional dancer in his younger days, led a circle dance, which attracted many people. The GEN group of some 20 people, lodging at the old Agatha Christie hotel, Pera Palace, 10 minutes by foot from the conference, met every morning to coordinate the more than 40 workshops covering all issues of ecovillages and global politics to bring about change with having a presence at the exhibition and joining other important meetings, dinners and celebrations.

Outside, GEN was in charge of building an old Harran stone house with old stones and master builders from the region. It was an example of local, ecological traditions. Hanne Strong created the contact to Ari Ariyaratne from Sarvodaya on Sri Lanka at this occasion, having invited 40 spiritual leaders, who in their concluding statement praised ecovillages as an important new concept. Down at the exhibition area, Indian architect Suhasini from Auroville built an attractive and earthquake resistant house in just five days from mud bricks produced on site with a manual earth-pressing machine.

During the NGO Forum, many guests from the official conference visited and praised the GEN exhibition, which was by far the largest and best attended, with 20 staff on hand at all times. Even though we were not originally on the program, GEN was invited by the impressed organizers (through the contacts of Rashmi) to address the official UN delegates and this was arranged promptly with Ross writing and Helena Nordberg-Hodge delivering a well-received talk.

On the last day, GEN was formally inaugurated with cocktail party, speeches, dancing, performing of street children from the Philippines, and the participation of several Danish ministers, Wangari Matthai from Kenya (who became a very good friend of GEN) and other friends. Albert Bates, Declan Kennedy (the first GEN chairman) and Max Lindegger signed the official GEN document as representatives of the three regions to standing applause. Istanbul put GEN firmly on the global map.



Albert, Declan and Max

Building the Networks

The next three years were a period of building networks under the leadership of the three regional secretaries, namely Declan Kennedy, Albert Bates, and Max Lindegger, who constituted the initial GEN board, with coordination by Hamish Stewart, the International Secretary, based in Fjordvang. Later, the GEN board was expanded to include one additional elected representative from each region, and we, as major funder, were allocated two non-voting seats on the board. This period resulted in the establishment and growth of three autonomous networks covering the globe: The Ecovillage Network of the Americas (ENA), eventually with nine bioregional networks; GEN-Europe, which eventually established fifteen national networks, and also covered Africa for the time being; and GEN Asia/Oceania (GENOA), which was primarily an Australian/ New Zealand/Sri Lanka network with just a smattering of members from other Asian countries, where the distances and more primitive communication facilities were a hindrance to development.



First GEN-Europe Council: Christina, Agnieszka, Declan, Demet, Lucilla, Silke

The GEN board met in many parts of the world during this time. Wherever they met they would utilize the opportunity to give ecovillage design/permaculture courses, ecovillage presentations and so on. Often they would create synergies by planning board meetings at the same time as large international meetings of interest. Meetings included:

- 1996 at the Farm (with an ecovillage design workshop),
- Sept 1996 at Crystal Waters (ecovillage design workshop and taking part in the 6th International Permaculture Conference in Perth);
- June 1997 in St. Petersburg (including a bigger meeting of GEN representatives (including Rashmi Mayur, Marti Mueller and Helena Norberg-Hodge in order to discuss GEN and the South, and a conference in St. Petersburg with Russian NGOs and a visit to Sortevala ecovillage).



Rashmi, Marti and Helena in St. Petersburg

- Oct 1997 at Tlhologo ecovillage, South Africa (ecovillage design workshop)
- July 1998. Amsterdam and Belgium. (Participating in ICSA Conference – International Communal Studies Association)
- Sept 1998. The meeting was a strategy meeting with Gaia Trust (including a meeting on ecovillage education)

Ecovillage Audit

GEN members in the early days often discussed the question of whether there should be a qualification for membership in any given network and for the right to vote, or whether membership should simply be open to all on an equal basis. If the former, what criteria should be used? Should GEN play the role of judging whether a given project could justify the word “ecovillage” in its name? And, by the way, could the name “ecovillage” be protected?

