



GEN



Years Anniversary

Glimpses from the
Ecovillage World

FOREWARD



IN 2025, THE GLOBAL ECOVILLAGE NETWORK (GEN) CELEBRATES ITS 30TH ANNIVERSARY!

In 2025, the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) celebrates its 30th anniversary – three decades of vision, courage, and collaboration across cultures, continents, and communities. From its beginnings as a bold idea shared by a handful of pioneers, GEN has evolved into a vibrant movement of people committed to living in harmony with each other and with the earth.

This anniversary book is our way of honouring that journey. It is both a tribute to the past and an invitation to the future – a collection of voices from primarily across GEN Europe, but also with contributions from the wider international network. Within these pages, you will find stories from people living in communities and networks in different cultural and geographical settings, each contributing their unique perspective on what it means to create a sustainable, regenerative way of life, within the GEN family.

Our objective is simple, yet ambitious: to capture some of the diversity of GEN's networks, communities and approaches; to celebrate the principles and practices that unite us, and to share visionary perspectives for the journey ahead. This book is not only a historical document – it is a living expression of the values that inspire and connect us: resilience, cooperation,

creativity, and care for the planet. Some of the texts are very personal, some are very academic, and others give us an insight into methods and recount experiences we have had in recent years. From this perspective, too, this collection of articles provides a small insight into the diversity of our network.

What you see now is the first edition. It represents an early snapshot, created in time for the anniversary celebrations in August in Hungary, and will be expanded throughout the year. Therefore, a more comprehensive version will be published, enriched with additional articles, images, and resources.

In that sense, this issue is a beginning rather than a conclusion – an open invitation to keep telling the stories of our movement.

May these pages inspire you, challenge you, and remind you that another way of living is not only possible – it is already happening, in communities across the globe.

In gratitude to GAIA Trust that has supported the Global Ecovillage Network and GAIA Education since their initiation.



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THE BIRTH OF GEN: THE GLOBAL ECOVILLAGE NETWORK



BY ROSS JACKSON
CO-FOUNDER OF GEN EUROPE
& GAIA EDUCATION

THE GLOBAL ECOVILLAGE NETWORK (GEN) WAS BORN IN THE PERIOD 1991-1995. THERE WERE MANY MIDWIVES WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE BIRTH, AND EACH STORY IS PERSONAL AND A LITTLE DIFFERENT. AS ONE OF THE CO-FOUNDERS AND THE MAJOR FUNDER OF THE PROJECT FOR THIRTY YEARS, I PRESENT IN THE FOLLOWING SOME OF THE MAJOR EVENTS LEADING TO THE BIRTH OF GEN SEEN FROM MY PARTICULAR PERSPECTIVE. I WILL CLOSE WITH SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE ECOVILLAGE MOVEMENT.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ross Jackson is a businessman, author, and philanthropist as well as being the co-founder and long-time funder—as chairman of Gaia Trust—of the Global Ecovillage Network and its sister organisation, Gaia Education, of which he was chairman for many years. After the untimely passing in 2015 of his wife Hildur, Ross later met and married Heather, with whom he now lives on a regenerative farm near Copenhagen, Denmark.

THE COHOUSING MOVEMENT

I see the cohousing movement as being a precursor to the ecovillage movement, illustrating the social dimension. Starting in Denmark and spreading from there, cohousing has its roots in events of the 1960s, which were characterised by the massive entry of women into the workforce and a redefinition of women's role in society. Women were no longer willing to play the passive role of housewives, subservient to their spouse's interests. They wanted a life for themselves, including a career.

In the early 1970s, my wife, Hildur, and I, and a few friends, founded one of the first cohousings in Denmark—a small one with just six families, but with all the desired characteristics, which years later

became mainstream. This included peripheral parking to create a traffic-free space in the center for children, no hedges between houses, and a common house for meetings and common meals once or twice a week. Our place became a magnet for the neighborhood's youngsters, who came to our friendly space rather than playing in the streets.

In the early 1970s, awareness still lagged about mounting environmental problems such as pollution, species extinction, and climate change. Twenty more years would pass before the foundation was laid for the next stage of the ecovillage movement, which would incorporate both the social and ecological dimensions.

A SPIRITUAL IMPULSE

Until 1982, I was following a fairly conventional middle-class Western path of a businessman, living happily ever after in the suburbs with a loving wife and kids—the “American dream” of my youth. That all changed that year when I had a powerful spiritual experience in India that opened up new horizons and a new worldview. I then realized that not only was I on the wrong path, but the whole of society was on the wrong path. The global picture was grim, with increasing pollution, species extinction,

environmental destruction, and an unsustainable divide between rich and poor, while most citizens were living isolated lives in an apartment or house far removed from nature. I decided that if I were to live in harmony with my new spiritual insights, then I would have to try and do something to change society’s disastrous path, but I did not quite know what. My first initiative was in 1987 to found a charitable entity, Gaia Trust, to support the transformation to a more sustainable and spiritual world.

A HISTORIC MEETING

It was about this time that Hildur and I met Robert and Diane Gilman, who shared our values and were living in a cohousing in Seattle. One of the first things we did together was to invite a dozen of our joint international contacts to a week of brainstorming in Denmark in September 1991, to discuss how best to use the funds that were beginning to flow into Gaia Trust.

After many long debates and discussions, one general conclusion the group reached was: we know what the problems are; we know what the solutions are; what we need is not more conferences or white papers, but implementation of what we already know. That led to the next question: who is actually doing something about it on the ground? Who is actually walking their talk? That question led us directly to the answer—intentional communities like Findhorn, Auroville, The Farm, Lebensgarten Steyberg, Crystal Waters, and many more. The key was a change in lifestyle.

The name “ecovillage” was coined at that meeting to describe these communities. It was decided that Gaia Trust would focus on linking these dispersed communities into a single global network, exchanging best practices and becoming a move-

ment that had the potential to nudge society in a more sustainable and spiritual direction. The strategy was simple—leading by example. If the projects were successful, they would be replicated.

In the period from the historic meeting of September 1991 until the Autumn of 1995, a small group of us from that meeting, joined by a few more along the way, met several times at different locations to discuss how to cement the idea of developing a global network of ecovillages. After some discussion, we agreed that a viable way forward would be to establish three regional offices: North and South America, based at The Farm Ecovillage in Tennessee, US, under the leadership of Albert Bates; Europe and Africa, based in Lebensgarten Ecovillage, Germany, under the leadership of Declan Kennedy; Asia/Oceania, based at Crystal Waters Ecovillage, Australia, under the leadership of Max Lindegger; with a coordinating international office in Denmark under the leadership of Hamish Stewart.

The first priority would be for the three regional secretaries to make contact with existing projects in their regions and form national networks, with coordinators for each national region. Gaia Trust agreed to finance operations for the first five years.



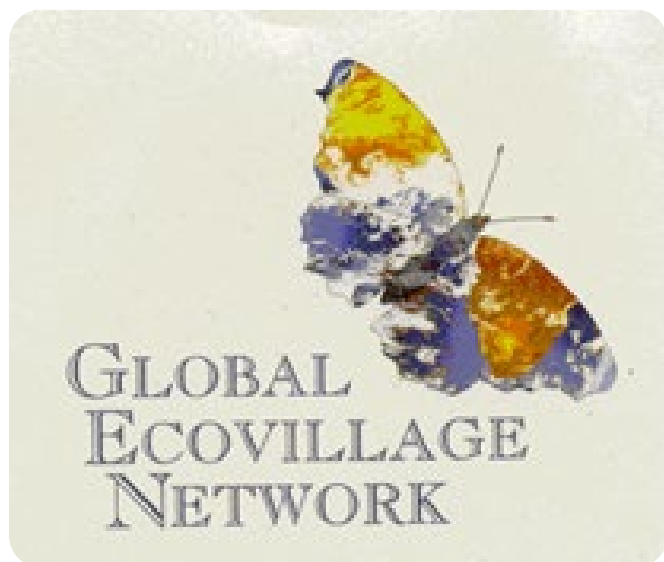
THE BUTTERFLY

In October 1995, the Findhorn community in Scotland was planning a conference on “Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities.” This seemed like an opportune time to meet and present our plans, so we all went there. On the final day of the conference, I presented our plan to the participants at Universal Hall.

At one point in my presentation, I was telling the story of the caterpillar’s metamorphosis into a butterfly as an analogy of my vision of the transformation of the planet from an exploitative civilization to a beautiful, flowering society, with the islands of

ecovillages around the world corresponding to the imaginal cells of the chrysalis as they linked together and formed the foundation of something entirely new. Just at that point, a butterfly landed on my overhead projector to the great amusement of the audience—an amazing synchronicity. It felt almost as if we had divine support.

The next day, at the founding meeting of GEN, one of the women was inspired to sketch a picture of a butterfly superimposed on a photo of the Earth from space, and after some refinements, this became the GEN logo, a powerful symbol of transformation.



GEN Butterfly Logo



Findhorn founders

THE FUTURE OF GEN

The ecovillage movement has grown slowly but surely since, but is still very marginal. The entrenched mainstream lifestyle is very difficult to shift. While a gradual transformation of the mainstream may well occur,

I have always envisaged that ecovillages could be the stable places from which humanity could begin to rebuild with a new worldview after a global collapse due to environmental degradation or war, which is looking more and more likely. The Ukraine war illustrated this point on a small scale. As people fled from the cities, many found relief and new homes in the forty or so functioning Ukrainian eco-

villages. For many, this was a life-changing experience. Many discovered a more attractive way of life and decided to stay. Others were helped out of the country by a heroic initiative by GEN Europe to organise pathways to new homes in European ecovillages and other safe havens.

Whatever the future may bring, the ecovillage movement will go on, because living in community and close to nature is so fundamental to our DNA and the very nature of the human condition. We are on the right side of history because we are doing the right thing, and we are here for as long as it takes, leading by example.

THE EUROPEAN ECOVILLAGE GATHERING: FROM INTIMATE MEETINGS TO THE LARGEST COMMUNITY FESTIVAL IN EUROPE



BY DICTE FROSTE
EX-COORDINATOR OF GEN EUROPE

“GEN STARTED WITH A GATHERING. A GATHERING OF PEOPLE WHO SHARED THE DREAM OF A COMMUNITY-LED FUTURE, THOUSANDS OF ECOVILLAGES POPPING UP LIKE MUSHROOMS AROUND THE WORLD AND A MYCELIAL-LIKE NETWORK CONNECTING THEM ALL AND REPRESENTING THE MOVEMENT OUTWARDLY. SINCE THE FIRST GATHERING, NOW 30 YEARS AGO, REPRESENTATIVES FROM ECOVILLAGES AND COMMUNITIES FROM AROUND EUROPE AND THE GLOBE HAVE MET EACH SUMMER - IN A DIFFERENT ECOVILLAGE IN EUROPE EACH TIME. TRANSFORMING FROM BEING A CONFERENCE TO A FESTIVAL-LIKE GATHERING, THIS MEETING POINT RESEMBLES AN ANNUAL HOMECOMING OF THE ECOVILLAGE MOVEMENT. A PLACE TO REKINDLE THE RELATIONSHIPS THAT TIE THE MOVEMENT TOGETHER, A PLACE TO REJOICE, TO COME TOGETHER IN JOY AND CELEBRATION, TO SHARE INSPIRATION ACROSS COMMUNITIES - AND, IN THE LAST DECADE, INCREASINGLY A PLACE TO SHARE THE ECOVILLAGE MOVEMENT WITH THE WORLD.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dicte Frost was the coordinator of the European Ecovillage Gathering for GEN Europe between 2021 and 2024. She has been serving as a project coordinator for the Danish Ecovillage Network (LØS) the last 7 years. In 2024 she co-founded Earthbound Ecovillage in Sweden.