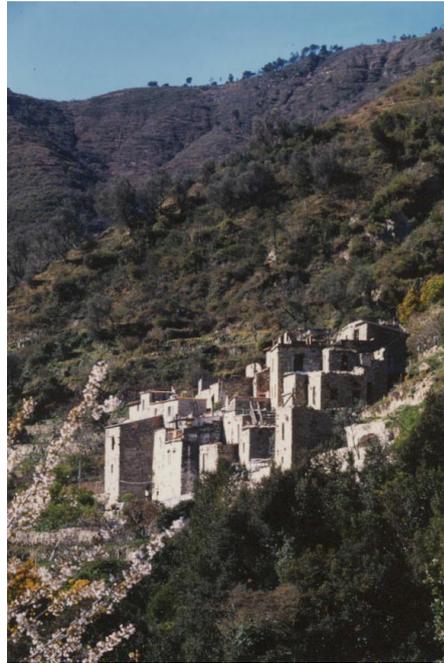
One result was a decision to keep membership open, but with slightly different voting rules in the three autonomous regions. Another was the attempt to copyright the name “ecovillage”, at least in the area of residential housing. This was done to some extent, and has been useful in a couple of cases of abuse, but unfortunately the word is considered too generic to copyright in general.

The major result of these early discussions was the evolution of a voluntary audit system that an individual ecovillage can use to judge how far it has come relative to the ideal. The first such system was developed by Hildur, based on the four elements, and is described in her article “What is an Ecovillage? The second, more widely used system, was developed by Linda Joseph of EarthArt, Colorado and Marilyn Mehlmann, Sweden. Known as Community Sustainability Assessment, it has been used by a number of ecovillages and is available for download on the GEN website at <http://gen.ecovillage.org/activities/csa/>.

Living and Learning

In January 1999, the international office was moved to Copenhagen along with Hildur and Ross, who had to give up their ecovillage project at Fjordvang in Western Denmark due to a personal veto of the otherwise approved project, by, of all people, the Danish Minister of the Environment, Svend Auken, who is otherwise known for his farsighted environmental politics (See Ross’ entertaining book for more details — *And We ARE Doing It; Building an Ecovillage Future* or see his website www.ross-jackson.com for excerpts.) When Hamish was unable to move to Copenhagen for personal family reasons, Gaia Trust hired Philip Snyder to take on the coordinating function as International Secretary for a two-year period, which became two and a half in practice. Karen Svensson was hired as his assistant during this period.

At about the same time the GEN-Europe office moved to Torri Superiori in Italy from Lebensgarten when Declan Kennedy retired. He was succeeded as GEN-Europe secretary by Lucilla Borio.



Torri Superiori in Italy

One of Philip's pet projects was developing the concept of what came to be known as Living and Learning Centers. This concept emerged initially out GEN's visionary proposal to the UN in Istanbul in 1996 to allocate 100 million dollars to build 50 demonstration ecovillages across the world as a concrete Agenda 21 initiative. Unfortunately neither the UN nor anyone else apparently had funds for such a purpose (amazing, isn't it, when we think of the money that is wasted on far less worthy initiatives!). GEN was advised instead to make a more modest proposal that private foundations or individual governments might support, particularly if the projects were located in the global South, where funding was easier to get.

Thus GEN decided in 1999 to offer resources to identify three appropriate Living and Learning sites in the South, and to make funding proposals for each. This resulted over the next three years in identifying, analyzing and describing three Living and Learning center projects: (1) Tanamalwila in Sri Lanka (2) EcoYoff in Senegal, and (3) the Ecoversidade project in Brazil. To date, it is only EcoYoff that has received any significant funding, but each project is moving ahead anyway with local support, and gradually developing the Living and Learning vision. All three are actually now offering teaching and demonstrating how to live sustainably, but on a more modest scale than we had hoped.

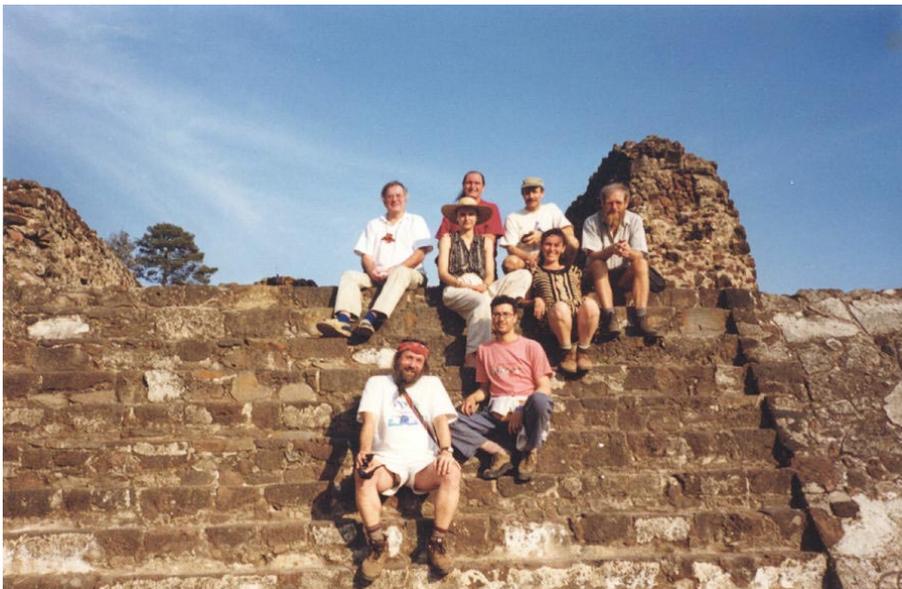
The Living and Learning concept has also evolved in GEN since those early days to include a wide variety of teaching centers, including those in the global North, and many ecovillages are now calling themselves Living and Learning centers and teaching sustainability with the recommended GEN methodology that combines theoretical teaching with practical field work. Marti Mueller (Auroville) and Lucilla Borio (Torri) have developed a GEN Living and Learning brochure briefly describing many of these centers.



Demba Mansaré (Senegal) conversing with Philip

During this period the GEN board met at the following locations:

- March, 1999 Huehucoyotl Ecovillage, Mexico (including co-sponsorship of the 2nd Sustainable Communities Forum, New York)
- November, 1999, at the Sarvodaya Peace Center, Sri Lanka
- June, 2000 at Torri Superiori ecovillage, Italy (home of GEN-Europe at the time)
- February, 2001. Sirius Ecovillage, Massachusetts, USA,



The GEN Board takes a break on a Mexican pyramid

In the Americas, ENA established its head office at EarthArt in Colorado with Linda Joseph as president, while Albert Bates continued to coordinate international GEN activities from the Farm in Tennessee.



ENA headquarters at EarthArt in Colorado

The UN Connection

One positive result of the relationship with the UN was that GEN's application for consultative status with ECOSOC was accepted, giving the organization more visibility and influence. However, it did not happen without GEN almost becoming the center of an international crisis. Pakistan was at the time chair of the ECOSOC committee, and was not happy that the GEN material mentioned the membership of the Ladakh project in *India*. Ladakh being part of the disputed Kashmir province, Pakistan did not wish to make any such concession to India. GEN considered modifying the material, but felt that this would be unfair to the Ladakh project. The result was rejection of the application until such time as the normal rotation of ECOSOC membership enabled a more favorable majority to approve GEN some 18 months later in 2000. This was quite an honor for a young NGO, as relatively few are given this status.

GEN now participates regularly in ECOSOC meetings with a team of representatives who live in or near New York City or get there often. This includes John Clausen, Frances Edwards, May East and Liora Adler, who represent GEN on a voluntary basis.