LEARNING ABOUT ECOVILLAGES

As I was born the same year as GEN, in 1995, there are many parts, stories and memories of the European Ecovillage Conference, as it was called back then, that I do not know about. Although I have heard many tales from ecovillage elders of this time, I have only been woven into the story of the gathering in the last 8 years. I had the honor of taking on the actual coordination of the gath-

ering in late 2021. My coordination journey with included the first gathering after the break of the covid-years, in Ananda Gaorii, Denmark in 2022; the largest gathering to date in Nature Community, Germany, in 2023; as the MC of the gathering in Ängsbacka, Sweden, in 2024, and laying the initial foundations for the anniversary gathering in Manas Garden, Hungary, 2025.

BECOMING THE EUROPEAN ECOVILLAGE NETWORK

When I took over the coordination of the gathering I inherited a legacy. A legacy of rituals, daily structures, songs, activities, ways of speaking and all the details that the participants might not see, that had been shaped by more hands than I know of before me. Already in the years before covid, some intentional shifts had taken place. In 2019, with Smith Feeny as the coordinator, the change from an ecovillage conference to an ecovillage gathering had been made with the intention to scale it up and make the content more accessible. This was set in motion by the 2019 gathering in Bagnai, Italy, that welcomed 600 participants. The ambitions that Riccardo Clemente, my co-coordinator, and I took on in 2021 were high. The gathering was to become the 'superspreader' of the ecovillage movement and to be more inclusive, accessible, and the intuitive entry point for what was later called 'ecovillage-curious'; people who wanted to experience the magic, diversity and depth of ecovillages for the first time.

The transition from a small conference to a larger gathering started way before my time and will continue long after, but I believe that the years

between 2021 and 2025 saw some major shifts. The key ingredient, as well as being one of the cornerstone virtues of GEN, was experimentation. We have tested out new ideas, including introducing morning circles, collective sessions such as open space technology and community resourcing circles. We have tried diversifying and deepening the programme offerings, bringing in larger concerts and 'regionalising' keynote speakers. We have kept what worked and composted the rest. In doing so, we have transformed the main ambience of the gathering to a community-based festival with deep, transformative roots. A place of dance, celebration and intimacy, as well as diverse workshops in the areas of social, economic, cultural and ecological regeneration.

The 2023 gathering in the Nature Community in Germany was a turning point. As we hit the maximum capacity of 800 participants we realised that our ambitions had come to life. We had gathered the largest number of people to ever celebrate community and ecovillage life and spread the movement further than our imagination could comprehend.



GEN Gathering 2022 in Ananda Gaorii

THE GATHERING AS THE HEART OF GEN EUROPE

Why is the gathering so important? I have asked myself this question many times. Especially in the face of great challenges, like in 2022 when our initial host dropped out, and we needed to start everything from scratch within 3 months, while also responding to the then newly-started war in Ukraine. A clear intuitive voice said that we had to gather. Especially when things were challenging, especially when we had been separated for nearly 3 years due to covid and especially in a scene of war and conflict. We had to gather because this is the heart of the movement. Coming together is what enlivens our relationships, it is what keeps us being actively hopeful, it is how we allow synergies and collaborations to arise, it is how we come back to connection and love, and it is how we keep fuelling our activist work in each corner of Europe. Community is gathering and GEN

is a community of communities.

The yearly drop of the gathering also ripples out change. It even changes lives. In a time of climate break-down and deep separation, it provides hope for people who have lost it - by presenting both the problems and the viable and tested solutions. It enables the ecovillage-curious to meet the real change makers and become one themselves. This is evident from the many hundred feedback forms that were received during the last four years. It also enables unexpected collaborations and new projects; one of the examples dearest to my heart being the collaboration with GEN Ukraine around the 2022 Gathering and the many projects to support Ukrainian ecovillages that were initiated during that gathering, testifying the power of gathering.

THE INTENTIONS OF THE 2025 ANNIVERSARY GATHERING

A lot of the work the last few years has been centered around reimagining and strengthening collaboration across movements that work for similar life-centered futures. This led me to meet with Sally Bogale from GAIA Education in 2023 around the dream of having a co-created anniversary gathering in 2025 between the sister movements of GEN Europe, GEN and Gaia Education. This dream

was woven together with hosting the anniversary gathering in Eastern Europe to bring the movement more intentionally to the region. I sit with deep anticipation to see the dream unfold, led by Aurelie Neumann and Nataša Gvozdić, in a time where we, more than ever, need to gather to come back to hope, to celebrate how far we have come and plant new seeds of change for a life-centered future.

STARTING AND ENDING WITH GRATITUDE

I want to celebrate and extend my deep gratitude to every single person who has put their hands on and shaped the European Ecovillage Gathering; from the GEN Europe staff and council, and the delegates representing the diverse ecovillages to the host communities, all the volunteers and the workshop holders.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

"Community is the future."

LINKS & RESOURCES:

<https://ecovillagegathering.org/>

<https://www.earthbound.eco/>



GEN Gathering 2022 in Ananda Gaorii

FROM HIPPIE PROJECTS TO SUSTAINABILITY PIONEERS: 30 YEARS OF ECOVILLAGES AND HOW THE IDEAS HAVE CHANGED OVER TIME



BY IRIS KUNZE
CO-FOUNDER OF GEN RESEARCH

THE FIRST SEEDS TO THE ECOVILLAGE MOVEMENT AND THE GLOBAL ECOVILLAGE NETWORK (GEN) STARTED IN THE 1980S AND 1990S IN RESPONSE TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES. ALTHOUGH INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES HAVE BEEN AROUND FOR A LONG TIME, THE TERM “ECOVILLAGE” WAS FIRST USED IN 1985.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Iris Kunze, PhD, is a leading researcher on ecovillages, and communal sustainable living since 2002 at universities in Germany and Austria. She has co-founded the GEN research group and has been living in ecocommunities since 1997, including Sieben Linden. She works internationally as a coach.

THE ORIGINS OF A GLOBAL NETWORK

The Gaia Trust, which began in Denmark in 1987 by Hildur and Ross Jackson, played a key role in supporting and promoting GEN. Hildur was an eco-activist, and Ross saw that creating a network of ecovillages could help address the growing global economic crisis and environmental limits. Their journey in the ecovillage movement began in 1993 when they set up the first national ecovillage network in Denmark. This soon led to the creation of a secretariat funded by the Gaia Trust. In 1995, they launched a website, and a conference called “Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities for the 21st

Century” was organised by the Findhorn Community Foundation in Scotland. This event, backed by the growing international network and the Gaia Trust, attracted 400 attendees from 40 countries. During this conference, community members from around the world shared their experiences and realised they had common goals for living more sustainably and cooperatively. After this event, 20 members of the ecovillage community officially established the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) as a trust in Scotland. This step marked a pivotal moment, providing a platform for sharing knowledge, resources, and

best practices among ecovillages worldwide. GEN aims to connect, share, and empower ecovillages by pooling experiences, facilitating cooperation, and promoting education on sustainable practices. It operates through five regional networks: North

America, Latin America, Europe, Africa, and Next-GEN (the youth network of GEN). Over the years, national networks have also formed in nearly every country.

DEFINING AND DEVELOPING ECOVILLAGES OVER DECADES

The definition of an ecovillage has changed over the years, shaped by different voices from the movement and scientists. In 1991, an ecovillage was described as “a human-scale, full-featured settlement where human activities are integrated into the natural world in a way that supports healthy human development and can continue indefinitely” (Gilman 1991). By 2006, the focus had shifted more to the community aspect. Ecovillages were seen as citizen-led projects that aim to regain control over local resources, noting that these communities hold strong shared values and often act as centers for research and training (Dawson 2006).

A decade later, local ownership, empowerment, and self-organisation became more important. In 2015, Kosha Joubert, president of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), noted that there are many ways to start an ecovillage. Being an ecovillage is more of a journey than a specific end goal. Kosha explained that a community can be recognized as an

ecovillage when its residents choose to design their own future instead of letting outside forces decide it.

The growing membership of GEN shows its diversity. GEN now includes urban eco-farming projects, especially in Africa, and connects with traditional and indigenous communities. This has led to a broader view of what an ecovillage is. An ecovillage is now defined as an “intentional, traditional, or urban community designed through locally owned, participatory processes.” It focuses on all four dimensions of sustainability: ecology, economy, society, and culture. Kosha highlighted that different ecovillages may focus on various aspects, such as building social connections, supporting political refugees, showcasing new ecological technologies, promoting local economies, or connecting with spirituality. Ultimately, “all ecovillages evolve toward integrating all four aspects” of sustainability (interview in Kunze et al. 2015).



GEN Research meeting

ECOVILLAGES TRANSFORMING TO ORGANISATIONS

The exchanges between ecovillages in the GEN network are significant. Many national networks, especially in Europe, act as legal organisations that can secure funding. Ecovillages in wealthier nations support projects in developing countries by implementing eco-technologies. In return, these developing ecovillages share traditional building methods and community-building practices. This relationship

is valuable, as it allows for a recovery of old medical practices and knowledge that has often been overlooked (interview in Kunze/Avelino 2015). Despite these connections and the progress in defining the ecovillage concept, the term “ecovillage” is not legally protected. This means that anyone can use the term to describe their projects or ideas.

BUT HOW TRULY ECOLOGICAL ARE ECOVILLAGES?

Many studies in recent decades have examined how well ecovillages promote a sustainable lifestyle. Most of these studies show that people living in ecovillages have a much lower ecological impact and use fewer resources than those in the surrounding society.

Often researchers focus on key numbers like CO₂ emissions and energy use. However, it can be difficult to measure all the factors that shape a person’s lifestyle in an ecovillage. Numerous studies demonstrate that ecovillages significantly reduce ecological footprints across various sectors—housing, food, and mobility—largely due to their communal organisation. The member-led structures within these communities provide distinct advantages in implementing and maintaining sustainable lifestyles on a daily basis. Research reveals that communal sharing of resources such as cars, housing/shared living spaces, and food systems is crucial for reducing resource consumption (e.g., Fonseca et al. 2022).

Previous research has clearly shown that while energy consumption decreases across all areas, there are measurable improvements in quality of life as well. A comparison of three ecovillage cases with ecologically-minded families confirms that ecovillages outperform in key dimensions, including security, self-determination, flexibility, work-life balance, efficiency, and the fulfillment of existential and psychological needs, while also fostering coexistence. Additionally, these ecovillages achieve a remarka-

ble reduction in energy use and carbon emissions, reaching just 30% of the average and approximately 50% of that of ecological families (Simon et al. 2003).

Ecovillages hold a significant edge in fostering sustainable lifestyles through their practical, real-life experimental approach. Regarding innovations for sustainable living, ecovillages have developed comprehensive solutions that impact nearly every dimension of sustainability, leading to substantial improvements in sustainable lifestyles. With measurable reductions in energy use coupled with enhancements in quality-of-life dimensions, it is evident that ecovillages represent high-quality sustainable living.

Furthermore, the “Ecovillage Impact Assessment Study” by GEN illustrates how exemplary ecovillages deliver community-led solutions to climate change and support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Kovasna et al. 2017). In conclusion, three key principles emerge from these studies that drive the realisation of sustainable lifestyles in ecovillages: first, an unwavering commitment to sustainable communal living; second, an experimental approach to all practical aspects of life across all dimensions of sustainability; and third, a strong emphasis on the value and practical implementation of community.