The GEN Ambassador — Rashmi Mayur

No history of GEN would be complete without mentioning the special role played by the late Rashmi Mayur, leader of the International Institute for Sustainable Future in Mumbai. We met Rashmi — who had a Ph.D. in Environmental Sciences from

Columbia University, USA — at the Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1995. He, like Ross, was part of Hazel Henderson's Commission to Fund the UN, which got together at our house that week. He saw the ecovillage movement immediately as a viable global strategy, which might unite the North and the South. He was thus invited by Gaia Trust to Findhorn and to Istanbul as an ardent and eloquent spokesperson for the environment and for the Global South.

Hildur was invited to India in 1996 to visit his Institute and the villages in the nearby Dahanu area, which Rashmi and his staff wished to turn into ecovillages. At a later visit in 1997 to India, Rashmi and Hildur visited Auroville, he for the first time. For an Indian like Rashmi, Auroville was considered a foreign project and their pride after two hundred years of colonialism hindered easy communication. He was however quite impressed with the mud brick technology, renewable energy technology and other achievements. At the same visit Rashmi had arranged a major grass roots conference in Pune, two hours east of Mumbai where also Max Lindegger participated. Rashmi believed that the ecovillage movement in India should be an organization of grass roots movements with a focus on ecology and developing of villages. Before the Habitat conference, he published five issues of a "Habitat II" newsletter and later published a magazine, "Eco Earth" with his ideas of how the movements could co-operate. They were funded partly by Gaia Trust and reached all over the global South.

In 1997 he went to Assisi with us for a "Spirituality and Sustainability Conference" arranged by the Earth Charter group and several American universities having sustainability programs, organized by Elisabeth Ferrero of St. Thomas University in Florida. Rashmi and we presented the ecovillage strategy to the participants, mostly American professors. For three evenings Thomas Berry, the 84-year-old American icon — historian, theologian and writer, answered questions from the respectful academicians, who all admired him greatly. The two great visionaries, Rashmi and Thomas Berry, got along famously.



Rashmi with Thomas Berry

In 1997 Rashmi came to the first International IFOAM meeting in Copenhagen. In 1998 and 2000 he participated and gave some of his typical inflammatory speeches to The State of the World Forum, as a guest of Gaia Trust. And in 1998 he was at Fjordvang for the education meeting. All during these meetings Hildur videotaped Rashmi and eventually made a one-hour video about Rashmi Mayur and his co-operation with GEN, called "The Earth is Our Home".

Rashmi was unofficially GEN's "ambassador to the UN". He participated in all the big conferences as well as many planning meetings, as he was adviser to the UN and several Southern governments. Thus GEN received very relevant and up-to-date information on what was going on in UN circles, while Rashmi made a great effort in putting the GEN vision before the many UN and government officials he came in contact with.

At the Johannesburg UN Earth Summit of August 2002, Rashmi was appointed official spokesman for the South, and had planned several major speeches and workshops. But he tragically suffered a debilitating stroke just before delivering his first speech, and he subsequently passed away in early 2004. He will be greatly missed by all who are working for a more sustainable, more just world.

Rashmi was also a highly developed spiritual person and an accomplished poet. Hildur hopes to publish a book of his poems illustrated with the spiritually inspired paintings of Amnart Klanprachar of Thailand. Here is one poem on education written during the opening and read loud at the 1998 education conference at Fjordvang.

Of Learning and Immortality.

Then they asked:
Master what is education?
The wise man spoke silently,
"There is no master
and no education,
my people"
People were bemused
Master continued,
"Life is an opportunity
to realize ourselves.
We are creatures
of learning.
To learn is to be creative.
To learn is to know
the root of our existence.
To learn is to preserve
Our sacred Earth.
To learn is to live
in harmony with the whole.
To learn is to give
birth to the future.

To learn is to reach
enlightenment - Nirvana.
To learn is to be liberated
from the finiteness
of Space and Time
To learn is to be
immortal".
Master was no more.