LINKS & RESOURCES:

www.iriskunze.com

GLOBAL ECOVILLAGE NETWORK: A GLOBAL FAMILY OF CHANGEMAKERS

FROM AN INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF PERMACULTURE FRIENDS TO
A WORLDWIDE WEB OF ECOVILLAGES AND ECOVILLAGE EDUCATION



BY INA MEYER-STOLL
ZEGG COMMUNITY, GERMANY

I FOLLOWED THE FOUNDING IMPULSE OF THE GLOBAL ECOVILLAGE NETWORK FROM THE BEGINNING IN 1995, EVEN THOUGH I WAS NOT PRESENT IN PERSON. IN 1996, GEN EUROPE AS A CONTINENTAL NETWORK WAS FOUNDED IN THE BEAUTIFUL HOME OF DECLAN AND MARGRIT KENNEDY IN THE ECOVILLAGE LEBENSGARTEN STEYERBERG IN GERMANY. MY PARTNER, ACHIM ECKER, REPRESENTED ZEGG. WE BOTH ATTENDED THE GEN EUROPE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN POLAND 2001, WHICH TOOK PLACE AFTER THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION (ICSA) CONFERENCE AT ZEGG. IT RAINED ALL DAY AND THE CONDITIONS WERE VERY SIMPLE WITH PEOPLE STAYING IN TENTS AND IN A SMALL HOUSE. BUT WE MET AMAZING PEOPLE.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ina Meyer-Stoll from ZEGG Community in Germany served as the GEN Europe Secretary from 2003–2008, in cooperation with Jonathan Dawson from the Findhorn Community.

INITIAL YEARS

At the autumn Council Meeting in Italy in 2002, I was asked to step into the vacant position of the Secretary of GEN Europe. Jonathan Dawson from Findhorn Foundation was also present at this meeting, and we both agreed to serve the network. Jonathan was responsible for securing funding and international outreach, while I took care of the GEN Europe members and administered the non-profit association, which then moved from Italy to Germany. This non-profit association was particularly important for financing the work of the European network. From 2003 onwards we had a wonderful

and fruitful cooperation, for which I am very grateful. With Jonathan Dawson and Kasimir Reichmuth, who continued to oversee the entire GEN website from Torri Superiore in Italy, we enjoyed an incredibly friendly working relationship based on mutual support. It was good that we were so different, as this enabled us to cover many areas in which we wanted to make a difference. However, the scarcity of financial resources was a constant topic and challenge in spite of the ongoing generous support of Gaia Foundation by Ross Jackson.

One important event I remember was the signing of the first EU grant application.

It marked an important step as the grant enabled building a stronger network in various Euro-

pean countries. For example, it helped to finance the translation of information into nine different languages to spread the message of ecovillage development.

LIKE MEETING WITH FAMILY

What I remember well is the sense of community among the European ecovillages. At that time, there were perhaps almost 30 official ecovillage members, although I do not remember the exact number. There was a deep recognition of likemindedness, a real family feeling and we got to know each other well. We experienced each other as equals, despite living in many different countries, representing different cultures. It was an experience in which we recognised our fundamental values, where we were con-

cerned with doing good for our planet Earth, living simply and connected with all living beings. At the annual general assemblies, which were attended by 60 to 80 people in those times, we did everything together and hardly wanted to split up into small groups. When the individual ecovillages presented themselves in the evening, we often stayed up late because we all wanted to experience everything and did not want to miss a bit.

PROMOTING GLOBAL EDUCATION

My time at GEN Europe was a growth step from this family feeling to a worldwide education network. During this time, Hildur Jackson initiated meetings with international GEN founders and educators to develop an Ecovillage Education programme. This built on the four basic dimensions of GEN: ecology, economy, social affairs and spirituality/worldview/

cultural education. We shared our perspectives on all dimensions, creating a valuable learning experience and a great opportunity to inspire each other. This meeting took place in Hungary in 2005, following a preparatory meeting in Findhorn, Scotland in winter 2004/5. Five teaching units were developed in each dimension, forming a complete curriculum



Promoting Global Education

for people who wanted to implement the valuable discoveries from ecovillages in their regions.

At the time, we hoped that the achievements of ecovillages at different levels could be easily communicated to an interested society. Thus, the Ecovillage Design Education course was born. I was partly involved in developing the modules for the social

dimension. At that time, Kosha Joubert was responsible for this area, and together we wrote a large part of the first curriculum. It is wonderful to see how many changes the EDE has experienced until today and how it has continually adapted to the culture in which the course is delivered. I feel deeply grateful to have been involved in this process.

FINAL THOUGHTS

It seemed important that GEN-Europe as a charity association received substantial EU funding on several occasions. This funding supported, for example, the various national ecovillage networks and provided a proportion of travel costs for GEN member representatives. It enabled the annual general assemblies to be financially viable and for GEN Europe to be represented at different international events. It also left a modest salary for the staff team.

I feel deeply grateful for the many travels I was able to experience. We had two council/staff meetings per year, where we all met face to face in different ecovillages in Europe. This was an amazing

luxury – getting to know many beautiful, inspiring places and people. Peak of the year of course was the annual summer gathering. It is so precious to meet in person, to exchange experiences, to learn from each other, to give and receive support when needed.

I am very thankful I could hand over the responsibilities from 2007/2008 to Ulrike Schimmel from the ecovillage Sieben Linden in Germany. She served the network for several years and was very creative in organising more funds for GEN Europe to thrive.

Thank you all, dear wonderful ecovillage family around the globe for flying with you.

LINKS & RESOURCES:

<https://www.zegg.de> - <https://www.zegg-gemeinschaft.de>

<https://forum.gen-europe.org/t/ina-meyer-stoll-on-inner-work-community-building/229>



GEN Meeting

IN SEARCH OF A COMMUNITY IN ITALY 30 YEARS AGO: REVIVING LIFE IN AN ABANDONED MEDIEVAL VILLAGE



BY LUCILLA BORIO
TORRI SUPERIORE, ITALY

IN THE NORTHWEST OF ITALY, NESTLED BETWEEN THE ALPS AND THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA, NEAR THE TOWN OF VENTIMIGLIA (IMPERIA), A SMALL ABANDONED STONE VILLAGE STOOD CRUMBLING, A FORGOTTEN RELIC OF THE PAST. ITS RUGGED YET HARMONIOUS ARCHITECTURE RESEMBLED A FORTRESS, ONCE HOME TO A VIBRANT COMMUNITY WHOSE MEMBERS HAD LONG SINCE LEFT IN SEARCH OF BETTER OPPORTUNITIES ABROAD. BY THE LATE 1980S, THE HAMLET WAS ON THE BRINK OF COLLAPSE—EXCEPT FOR ONE LONE INHABITANT WHO REMAINED AS A KIND OF SPIRITUAL GUARDIAN. THAT WAS THE SETTING FOR WHAT HAS BECOME A THRIVING COMMUNITY.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lucilla Borio is the co-founder and a long-time resident of the Torri Superiore Ecovillage (Ventimiglia, IM). She is the former CEO of GEN Europe and former president of GEN International, and she currently serves on the GEN Elders Council. A direct student of Beatrice Briggs (IIFAC), Lucilla has been working as a facilitator and trainer since 2001. Her writing has been featured in numerous books and publications, including *The Encyclopedia of Community*, *Ecovillage Living*, and *Ecovillages Around the World*. Since 2015, she has been one of the lead authors and trainers of GEN Europe's "CLIPS – Community Learning Incubator Partnership for Sustainability," a program designed to support the development of sustainable groups and communities: <http://clips.gen-europe.org/>

FROM DREAM TO REALITY

In 1989, a small group of dreamers decided to bring this ghost village back to life. They founded the Torri Superiore Cultural Association, determined to rescue this hidden gem. What began as an idealistic endeavor soon turned into a decades-long journey of restoration and rebirth. The first new residents

moved into the few habitable rooms, embracing a simple, almost monastic lifestyle. Room by room, the Association gradually purchased the entire village—over 160 spaces once owned by more than a hundred different people.

It took twenty years to complete the acquisi-

tion, and twenty-two years to restore the village's intricate, interconnected architecture. Today, Torri Superiore is a thriving ecovillage, its community built slowly and organically over time. Of the original founders, only three remain as active members of the Association—myself included. Everyone else came later, drawn by the desire for an alternative way of life—closer to nature, rooted in shared values, and grounded in the dream of turning the impossible into reality.

We never took out a bank loan. Everything was accomplished through an internal, trust-based loan system that worked—almost miraculously. Our community has always numbered between 20 and 30 people. Since 1989, hundreds (if not thousands) have passed through Torri Superiore: as eco-guest-house visitors, short- and long-term volunteers, students in courses and workshops, or participants in cultural events and guided tours.

TORRI SUPERIORE: THE SEAT FOR GEN EUROPE

In 1999, we were honored to take over the running of the secretariat of GEN Europe (Global Ecovillage Network) after its first four years in Levensgarten Steyerberg, in the Netherlands, under the leadership of Declan Kennedy and Agnieszka Komoch. Coordinating this young network was a thrilling challenge, especially in a pre-digital age, long before emails were common, before websites and social media. Communication relied on phones, faxes, and handwritten letters. By the time our term ended in 2004, the world had already begun to change, but face-to-face meetings and long trips to support emerging ecovillage networks across Europe and Africa were still our norm. During this

time special initiatives, like the first “Ecovillage Travels” project, were created.

It was a golden era for Torri. The world discovered the ecovillage, and Torri received incredible encouragement from GEN colleagues and international visitors. In 2000, at Declan Kennedy's suggestion, we hosted our first Permaculture Design Course with Richard Wade and Ines Sanchez. In 2002, we invited Beatrice Briggs (IIFAC) for a facilitation training that marked a turning point—shaping not only our internal group dynamics but influencing the RIVE (the Italian Ecovillage Network) more broadly as well.



CLIPS Training in Torri Superiore

A MILESTONE AND A TURNING POINT

After more than two decades of intense collective work, we celebrated the completion of the restoration in 2016. It was a major milestone—but also a turning point. Suddenly, the pioneering spirit that had fueled the project for so long had to give way to a new phase focused on day-to-day management, farming, and upkeep. The transition was not easy. Some members left, unable to adapt to this shift in rhythm. Reaching a big goal can shock a group; it took time to reimagine our purpose and rebuild a daily routine. The magic of those early years—when anything seemed possible and joy was sparked by impromptu kitchen flash mobs and all-night dances—was hard to let go of. Of course, we were younger then, and that too makes a difference!

Today, life at Torri Superiore is peaceful but full.

We run programs, host guests, offer training sessions, and partner with a local social cooperative on agricultural projects. We have installed solar panels to provide a share of our hot water and electricity. Our restaurant can accommodate up to 70 guests, and we offer 14 simple yet cozy guest rooms, along with a spacious training room and a dedicated yoga studio.

Maintaining such a large, historic building is a constant effort—cleaning and repairs are always on the list. Our social community cooperative, Ture Nirvane, is now a certified host for both the European Solidarity Corps and the Erasmus+ program, thanks to the dedicated work of Emiliano Bon (Xena) and Dario Ferraro.

TORRI FOR THE NEW GENERATIONS

The next great challenge we face is generational renewal. As we grow older, we are beginning to plan for the future. This village has stood for over 700 years, sheltering many different communities. We dream of a new generation of residents—young people filled with energy, vision, and the same pioneering spirit that brought us here thirty years ago.