Painting by Amnart Klanprachar

Working with the World Social Forum

GEN has been an active participant in the World Social Forum meetings at Porto Alegre in Brazil and elsewhere, including regional meetings in Florence, Paris and Pune. GEN puts forward at these get-togethers its positive vision of building sustainable settlements as a strategy to combat the negative effects of corporate-led globalization, and is gradually making an impact on other activists who tend to think very differently about strategies.

Gaia Trust Gears Down

With the completion of Philip Snyder's period as International Secretary in June 2001, Gaia Trust felt that it could no longer support financially a separate International Secretariat, and warned that its financial support to GEN would be gradually decreased over the next two years, terminating in June 2003. GEN would have to find new sources of funding. This was not because Gaia Trust had lost faith, but because it was always its policy to use its capital as well as its income over a relatively short period while its founders were still active, and it could see that funds would run too low to continue by mid-2003. It was decided therefore to distribute the coordinating tasks to the regional offices, with GEN-Europe taking on communication, GENOA the programs and ENA the website, while fundraising would be given a high priority.

In the following period, GEN board meetings were held in these locations:

- November, 2001. Crystal Waters Permaculture Ecovillage, Australia
- August, 2002, Johannesburg, South Africa (UN Earth Summit)
- September, 2003. Peru (in conjunction with an ENA meeting and a major grass roots and spiritual meeting, “ The Call of the Condor”, arranged by Liora Adler.

In 2003 the GEN-Europe office moved again, this time being split between Findhorn and Zegg in Germany, with Jonathan Dawson and Ina Meyer-Stoll as co-Secretaries.



Ina and Jonathan

As of spring 2004, the only significant funding raised has been from the EU for GEN-Europe (See www.gen-europe.org).

Publications

While the secretariat was located in Copenhagen, three significant publications were made, all edited by Hildur and Karen Svensson. The first two were really substantial pamphlets — one about the whole movement, *Ecovillage Millennium* in 2000, and one about education, *Ecovillage Living*, in 2001. These were very valuable for spreading the word and for use in fundraising. In 2002 a regular book was published — *Ecovillage Living: Restoring the Earth and Her People*, (Green Books, U.K.), which was widely acclaimed, and is selling well.

With the cutback in funding, further publications were not feasible. As an alternative, Gaia Trust and GEN entered an agreement with Permaculture Magazine (U.K.) in 2003 whereby Permaculture Magazine would make available a few pages in each issue for GEN news and announcements, and give prominence on the cover to the GEN name and logo, while soliciting articles on ecovillage topics from the GEN network. For the

magazine, this meant a broadening of its concept, which fit well with its own business plan. This is now functioning quite satisfactorily for all parties.



Karen and Hildur at Gaia Center, Copenhagen

The International Advisory Council (IAC)

From the beginning it was part of the GEN plan to establish a group of highly respected individuals independent of the board that could have the function of keeping the vision, and also keeping an eye on the board just in case there were any tendencies to get off track. Initially this entity was called the Vision Keepers, but it never really got off the ground.

More recently, on the initiative of Marti Mueller of Auroville, the idea was revived and put into action under a new name, the International Advisory Council, or IAC for short. IAC members function mostly in a very ad hoc way. For the moment, there are no regular meetings, and no funding is available, but members are in e-mail contact. It is the GEN board's responsibility to keep the IAC informed of developments and when they may need IAC help.

Current members of the IAC Council are: Marti Mueller (chair) Albert Bates, Bea Briggs, John Clausen, Liora Adler, Ross Jackson, Vinya Ariyaratne, Vandana Shiva, and Hamish Stewart.

Members, or others, can e-mail the IAC at: gen.iac@lists.ecovillage.org

New Networks Emerge

In spite of the cutback in funding, new networks continue to emerge. Recent examples include Senegal, India, Eastern Europe and Japan. Senegal is important, not only as the first African network, but the first network anywhere to receive government support. In fact, the government sees the ecovillage movement as a possible alternative development model, more in tune with their traditions than the IMF "structural

adjustment” policies, which tend to destroy community and the environment. The network is slowly expanding into several countries of West Africa.



Founding Meeting of GENSEN, the Ecovillage Network of Senegal

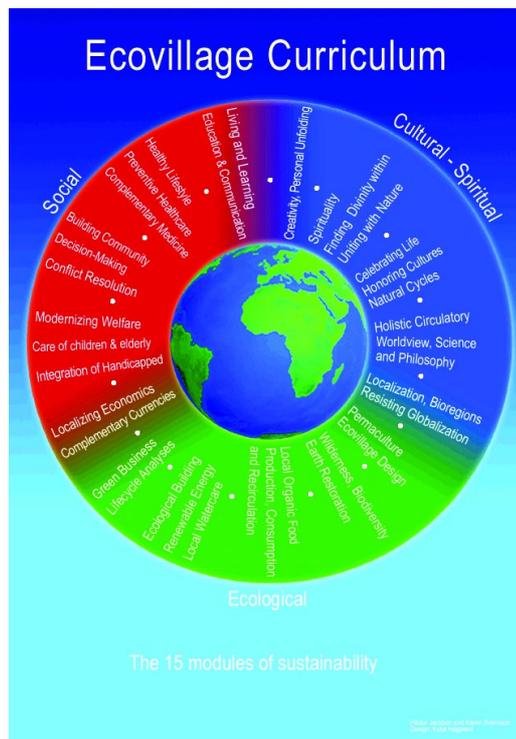
Japan is also interesting as it is the industrial country with the most traditional villages still intact. The concept is a natural one for them. The Japanese are very systematic and professional in introducing ecovillages to their country, as illustrated by Japanese developer Tatsuo Akimura. First, he hired a team of eight recent university graduates selected from 500 applicants to form a core of experts to design and then live in the first Japanese ecovillage, Kobunaki near Kyoto. Then he traveled with the team around the world to visit and learn from the best examples. We have great expectations for Japan.



Ecovillage Education Meeting at Fjordvang, 1998

Hildur has since proposed in her recent book with Karen Svensson (See Reference 1 below) a fifteen-module curriculum with five topics in each of the three major areas; social, ecological and spiritual/cultural, built up around a so-called “sustainability circle”.

Current thinking is that this curriculum might be offered initially in Europe in cooperation with leading ecovillages, as a three week program, for example as a summer school program for American university students. Later it could be expanded into a full two-year education. A second major educational meeting has been called by Gaia Trust in May 2004 with 20 leading ecovillage educators from around the world and as many others in e-mail contact, to approve the curriculum as the standard for an Ecovillage Design curriculum. See Hildur’s article “Integrated Ecovillage Design” on this site.



Karen and Hildur's Sustainability Circle

Organizational Change and Funding

GEN was from the beginning dependent on Gaia Trust funding, which during the late 1990s was running at about \$600,000 per year. As Gaia Trust's stated policy was to use up its capital while the founders were active, and to sell off its commercial subsidiary, Gaiacorp, within ten years, it was clear that this source of funding would dry up at some point. Gaia Trust warned GEN very early on and recommended that GEN find other funding sources.

GEN has only been partially successful to date in finding other sources of support, the major one being the EU for GEN-Europe, but even there at a much lower level than they were used to. Gaia Trust continues to offer limited support to GEN on a project by project basis, for example, this year, support for maintaining the GEN website, support for the deal with Permaculture Magazine to set aside pages each issue for news and educational programs from GEN, and the establishment of a Gaia Excellence Award in Europe.

What the future will bring is uncertain at this time. The most likely is that GEN will continue to function at a lower level of activity, being more dependent on volunteer workers. Hopefully, other foundations or individual patrons or governments will realize the importance of this movement and give it their support.

More Ecovillage and GEN History

See the article in Resources by Jonathan Dawson, as well as further information on the GEN website gen.ecovillage.org.

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