We know this transition will not be quick or easy, but it is a natural succession process we are ready to embrace in the coming years.

LINKS & RESOURCES:

<https://www.torri-superiore.org/en/ecovillage/>



Front View of Torri Superiore

DAMANHUR AND GUEDE CHANTIER: A BEAUTIFUL NORTH-SOUTH TWINSHIP



BY MACACO TAMERICE
DAMANHUR, ITALY

DAMANHUR IS A FIFTY-YEAR-OLD SPIRITUAL ECOVILLAGE WITH OVER 1,000 MEMBERS WORLDWIDE, ABOUT 600 OF WHOM LIVE IN VALCHIUSELLA IN NORTHERN ITALY. NESTLED IN THE FOOTHILLS OF THE ITALIAN ALPS, DAMANHUR WAS FOUNDED IN 1975, INSPIRED BY THE VISION OF FALCO TARASSACO (BORN OBERTO AIRAUDI, 1950–2013). TODAY, DAMANHUR IS A LIVING LABORATORY OF SUSTAINABLE LIVING AND SPIRITUAL RESEARCH—A FEDERATION OF COMMUNITIES WHERE PEOPLE COME TOGETHER TO LIVE IN HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER AND WITH THE NATURAL WORLD. ROOTED IN SHARED VALUES, DAMANHURIANS SEEK DEEPER CONNECTIONS WITH THEMSELVES, THE PLANET, AND THE GREATER RHYTHMS OF LIFE. DAMANHUR IS ALSO KNOWN FOR THE TEMPLES OF HUMANKIND—AN UNDERGROUND SANCTUARY CARVED BY HAND, EXPRESSING A PROFOUND COMMITMENT TO CREATIVITY, BEAUTY, AND INNER TRANSFORMATION IN SUPPORT OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Macaco Tamerice is a facilitator, trauma-informed coach, and former President of GEN Europe. A resident of Damanhur since 1993, she weaves together community, healing, and sustainability. Also a jazz singer, GEESE educator, and international speaker, she teaches worldwide with heart and depth.

MEETING THE WORLD THROUGH GEN

I have lived in Damanhur for 32 years and have represented it in global networks like GEN. In 2007, I was elected to the council of GEN Europe and served for many years as its President. At the 2013 GEN Europe Gathering at Schweibenalp in Switzerland, Ousmane Ali Pame—then President of GEN-Africa—was also invited, along with other key figures from GEN Africa. During our international meetings, it became evident that we needed active and meaningful connections between ecovillages in the Global North and South.

In addition to leading GEN Africa, Ousmane was the mayor of Guede Chantier, a traditional village of about 7,000 people in northern Senegal, near a river. The village had transformed into an ecovillage after suffering years of exploitation by industrial agriculture, first by France and later by China. It was then that the idea of a twinship between Damanhur and Guede Chantier took shape—a partnership that would allow two communities from very different backgrounds to connect and share their experiences. So began our shared journey.

AN IMPORTANT VISIT FROM SENEGAL GAVE RISE TO AN IDEA

In 2014, we had our first exchange. Ousmane visited us with the agricultural representative of the dry Podor region, part of the Sahel in northern Senegal, bordering Mauritania and Mali—an area increasingly affected by desertification. They stayed at Damanhur for two weeks and were hosted in various Damanhurian nucleos (Damanhur is organized into four large communities, each composed of nucleos. Every ‘nucleo’ is home to 7–25 people, with a shared house and land. While similar in structure, each has its own unique focus within the federation).

Their visit was deeply inspiring. They gave talks about Guede Chantier on several occasions, and it quickly became clear that we wanted the twinship to be practical and impactful. When Ousmane and his colleague saw how we preserve our summer vegetable harvest—making tomato sauce, pickles, and vegetables in oil—a clear idea emerged: to create a food preservation workshop for women in Guede Chantier to help combat malnutrition during the long dry season.

In the Sahel, there are 2–3 months of rainy season, during which a large quantity of vegetables is grown—but much of it goes to waste due to a lack of preservation techniques. It took us two years to gather the necessary resources. Finally, in 2016, we held our first food preservation workshop, teaching women how to conserve vegetables in glass jars and

make tomato sauce. It was originally designed for 12 women from Guede Chantier, but when I arrived with Pellicano—a Damanhurian expert in food conservation—there were 55 women from five different villages eager to participate. It was an unforgettable experience, and the outcomes exceeded all expectations.

What we at Damanhur learned from Guede Chantier was the extraordinary joy of life and a deep-rooted sense of community. Damanhur, with its five decades of existence and strong social structure, has built a tight-knit community by Western standards. Yet the organic and all-encompassing sense of belonging in Guede Chantier—evident in the unhesitating sharing of resources and the inclusion of everyone—was a profound lesson for us.

The impact of the workshop was substantial. The women were able to create nutritious food for their families during the dry season and gained greater independence—many began selling their products in local markets, generating income.



Macaco in Guede Chantier

PLANTING TREES, TOGETHER

In 2018, we returned to Guede Chantier with an even more ambitious goal. Together with Ousmane, we planned a second food workshop and set out to plant 1,600 fruit trees in three villages in and around Guede Chantier. A group of eight from Damanhur joined what we called the “tree caravan,” moving from village to village, planting trees with the women and children. Working side by side, sharing smiles, gestures, and stories, we felt deeply connected as human beings.

The results were tangible. The food forests had a

high survival rate and inspired the launch of REDES, the Sahelian ecovillage network, to expand tree planting efforts and even establish a nursery. Since then, they have planted thousands of trees, actively combating desertification.

This initiative has sparked many more twinships between ecovillages from the Global North and South and strengthened the awareness within GEN that communities from vastly different regions and cultures can forge meaningful, personal connections through grassroots collaboration.

LIVING THE EXTENDED VERSION OF LIFE: ECOVILLAGES, REGENERATION, AND COMMUNITY



BY MAUGE CANADA
ARTERRA BIZIMODU, SPAIN

I JOINED AN ECOVILLAGE BEFORE THE TERM EVEN EXISTED. IN 1980, I BECAME PART OF A BOLD EXPERIMENT: LAKABE, AN ABANDONED VILLAGE NESTLED IN THE PYRENEES OF NAVARRA, SPAIN. ALONGSIDE A SMALL GROUP OF PIONEERS WE RECLAIMED THE RUINS (PUBLIC LAND AT THE TIME) AND BEGAN REBUILDING NOT JUST CRUMBLING STONE AND TIMBER, BUT A WAY OF LIFE—ROOTED IN COMMUNITY, SELF-SUFFICIENCY, AND REGENERATION. FORTY-FOUR YEARS LATER, LAKABE STILL THRIVES. THREE GENERATIONS NOW WALK ITS PATHS, TEND ITS GARDENS, AND WEAVE THE FABRIC OF COLLECTIVE LIFE. IN A VALLEY ONCE MARKED BY DEPOPULATION, THIS VILLAGE PULSES WITH RESILIENCE—A LIVING TESTAMENT TO RURAL REVIVAL, NOT AS A SOLITARY ACT, BUT AS A SHARED JOURNEY.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mauge Cañada is 64 years young. Mother. Grandmother. Daughter. Friend. Sister. Peer. Earth-lover and grower/gardener – a farmer and food producer at heart. Member of Lakabe, co-founder of Arterra Bizimodu. Psychologist and group facilitator. Treating life as a laboratory; community living is my boundless adventure – wondrous, challenging, never boring, always inspiring.

THE START OF ARTERRA BIZIMODU

Several years later, I found myself co-creating a new project. Also in a rural setting, this time involving the regeneration of an old, enormous building: formerly a religious school, later a hotel, now rescued for community life and transformed into a vibrant hub for ecological transformation and collective ownership. The apartments no longer house tourists; its lands ceased being golf courses

and returned to food sovereignty and wild habitat. Twelve years on, Arterra stands as a living proof that communal living can regenerate not just buildings, but land, relationships, and hope.

Each community project shares a common commitment to reinhabiting rural areas collectively, therefore ecovillages can serve as a means to return to villages more sustainably.

A SHARED COMMITMENT TO RURAL REGENERATION

Each of these many initiatives carries its own identity, yet they share a common purpose: reclaiming rural spaces through collective, sustainable models. In Europe's emptying countryside, ecovillages like ours offer more than an alternative—they present a tangible path to revitalisation, grounded not in extraction or speculation, but in care, ecology, and deep human connection.

To expand this vision, from the Iberian Ecovillage Network (RIE) and led from Lakabe and Arterra Bizimodu in Spain, we undertook a collaboration with the Government of Navarre in 2018, to be able to explore from public administrations and ecovillage projects ways to facilitate the implementation of new projects.

We held an international conference in which the potential of community initiatives throughout Europe could be made visible as an efficient way to repopulate rural areas.

Thanks to GEN, we were able to connect with people worldwide, inviting them to participate. This network proves itself vital as a unique opportunity to seek experiences, make new contacts and reach out. Knowing ourselves as part of something larger facilitates encounters and collaboration extraordinarily. We have grown so accustomed to it that perhaps we sometimes undervalue this wonderful resource. We could not have organized such an impactful confer-

ence without GEN.

Government-funded, that conference brought together representatives from public administrations, municipalities, technical staff, and people interested in joining such initiatives. During the sessions, we gathered voices from around the world—both in-person and online—who shared their experiences and the impact of their projects on their territories.

A change in government left some of our aspirations unfulfilled, including a pilot ecovillage project on public land. Yet the effort was far from wasted. Today, we remain a reference point for institutions, advocating for legal and structural changes that support community-led rural regeneration.

Arterra Bizimodu now collaborates with Koo-bizitza, a local network of collaborative housing community projects. We are working with administrations and municipalities to promote community projects in both urban and rural settings, participating in multidisciplinary committees to develop collaborative housing (cohousing) legislation for Navarre.

Drawing on CLIPS (a GEN Europe project), we have designed a process to support these new initiatives, serving as the reference point for municipalities to transfer land or buildings to network-endorsed projects. We are taking initial steps in these processes, hoping to materialize at least three urban projects in Pamplona and several rural ones next year.



Arterra Bizimodu meeting on its vision

A LIFE IN COMMUNITY: A LIFE FULLY LIVED

Collaborating with administrations is challenging—different languages, different paces, numerous constraints and many stakeholders involved. Our purpose as an ecovillage is to contribute to a paradigm shift; we envision a world with different balances that nurtures life—all lives. We have learned that this path requires patience, perseverance, dialogue, and many proposals that may end up filed away.

I observe myself within this multifaceted existence. Living in these projects and connected with others throughout Europe, I sometimes feel I am part of life's "extended version." Some days I rise early to tend my garden, gazing at mountains and sky in silence and tranquillity. I return home just in time for coffee break, joining all the garden team volunteers at breakfast: diverse languages, laughter, toast, young people exploring different worlds. Then I head up to my office for an online meeting. Stepping outside, I encounter little people, noisy and happy, ready for some playtime. Some afternoons weave themselves into conversations, others hold meetings. Companions bustling here and

there, each absorbed in their tasks: someone making jam, others repairing a door, a team working on the roof, rooms needing cleaning before Thursday's workshop.

Today we spoke with a nearby municipality requesting workshops for next month—they want to gauge interest in their village for a cohousing project, having a building they could transfer to a collective.

Summer brings long afternoons. Some days grow so hot that venturing outside becomes impossible until dusk. This is summer in the age of climate change in southern Europe. These sweltering days remind us there is no time to waste—we will keep pressing the administrations, but we will not wait for them. We are living today, the future we hope will blossom for countless tomorrows.

LINKS & RESOURCES:

<https://www.lakabe.org/>

<https://arterrabizimodu.org/>

<https://sites.google.com/site/rehabitarlatierra/home>



Arterra Bizimodu building

COMMUNITIES AND THEIR SURROUNDINGS: LESSONS FROM GASTWERKE



BY STEFFEN EMRICH
GASTWERKE COMMUNITY, GERMANY

“WHEN WE STARTED THE GASTWERKE PROJECT IN A SMALL VILLAGE NEAR THE CITY OF KASSEL ABOUT 15 YEARS AGO, WE WERE A GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES FULL OF ENTHUSIASM — AND WITH AN OLD FORESTRY RESEARCH STATION IN OUR HANDS. THE SITE HAD BEEN THE LARGEST EMPLOYER IN THE VILLAGE FOR DECADES BUT HAD BEEN STANDING EMPTY FOR SEVERAL YEARS BEFORE WE ARRIVED. FOR MANY LOCALS, OUR ARRIVAL WAS A MYSTERY. WE HAD NO PRIOR CONNECTION TO THE VILLAGE, AND RUMORS BEGAN TO CIRCULATE: STORIES OF “SEX, DRUGS, AND ROCK’N’ROLL AND” WILD FANTASIES ABOUT WHAT COULD HAPPEN IN SUCH A COMMUNE. THESE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH OUR REALITY, BUT THEY SHAPED THE ATMOSPHERE IN THOSE FIRST MONTHS. (HONESTLY THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN SURPRISED IF THEY WOULD HAVE KNOWN HOW ORDINARY WE ARE IN MANY WAYS).”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steffen Emrich has been living in the gASTWERKe community near Kassel (Germany) for over 15 years — long enough to witness how a group of “strangers with big ideas” can become part of a village’s heartbeat. As a sociocracy trainer, networker, and long-time GEN activist, he is passionate about bridging the gap between intentional communities and the wider society.

GASTWERKE'S INITIAL YEARS

From the beginning, we knew we wanted to be open to the people around us. We set up a small farm shop, held open days and a “Tomato Festival,” and welcomed visitors. Yet, for the first years, our openness worked mostly in one direction — we were inviting people in, but rarely stepping into their spaces and we were a bit disappointed how few people appeared. The farm shop, even so the only shop in the village, was hardly visited by people from the village. At the same time, many of us

felt shy or hesitant about joining events like the May Day festival, the volunteer fire brigade party, the local carnival party in the village sport hall or the local sports club or bigger church events. Two separate worlds and our community situated like a space ship surrounded by a traditional village.

It took a shift in perspective to realise that genuine connection grows when you also walk toward others. I was one of the few (coming from a village myself) who visited the village events on a regu-

lar basis. By total coincidence I happened to be at one sports club event and I was asked to moderate a children's race. By chance, the organiser of the upcoming 1200-year anniversary celebration of the village was in the audience and he liked my moderation style. Then being invited to moderate the big parade on this big village event felt like a rite of passage — a public sign that we slowly but surely became accepted by the community.

As a group we became more and more aware that we have to be more proactive in getting in contact with our village. Over time, our members began to join local associations, get elected to the village

council etc. Personally, I served on the municipal council for some years. Today, gASTWERKe members chair the board of a neighboring association, run the local library, meet regularly with the “tractor round table”, take part in a sports betting pool and are active in the youth soccer teams.

Nowadays, when we organize a Bobby Car race or a village-wide “give-away day,” we can count on many local volunteers. People genuinely appreciate our presence, and the line between “the ecovillage” and “the village” keeps getting blurrier - realising that it took 15 years and a conscious effort to secure this integration.

BEYOND OUR GARDEN FENCE: A MESSAGE FOR THE GEN NETWORK

The story of gASTWERKe is just one example, but it carries a message for all GEN projects: we may have different visions, structures, and lifestyles, yet we are all part of a larger whole. Our communities are not isolated experiments; they are pieces of a global mosaic working towards a regenerative future.

If we want our impact to reach beyond our own fields, gardens, and meeting rooms, we must also reach into the regions we live in. “Walk your talk” is not only about living our values inside the community — it is also about bringing them to life in the wider society.

It is valuable, even necessary, to test new ideas in a small, protected environment. Yet, real change happens when we step out and engage: when we contribute to local cultural life, when we partner with municipalities, when we make our practices visible and accessible. Our aim is not to convince everyone to live exactly as we do, but to show that we are part of society — not an exclusive enclave apart from it.

As living laboratories, GEN communities can offer practical, tangible examples of a sustainable lifestyle. We can inspire, spark curiosity, and give people tools they can adapt to their own lives. In doing so, we strengthen the diversity and resilience of the world we are part of, and fulfill the promise that ecovillages have carried from the beginning: to be both visionary and deeply rooted in the places we call home.

“Community is to be able to walk your talk and the perfect place to get wanted and unwanted mirrors”.

LINKS & RESOURCES:

www.gastwerke.de

www.procorde.net

German Podcast on Communities:

<https://was-mit-gemeinschaft.letscast.fm/>

Facebook/Instagram: @wasmitgemeinschaft

Workshop in gASTWERKe Community



GEN NETHERLANDS:

“ALONE YOU GO FAST, TOGETHER YOU GO FAR.”



BY MONIQUE WIJN
CO-FOUNDER OF GEN NETHERLANDS

SINCE 2013, GEN-NETHERLANDS HAS BEEN A VIBRANT AND ACTIVE NETWORK OF COMMUNITIES FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY. COUNTLESS INITIATIVES HAVE EMERGED—SOME DID NOT MAKE IT, BUT OTHERS, AS OF 2025, HAVE BEEN BUILT AND NOW OFFER HOUSING AND LIVING SPACE TO DOZENS OF RESIDENTS. A HIGHLY DIVERSE NETWORK, RANGING FROM BEAUTIFUL ECO-HOMES TO CONVERTED FARMS, FROM SQUATTED PLOTS TO NEWLY BUILT APARTMENTS—A COLORFUL BOUQUET OF DIVERSITY, COLLECTIVELY BEARING WITNESS TO A GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT MOVING TOWARDS LIVING AND DWELLING TOGETHER, WITH EACH OTHER AND WITH THE EARTH.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Monique Wijn is co-founder of the Dutch Ecovillage Network and actively involved in networking and advocacy for ecovillages in the Netherlands. She lives in Ecovillage Land van Aine in Ter Apel and is a CLIPS-trainer in the Netherlands and internationally. She has been representing GEN-NL in the National Network meetings of GEN Europe since 2014 and was chosen as a council member of GEN Europe in 2023.

THE ORIGINS OF GEN-NL AND FIRST NATIONAL MEETING

Following inspiring GEN Gatherings in Portugal (2011), Hungary (2012), and an Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) course in Sieben Linden, Germany (2012), a group of people first came together in January 2013 to discuss the creation of a Dutch ecovillage network. The initiators were Fredjan Twigt (Ecovillage Bergen), Wouter Extercatte and Monique Wijn (Ecovillage Groningen).

At the next meeting in May 2013, various communities were invited, most of them still in formation: Ecovillage Bergen, Ecovillage Brabant, Anastasia Village Levensland, Ecovillage Groningen, and the Earth Houses in Olst. To introduce ecovillage

culture, we formed a circle and passed around a talking stick – a new experience for many communities!

It was at this meeting that the decision to establish the network was made. The primary focus was to become a network of initiatives and to support and inspire each other in realising ecovillages in the Netherlands. The goals: networking, education, advocacy, and information sharing. We discovered that we collectively knew a significant number of emerging initiatives, and decided to focus our efforts there. We also agreed to organise an annual festival for the broader interested public.

NETWORK MEETINGS AND ECOVILLAGE FESTIVAL

The first network meeting took place on July 1, 2013, in the beautiful ecological building of Ecovillage Brabant on the grounds of De Kleine Aarde. There were 40 participants from around 20 initiatives - a huge success! We decided to launch a website and newsletter.

Since that first meeting, summer and winter gatherings have been held annually — each time in a different community — to connect and visit one another.

In August 2013, the first national Ecovillage Festival was held in Ecovillage Bergen. They had just

received the keys to the land, and within a week, we built festival infrastructure together. Due to restrictions — Bergen still needed to resolve environmental cleanup of the former military site — no publicity was allowed, and attendance was capped at 100 participants. Nevertheless, it was a fantastic first celebration. The festival was organised each year from 2013 to 2016. After that, we became part of the Living Village Festival (2017–2020) and Vibe of the Earth (2021–2022). These events were halted due to COVID.



Boschgaard meeting



CLIPS training

ENGAGED IN GEN EUROPE & CLIPS AND BECOMING A LEGAL ENTITY

Then we became actively involved with GEN Europe. In Spring 2014, the first national network meeting took place in Torri Superiore, Italy. There, the idea was born to form an international partnership to develop an educational toolkit to support communities. This became CLIPS — the Community Learning Incubator Programme for Sustainability.

Since then, a national network meeting is held every January in a different European country. The CLIPS project became a great success. The first partnership included ten countries. A website and a guide in ten languages were developed. In phase two, a CLIPS game and a methods book followed.

GEN-NL has been very active in this field, training countless groups and organizing an annual national training for communities.

The CLIPS project led to GEN-NL forming a legal entity. In spring 2015, the Ecodorpen Network Foundation was established, later renamed GEN-NL. This was a challenging step; some people were ideologically opposed to any legal structure, while others insisted on implementing sociocracy, which was unfamiliar to many. As a compromise, the statutes adopted decision-making by consent, without explicitly naming sociocracy.

THE ADDED VALUE OF ECOVILLAGES AND YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

To highlight the importance of ecovillages, we organized the 2017 symposium “The Added Value of Ecovillages”. Ecovillages presented alongside their municipalities about collaboration, success factors, and challenges. Topics such as “ecovillages in rural areas” were discussed. All participants signed a manifesto to develop a Green Deal for ecovillages.

Meanwhile, GEN-NL began facilitating youth

exchanges to ecovillages across Europe. Both Youth Exchanges (1–2-week trainings) and ESC (2–12 month stays) were developed, and numerous young people attended these inspiring gatherings. Since 2022, GEN-NL has been accredited as a Lead Organization and helps ecovillages become ESC host sites. By 2025, three Dutch ecovillages have gained host status.



Youth Exchange



Mini EDE

GEN FILM HOUSE, WEBINARS AND ECOVILLAGE DESIGN EDUCATION

In June 2020, during the lockdown, physical visits were impossible. GEN-NL organized its first online weekend, featuring many fantastic speakers on self-sufficient living and building. This sparked a series of online events. Every month, GEN-NL hosted a film night and webinar series on topics such as innovative architecture, permaculture, resilience, social issues, new economies, and more. Hundreds of peo-

ple participated in these webinars and film evenings.

In 2023 we started a yearly mini-EDE, a 5-day dive into the ecovillage mandala: with one intensive day on each of the five dimensions ecology, social, economy, worldview, and whole systems design. This was a huge success, so in 2024 we organised an EDE again, and we hope to make this an annual event.

DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTION OF ECOVILLAGES

Cooperation is now bearing fruit. Ecovillage Boekel is being built, along with Ecovillage Zuiderveld in Nijmegen, De Woongaard in Serooskerke, and Ecovillage Klein Oers in Veldhoven (2025). Ecovillage Land van Aine has achieved a new zoning plan titled “Ecovillage zoning plan” and is under construction. New communities are forming, such

as Onder de Eik in Uffelte and Ons Dorpje in Schalkwijk. Since not everyone identifies as an “ecovillage,” we introduced a new category: eco-communities, for smaller groups. Several groups are transitioning from temporary to more permanent permits. From just three to five communities in 2013, there are now over 50 projects.

LOBBYING AND ADVOCACY: THE THIRD HOUSING STREAM

In 2022, Cooplink invited us to join a coalition of umbrella organisations for communal living. Elderly co-housing, tiny houses, shared farms, and urban networks united to draft a manifesto, showing that large groups of Dutch citizens want to live communally. Even provincial governments wrote to the Minister, stating that 20–25% of the people request this form of living and that housing diversity must go beyond single-family homes. In 2025, this resulted

in a new legislative proposal, mandating communal housing as a standard form of development. From 2026, millions of euros will be available in a fund for financing communities. A certification system is being developed to assess whether a community is truly communal. The ecovillage criteria largely align: shared vision, inclusive decision-making, no private ownership, and internal admission policies.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN GEN-NL

In 2024, GEN-NL adopted a new focus with three support activities: GEN-HELP, GEN-FUN(D), and GEN-FIND.

- **GEN-HELP:** Emerging from the CLIPS project, a team of trainers from various disciplines was formed. Mediation and misconduct response lines have been added. Ecovillages can access these services in times of crisis or conflict.
- **GEN-FUN(D):** Inspired by the French Cooperative Oasis, GEN-NL is working to create a revolving fund for start-up ecovillages. External contributions will be welcomed and remain withdrawable. A team of ecovillages

and experts is involved, supported by two European projects. Separately, an Ecovillage Fund has been established, based on legacies and donations, granting thousands of euros to communities annually.

- **GEN-FIND:** Since 2023, GEN-NL has partnered with Belgium and France to develop an online academy, linked to a resource center and expert team to help ecovillages build successful projects based on acquired expertise. In summer 2025, experts and communities in the Netherlands and Belgium will be filmed to create this Dutch/Flemish academy, expected to be launched in March 2026.

A 10 YEARS ANNIVERSARY

GEN-NL celebrates its 10-year anniversary in 2025. Events will take place all summer, beginning with an opening celebration with the Earth Houses in Olst, that also turned 10 years. A bike tour followed, visiting northern ecovillages. In August, a second bike tour through southern ecovillages will conclude in a grand finale party at Ecovillage Bergen.

“To me, community is a collective journey with fellow human and non human beings, in a consciously designed sustainable ecosystem, maintained by care, heart driven commitment, joy, playfulness and embracing the unknown.”

LINKS & RESOURCES:

Website: <https://gen-nl.nl/>

CLIPS: <https://gen-nl.nl/clips/>

Youth and NEXT GEN: <https://gen-nl.nl/jongeren/>

Map of Dutch Ecovillages: <https://gen-nl.nl/overzichtskaart-alle-initiatieven/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/GENNederland>

GEN & RIVE: A LONG LASTING RELATIONSHIP



BY SAFIR & RICCARDO
EX-CO-PRESIDENTS OF RIVE



RIVE (RETE ITALIANA VILLAGGI ECOLOGICI), THE ITALIAN ECOVILLAGE NETWORK, REPRESENTS ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCES IN THE ITALIAN LANDSCAPE OF COMMUNITY NETWORKS AND SUSTAINABILITY. FOUNDED IN 1996, WITH ALMOST THIRTY YEARS OF HISTORY, THE NETWORK HAS EVOLVED FROM A SIMPLE COORDINATION BETWEEN ECOVILLAGES TO BECOME A TRUE MOBILISING FORCE OF IDEOLOGIES AND VALUES THAT HAS AN IMPACT WELL BEYOND NATIONAL BORDERS.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrea Safir Stagliano has lived in communities for over a decade and has been active in RIVE since 2012, serving in many roles, including co-president. He facilitates groups using tools like Sociocracy and NVC, and co-created meditative walks between ecovillages for deep, transformative connections.

Riccardo Clemente is a member of Popolo Degli Elfi community, has served as RIVE president and GEN Europe council for 9 years. An artist that keeps the community spirit alive using tons of humour.

A VISION THAT EMBRACES THE WORLD

RIVE's manifesto clearly outlines the vision that animates this extraordinary experience:

"We want to build a world in which harmony, trust and peaceful relationships among people and respect for every living being lead each person to acquire self-awareness, conducting an eco-sustainable existence." These are not empty words, but a concrete program that translates into the daily lives of hundreds of people and dozens of communities.

RIVE recognizes community life experiences as genuine "laboratories of authentic forms of existence" that reject what is ephemeral and superficial

to inaugurate ways of living based on cooperation, sharing, and affection among members. These communities are very diverse in their mission. Some have common economy like Bagnaia, Tempo di Vivere, Lume, where some are more focused on the spiritual aspect like Damanhur, Comunità Etica Vivente and others are more based on self sufficiency like Gaia Terra and Popolo degli Elfi. But inside the network they find a common mission to spread and disseminate the experience of communitarian projects, living together, and common values such as caring for the planet, the human being and every living being.

THE POWER OF A NATIONAL NETWORK

As a national network, RIVE today interconnects around sixty community projects distinguished between ecovillages; ecovillages under construction and other projects, serving a fundamental catalysing function. Its main purpose is to enable continuous dialogue throughout the year among communities, allowing them to discuss themes close to their hearts, foster collaboration on specific projects, and channel support from a vast network of members and people who, while not yet living in community, recognize themselves in community values.

INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE ECOVILLAGE MOVEMENT

RIVE's national dimension naturally integrates with the international one through active participation in GEN (Global Ecovillage Network). The Italian network is not only a member of GEN, but one of its most active protagonists. Among GEN's founders, RIVE has organised important international meetings in Italy and maintains a central position in European project development for over a decade.

The numbers speak clearly: RIVE has sent over 300 people on exchanges to ecovillages worldwide, creating a network of relationships and knowledge that enriches the entire movement. But it is not just about participation: the Italian network has

This aggregation capacity manifests concretely through four meetings that RIVE organises annually, one of which is open to external participants in a large summer gathering. RIVE's summer camp has a unique particularity in the community network landscape: it manages to welcome an impressive number of participants, with events hosting up to 700 people. This dimension allows connecting the ecovillage world with other worlds: associations, municipalities, and people living in cities.

assumed leadership roles in some of GEN Europe's largest flagship projects, such as CLIPS and Launch and Thrive, demonstrating itself to be not only a project promoter but central in developing innovative initiatives.

Italian participation in GEN Europe meetings has always been massive and qualified. RIVE activists are constantly at the forefront of European meetings, both as participants and as activists within the network. An emblematic example was the 2024 meeting in Sweden, where, despite considerable distance from Italy, the Italian delegation was one of the most numerous among all participating nations.



RIVE Gathering & Logo

GOVERNANCE INNOVATION: THE SOCIOCRATIC REVOLUTION

Since 2017, RIVE has undertaken a profound transformation path through sociocracy adoption, becoming an experimentation laboratory for more inclusive, transparent, and effective network management forms. This ongoing process is managed by a dedicated group for sociocracy implementation, consisting of people with specific training who operate as facilitators in communities and trainers for the network.

The sociocratic process is enabling RIVE to include new people more quickly and make them aware of all the wealth of information and projects within the network. The innovative structure includes two co-presidents and two central circles: the Vision Council, which takes care of the organization's mission and long-term strategic aspects, and the Coordination Circle, which coordinates all the association's operational working groups.

INNOVATIVE PROJECTS FOR THE FUTURE (GROWTH & INCLUSIVITY)

RIVE's growth potential materialises in several ambitious projects. The VERI project (Ecological Volunteers for Italian Networks) is ready to launch and involves creating qualified volunteers who can move from one community to another, with specific skills for navigating the community world and covered by dedicated insurance.

Simultaneously, a system for exchanging skills, talents, and abilities is being developed through a specific app developed with external collaborations. This platform enables and will increasingly allow direct exchange in barter form, as well as with an economic component for those who request it,

among members, activists, and communities that have developed specific competencies to share.

RIVE is working intensively on membership aspects, seeking to expand its members to include distributed communities, cohousing, associations in general, and supporters who recognise themselves in the network's mission. This openness reflects the inclusive vision expressed in the manifesto, which welcomes "both actually constituted ecovillages and projects, and all those who, even individually, recognizing themselves in its values, intend to work for the same purposes."

SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES AND FUTURE VISION

Like many third-sector organisations, RIVE faces the challenge of economic sustainability. The balance between volunteering and remuneration represents a central theme that the network is addressing with the goal of imagining an economic system that can reward those who have dedicated years of experience and work to the association, while maintaining a level of volunteering that preserves the original mission of dedicating time, energy, and passion to the idea of collective living.

RIVE presents itself today as a mature but continuously evolving reality, capable of combining fidelity to founding values with organisational and project innovation. Its capacity to grow in communication terms, support less structured communities from a communication standpoint, and develop concrete

projects for exchange and collaboration positions it as a reference model in the landscape of Italian and European community networks.

The lasting vitality of RIVE comes from communities sharing their wisdom, experience, and challenges, together with dedicated activists who have offered talents and countless volunteer hours, accompanied by inspiring people who live in community. Blending flexibility, openness, humor, and playfulness with decades of facilitation, and supported by circles and working groups, the network has nurtured continuity, memory, and a shared spirit that keeps it alive and thriving.

LINKS & RESOURCES:

Website: <https://ecovillaggi.it/>

Find us on Facebook & Instagram as RIVE Italia

NETWORKS OF TRUST: UKRAINE'S ECOVILLAGE MOVEMENT AND THE POWER OF SOLIDARITY



BY ANASTASIYA VOLKOVA
ZELENI KRUCHI, UKRAINE

“THE HISTORY OF THE UKRAINIAN NETWORK, WHICH RAPIDLY BROKE INTO THE BIG GEN EUROPE FAMILY AND IMPRESSED WITH ITS QUICK DEVELOPMENT, BEGAN WITH ONE PASSIONATE PERSON WHO BELIEVED IN THE IMPORTANCE OF JOINING ALTERNATIVE UKRAINIAN COMMUNITIES TOGETHER WITH THE GLOBAL MOVEMENT. AND WITH A TEAM OF ENTHUSIASTS WHO BELIEVED IN HIS VISION AND REMAINED FAITHFUL FOR A LONG TIME, INVESTING IN THE IDEA OF A BETTER WORLD. THIS IS A STORY OF UPS AND DOWNS, BUT ALSO OF STUBBORNNESS, PERSEVERANCE, AND SUCCESS.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anastasiya Volkova, living in the ecovillage Zeleni Kruchi in Ukraine. Head of the NGO Permaculture in Ukraine and former project coordinator in GEN Ukraine.

HOW THE UKRAINIAN NETWORK GOT STARTED

Ecovillages have existed in Ukraine since the 1990s, mostly inspired by the books of the Russian author Megre, but also progressive villages of artists, among which Obyrok was the most famous. It was there that the name GEN Europe was first heard, when Robert Hall came to the village in 2016 and introduced the European network. But the idea of joining needed time to mature in Ukraine.

This time came in 2017, when Maksym Zalevskyi, the organiser of the Green School, an educational project that gave birth to numerous startups and where many people found their way, went to the GEN Gathering in Estonia and came back so

inspired that the process really took off. The team got together and an NGO was founded. Camilla Nielsen-Englyst, a then member of the GEN Europe Council, came to Ukraine and supported the development of the organisation and the first project grant to support network activities.

My personal story of interaction with GEN started at the same time. I remember well the time when I had only a very vague understanding of the European network, but I felt that we needed it. We went on the first tour of the Baltic communities, went with a group to the National Networks Meeting in Slovenia, to the GEN Gathering in Italy,

and the process of mutual acquaintance began. We always came from GEN Ukraine as a team, not alone. We also brought other GEN Europe repre-

sentatives to our country, including Riccardo, Nara, and Robert Hall.

EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND MAPPING OF ECOVILLAGES

As a powerful tool for communicating GEN Europe's values to the Ukrainian community, we held an Ecovillage Design education (EDE) in 2020 in two different Ukrainians ecovillages, which strengthened the organisation and created a strong group who later would become GEN Ukraine activists. When the Covid lockdown started, we still continued our activities and also attended National

Networks meetings: the connection was not interrupted. There were even initial talks about the possibility of hosting a GEN Gathering in Ukraine. At the beginning of 2022, the new GEN Ukraine roster included 26 ecological communities practicing self-sufficiency, eco-construction, education, and land care.

A YOUNG NETWORK IN TURBULENT TIMES

When the full-scale Russian invasion began in February 2022, 12 ecovillages found themselves in the combat zone, five were destroyed, but most were still in relatively safe rural areas. On the very first day, people from the cities moved to these ecovillages fleeing from air attacks. The poorly-equipped

houses of ecovillagers were soon crowded with people who often came with children and only one bag of documents. Ecovillages always had supplies in their storage rooms, so initially they had resources to welcome internally displaced people. But no one, at that time, knew how long it would take.

EMERGENCE OF THE GREEN ROAD

On the second day of the war, I had an online call with Maksym Zalevskyi and Iryna Kazakova, who worked as project coordinators for our two friendly organisations, GEN Ukraine and Permaculture in Ukraine. We realised that we had to support the people being displaced. On the same day, we were contacted by the GEN Europe council asking how they could be of help. We started a project later called the 'Green Road of Ecovillages'. It was a map of locations in Ukraine that hosted people in need of shelter, and a map of locations in Western Europe that hosted Ukrainians who had gone abroad. The support from GEN Europe was very important to us, and we had online calls with the council almost

every day during the first few weeks. Our friends in Europe collected donations which they sent and we distributed. We bought mattresses, food, household appliances - everything that was needed to meet the basic needs of people.

The biggest assistance came from the Danish Ecovillage Network, LOES, through Camilla - and the GAIA Trust. In partnership, we quickly implemented a large emergency grant to provide needed material support to the ecovillages, sent several trucks with humanitarian aid, and provided several hundred refurbished laptops for children's education and remote work for adults.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NETWORKS

The response from our friends around the world to the needs of the Ukrainian ecovillage network

was fast and it helped us to stay strong. We worked extremely hard at the time, under the stress of sur-

vival and on high levels of adrenaline. From meeting the most basic needs, we moved on to more long-term solutions: repairing houses, cleaning wells, setting up greenhouses and providing agriculture equipment. We developed different vectors: food security, water, energy, mobility, and community building. Thanks to this support, the residents of the ecovillages did not leave to go abroad, but continued to grow food, educate children, and support each other and the displaced people.

Another important area was the development of common spaces in ecovillages, which allowed communities to gather and hold events. We went through two blackout periods, in winter 2022 and summer 2023, when Russia attacked Ukraine's critical energy infrastructure and electricity was on schedule throughout the country, sometimes only for a few hours a day. To support the people in the communities, we provided them with generators, power banks, and solar stations.

The Ukrainian team continued to travel to GEN Gatherings and be visible: We came en masse to Denmark in 2022, as a special volunteering group, were in Germany in 2023, and went to Sweden in 2024. Mostly women, as the men can not cross the border. Always in branded T-shirts, energetic and radiant. In 2025, the team is smaller.

WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?

The war in Ukraine is ongoing, and as of mid-2025, there is no prospect of ending it. Attention from the rest of Europe has gone down. The initial project coordinators have started to burn out one by one and leave the team, and it is an extraordinary effort to continue working at this pace under the general stress of war. Residents of the ecovillages are also exhausted: more and more men are mobilized, some of them die, some women take their children abroad for safety. There is not much energy to organise events, and travelling for men is difficult. However, even in such conditions, micro-projects are taking place: planting trees, installing rainwater collection systems, and cleaning up garbage dumps. Caring for the earth is at the heart of all ecovillages,

In addition to the centralised interaction between the Ukrainian and European networks, there were also horizontal projects. For example, the construction of a house for displaced people and events in Busha, which was made possible thanks to the dedicated support of individual GEN Europe representatives: Steffen Emrich, Anne Schwab, Monique Wijn and others.

The Green Road of Ecovillages project has shown in practice the importance and power of communities and networks. I myself live in one of the Ukrainian ecovillages, Zeleni Kruchi, and I felt the privilege of our 'bubble', where life was vastly different from the outside world. When there was destruction and despair around us, we had the feeling that we were not alone, and were, surprisingly, developing, in the midst of a fragile situation.

The Green Road project could only happen because two networks already existed in Ukraine before the war - the one of ecovillages and the one of permaculture centers - and that there was communication and trust between community leaders and GEN Ukraine coordinators, and between GEN Ukraine and GEN Europe. Our case shows the strength in unity and the importance of the values that GEN Europe promotes.

no matter what their ideological, religious, or political views are. Small or large, through all crises and transformations: in Earth we trust.

I write these words during the GEN Gathering 2025 in Hungary, feeling happy to be back in a big family, and believing that the Ukrainian network will find a way out of this crisis and set an example of resilience.

LINKS & RESOURCES:

<https://gen-europe.org/ukraine/>

<https://genukraine.com.ua/>

INITIATING BEN: REGIONAL SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL NETWORKS



BY ROBERT HALL
CO-FOUNDER OF BEN

THE BALTIC ECOVILLAGE NETWORK OR BEN HAS BEEN A BIT OF AN ANOMALY IN THE GEN FAMILY. WHILE GEN CONSISTS PREDOMINANTLY OF ECOVILLAGES, NATIONAL NETWORKS AND CONTINENTAL NETWORKS, BEN HAS ALWAYS STUCK OUT AS AN ODDBALL. IT IS DUE TO THE UNIQUE GEOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT BEN AROSE OUT OF THAT GAVE THIS TRANSNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ECOVILLAGE ACTIVISTS ITS PURPOSE.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Hall is a co-founder of Suderbyn Ecovillage and the Baltic Ecovillage Network and has served in the leadership of the Swedish network, BEN, GEN Europe and GEN. He has moved to France to co-found Little Wild, a smaller re-learning community project on permaculture and rewilding.

THE BALTIC SEA REGION

The Baltic Sea Region is a European macro-region of at least 9 countries.

For roughly half a century, between 1945 and 1990, the region was divided by a figurative “Iron Curtain” that limited five of these countries to have normal neighbourly contact with the other four and vice versa. To make matters more challenging, each of the nine countries has its own language. When the region opened up in 1990 it was as if a new world had been discovered. Tourists, students, sports teams, writers, farmers, workers and businesses ventured across the formerly dividing

borders of what had always been a well-integrated region for thousands of years.

It was in these first euphoric years of the 1990’s when I and my family moved to Gotland, a large Swedish island, then still heavily militarised, in the middle of the Baltic Sea. My first job at the Gotland County Administration in early 1995 was to help the island break the proverbial straight jacket imposed on it during the Cold War and build new “bridges” to the neighbouring regions, to connect the island and any actor on it to the wider world, and identify EU, Nordic and Swedish funding to make it happen.

START OF BALTIC ECOVILLAGE NETWORK

A decade later, having spent years in the Balkans, my family moved back to Gotland due to the desire of my children to return to their friends and beloved Gotland. Part of the deal of moving back was that it would be to an ecovillage that did not yet exist. Thus, the ecovillage Suderbyn was born in 2008, literally in the middle of the Baltic Sea. Just 5 years later, BEN was launched.

BEN was not something I had thought much about. Already in the euphoric years of 1996-98 when the Baltic Sea's eastern and western coast were re-connecting, the Danish national network, LØS, and the Swedish national network, ERO (then called Njord), discussed the need for a big Baltic Sea ecovillage event. They tried to get project funding for this envisioned conference - but failed. It was only in 2007 while visiting Findhorn prior to starting up Suderbyn when I asked Jonathan Dawson, Managing Director of GEN Europe and on the International Board for GEN, to have it's support for a Baltic Sea network.

Once Suderbyn was started in the summer of 2008, it was time to apply for GEN aspiring mem-

bership. In July of 2009, at my first European Ecovillage Gathering in Keuruu Ecovillage, Finland, around 15 persons participated in an Open Space workshop about creating a Baltic Sea network. Not long afterwards in 2010 the Lithuanian Institute of Agrarian Economics built a consortium to seek Interreg Baltic Sea Region financing for an ecovillage project. Naively, the newly-started Suderbyn joined that consortium application as the sole Swedish partner. In early 2011 Swedish Sida funded a pilot project "Healthy Baltic Sea Lifestyle" which gathered some 60 persons from ecovillages, transition groups and permaculture associations from all around the region to a networking event at Raudsilla, Estonia. Just months later in 2011 was the kick-off in Vilnius for the EU's Baltic Sea Interreg project "Ecovillages for Sustainable Rural Development", a three-year project (2011-2014) with an incredible 1.6 million euro budget.

The combination of the growing vision of a Baltic Sea network with the large EU project made the formal creation of the Baltic Ecovillage Network, BEN, obvious.

Baltic Ecovillage Network meeting



LAST YEARS OF BEN & NEXT FUTURE

On 12th April 2013 BEN was formally founded in Ängsbacka and sought GEN Europe membership almost immediately. BEN was to facilitate the development of national ecovillage networks in the countries around the Baltic Sea and be more hands-on in exploring funding, organising training and exchanges than what GEN Europe could offer. And initially that is exactly what BEN did. In 2013 BEN activities were facilitated by "TESTS I", a one-year project funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers to strengthen ecovillage networking especially in countries with emerging national networks such as the Russian network. That same year, the young NGO BEN became an associate partner of the big EU Ecovillages project and associate partner of the REALS project, a Swedish-funded three-year project to strengthen ties between Russian, Belarusian and Swedish permaculture, transition and ecovillages. In 2014, a new one-year project "TESTS II" was funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers to

further strengthen the movement, not least in Latvia and Poland. This project also allowed BEN to pay GEN Europe for delivery of an advanced website.

After those busy project-driven years, during the last decade, BEN continued to function, to gather and to run projects that often finance the network to meet and plan more cooperation between members around the Baltic Sea.

I believe BEN and the Baltic Sea cooperation has been important for the creation and evolution of national networks in Russia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany and Ukraine. BEN has not shied away from hot potatoes either. Early on, the issue of how Anastasian ecovillages fit into GEN was taken on and more recently BEN has worked with the tensions between the Ukrainian and Russian ecovillage networks. Whether or not BEN will continue to fill a unique role is an open question. There is now an ongoing hot war in the region and the threat of larger European war is once again dividing the Baltic.



Baltic Ecovillage Network meeting

LINKS & RESOURCES:

<https://balticecovillage.net/>

<https://www.environmentandsociety.org/perspectives/2012/8/article/collaborative-research-examples-and-lessons-baltic-sea-project>

<https://www.ekvi.lt/en/innovation-transfer/lithuanian-institute-of-agrarian-economics-started-to-implement-international-project-ecovillages-for-sustainable-rural-development>

SEEN: THE EMERGENCE OF THE SOUTH EASTERN EUROPEAN ECOVILLAGE NETWORK



BY MANJA VRENKO
SUNNY HILL, SLOVENIA

IN THE FACE OF SHARED ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES, COMMUNITIES ACROSS SOUTH AND EASTERN EUROPE ARE SEEKING NEW WAYS TO LIVE SUSTAINABLY. THE SOUTH EASTERN EUROPEAN ECOVILLAGE NETWORK (SEEN) HAS EMERGED AS A CRUCIAL CONNECTOR AND CATALYST FOR THIS MOVEMENT, LINKING INDIVIDUALS AND PROJECTS WITH THE VISION OF A MORE REGENERATIVE FUTURE. ACTING AS A REGIONAL HUB FOR THE GLOBAL ECOVILLAGE NETWORK (GEN), SEEN IS DEDICATED TO SPREADING THE CORE VALUES OF ECOVILLAGE LIVING—FROM HORIZONTAL GOVERNANCE TO NATURE CARE—ACROSS THE WESTERN BALKANS AND BEYOND.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Manja Vrenko is a co-founder of Sunny Hill community in Slovenia and promotor of Ecovillage culture in Balkan region. She also serves as the General Coordinator of GEN Europe, and has been actively involved in the network for over a decade. She is an experienced permaculture practitioner, Community Incubator (CLIPS) facilitator, and educator.

WESTERN BALKANS & SEEN

The Western Balkans present a unique and promising opportunity for the ecovillage movement. The region's rural areas are often sparsely populated due to migration, leaving behind vast tracts of accessible land. This, combined with the often-unspoiled nature and rich biodiversity, creates an ideal setting for establishing new communities from the bottom up. The low population density and availability of land reduce many of the barriers to entry that exist in the more crowded parts of Europe, allowing for a more accessible path to self-sufficiency and community building. This potential is a key focus of

SEEN's work, which seeks to empower individuals to seize these opportunities and create new, regenerative models for living in the region.

The network's genesis is rooted in the "EU Networks for a Sustainable Future" Erasmus+ project - a collaborative effort initially involving partners from Croatia, Hungary, and Slovenia. This foundation allowed SEEN to foster regional cooperation, share invaluable knowledge, and build a resilient network that empowers local communities. By serving as a bridge between the well-established GEN Europe and the budding initiatives in Southeastern

Europe, SEEEN ensures that the rich history and practical tools developed by the global ecovillage movement are made accessible to a new generation of changemakers.

At the heart of the network's philosophy are the foundational pillars of ecovillage living: horizontal governance, where decisions are made collaboratively and all voices are heard; shared resources,

which moves communities away from individual consumption and toward a model of communal abundance; nature care, which emphasises permaculture, regenerative agriculture, and a deep connection to the land; and self-sufficiency, which builds local resilience in food, energy, and economy. These principles are not abstract ideals but are actively practiced and taught by the network's members.

THE ZELENO DOBA IN SERBIA AND NYM COMMUNITY IN HUNGARY

A powerful illustration of SEEEN's impact can be found in joint members: Zeleno Doba in Serbia and the Nym Community in Hungary.

Zeleno Doba (Green Age), a non-profit organisation, is dedicated to promoting permaculture, sustainable community development, and green education. They serve as a vibrant hub for workshops, events, and consulting, actively working to revitalize rural areas by teaching people how to live in harmony with nature. Their work extends to the practical application of ecovillage principles in various projects, from designing sustainable food gardens to leading educational programs on ecological literacy. Through these activities, Zeleno Doba not only shares the technical skills needed for a green transition but also fosters the social bonds and collaborative spirit essential for building thriving communities in Serbia.

The Nym Community in Hungary provides another compelling example of the network's practical application of ecovillage principles. As a project focused on learning and community building, Nym hosts workshops and gatherings centered on sustainable living practices. They emphasize a "learning-by-doing" approach, inviting people to participate in hands-on activities that demonstrate regenerative agriculture, eco-construction, and community decision-making. By creating an open and welcoming space for people to engage with these ideas, Nym acts as a critical node in the network, connecting aspiring ecovillagers with the knowledge and experience they need to start their own projects.



Workshop & Activities in Sunny Hill

BUILDING A MOVEMENT: TRAININGS AND GROWING MEMBERSHIP

The SEEEN network is a dynamic and growing community. Its activities extend beyond sharing information online; they include organising practical trainings, immersive events, and informative webinars. These events are vital for building a sense of collective identity and for transferring practical skills directly to participants. As a key follow-up activity of the “EU Networks for a Sustainable Future” project, the network successfully organised a CLIPS (Community Learning in Permaculture and Sustainability) training in Serbia, bringing together participants to deepen their understanding of ecovillage design and community building. By holding these gatherings, SEEEN is actively creating a culture of learning and collaboration, which is essential for the movement to flourish.

The network is composed of a diverse group of organisations and initiatives from across the region. Main members include:

- South Eastern European Ecovillage Network

(SEEEN): <https://seen.eu/>

- Croatian Permaculture: <https://hrvatska.permakultura.net/>
- Zeleno Doba: <https://zelenodoba.org/>
- Zelenput: <https://web.zelenput.hr/>
- Bosnian GreenWay association: <https://greenways.ba/>
- Sunny Hill: <https://soncnigrici-istra.eu/>

These members represent the vanguard of the ecovillage movement in Southeastern Europe, each contributing unique expertise and passion to the shared goal of sustainability. As the network continues to grow, it will undoubtedly serve as a key player in shaping the future of regenerative living in a region rich with cultural heritage and high social and ecological potential.

Our learning: “If you want to go far, go together”.

That is the essence of GEN and therefore SEEEN.



Workshop & Activities in Sunny Hill

SEEDS OF DIGITAL REGENERATION: THE ROLE OF ECOVILLAGES IN A NEW DIGITAL CULTURE



BY ANGEL MATILLA
GEN EUROPE IT MANAGER

“FOR ME, COMMUNITY MEANS RECLAIMING A FUNDAMENTAL PART OF HUMAN NATURE,
DESPITE THE INFLUENCE OF THE FLAWED, INDIVIDUALISTIC SYSTEM WE CURRENTLY LIVE IN.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Since 2017, Angel has been living in the community of Arterra Bizimodu and working in the GEN Office Team as IT Manager to help strengthen GEN Europe's digital sovereignty by means of promoting self-hosted free open source software (FOSS) throughout the network. He has been researching other ways of solving the polycrisis by living life in more regenerative, self-sufficient, resilient and communal ways.

When I joined the European Ecovillage Network as their IT Manager back in 2017, I suspected it was not going to be a regular IT job. But I had no idea how radically different it would be. In some ecovillages, such as Sieben Linden in Germany, residents consciously prohibit mobile phone signals within village boundaries and deliberately choose slow Internet connections¹. Lakabe in Spain has decided to remain an electromagnetic-free zone except during specific designated hours, due to health concerns. TheNature Community in Germany deployed self-hosted networks with different open-source services for their members. These are not random tech

choices, but represent deliberate experiments in digital living that challenged many preconceptions I had about our relationship with technology. What I have discovered through working with these communities and living in one is that there is no single recipe for how ecovillages decide to develop. They are living sustainability labs, where people experiment with alternative approaches and show the world that other ways are possible. However, they do have a common denominator: there is a clear understanding that the mainstream approach cannot sustain our society in the long term.

1. <https://siebenlinden.org/de/seminare/rund-um-den-aufenthalt/mobilfunk-und-internet/>



Sign on conscious use of technology

Thirty years ago, the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) emerged as a strategic response to what its founders saw as the destructive consequences of the dominant worldview. They envisioned a world of empowered citizens and communities, designing and implementing their own pathways to a sustainable/regenerative future, and building bridges of hope and international solidarity. Throughout this time, GEN has reached out to the world with messages of these alternative pathways, covering social, ecological, economic and cultural aspects in a holistic manner.

Ecovillages have honored the “eco” part of their name by implementing permaculture, food forests, community supported agriculture, renewable energies, water management techniques, and eco-building into their practice. On the economic side, there are plenty of examples of aiming for degrowth, using local currency, and implementing local exchange networks, time banks, gift economy and many other strategies. With regards to the social aspect, they have developed consent-based decision-making systems (e.g. Sociocracy), facilitated meetings, non-violent communication, and alternative edu-

cation systems. All of this while embracing a low impact lifestyle, fostering self-reflection and a feedback culture, engaging in conscious art, celebration, and spirituality.

Yet while all these innovations have been widely communicated and celebrated, one area has remained largely in the background: the digital culture. Just as there are mainstream approaches to food, energy, and economics that ecovillages actively challenge, there is also a dominant digital culture, but it is far less obvious what intentional communities are doing about it, and why it matters. Probably because both the concept and its implications are less tangible than e.g. a food forest.

Today’s mainstream digital media is characterized by endless growth models that ignore environmental costs¹, algorithms designed to isolate and polarize², and aim to capture rather than serve human attention³, and the concentration of our data in the hands of a few profit-driven corporations⁴. Even governments in Europe are slowly starting to consider digital dependency on US/Chinese platforms as a sovereignty issue⁵.

2. <https://www.iea.org/energy-system/buildings/data-centres-and-data-transmission-networks>
 3. <https://arxiv.org/html/2411.14652v1>
 4. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4872178
 5. <https://www.unite.ai/the-ai-monopoly-how-big-tech-controls-data-and-innovation/>

All these issues are not new, but rather the result of decades of profit-oriented technological and socioeconomic development. However, as of 2025, they have become quite difficult to ignore. On the one hand, the rise of artificial intelligence has dramatically modified many aspects of an increasing number of jobs and has reshaped our relationship with the Internet in just over two years of prominence⁷.

On the other hand, large social media emporiums have stopped concealing their true intentions as the political situation of the world becomes more unstable. The best example of this is the public support and funding of Elon Musk, owner of the Social Network X (formerly Twitter) to Donald Trump's campaign for the United States' presidency. There are studies that indicate Musk tampered with X's algorithm to boost his pro-Trump posts⁸. Similarly, Mark Zuckerberg (Meta's CEO) announced the ending of their fact-checking program⁹, thus enabling the spread of misinformation, and allowing their algorithm to decide what to promote through Meta's networks (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp).

Despite the grim reality of our current digital landscape, there are alternatives that people, also within the ecovillage movement, have been experimenting with for years. While these alternatives remain relatively unknown even within ecovillage networks, I believe the ecovillages are the perfect places to experiment and promote a new digital culture for the wider world.

Just as ecovillages often choose to produce their own food over depending on supermarkets and foster local trade over big internationals, rethinking digital activity equally falls within the ethos of ecovillages. This involves various elements:

1 Practicing digital degrowth and mindfulness:

Ecovillages can consciously choose to reduce their digital footprint and foster a more intentional relationship with technology. This means embracing practices like digital detoxes¹⁰, to establish clear usage patterns that prioritize real-world connection and making deliberate tool selections based

on their community values rather than convenience or mainstream trends.

2 Establishing digital infrastructure as a community resource: Rather than relying on external corporate services, ecovillages can build and govern their digital infrastructure as a shared commons. This involves deploying open-source, self-hosted services for communication, collaboration, and data storage, ensuring local control and data sovereignty.

3 Cultivating digital autonomy and resilience: Ecovillages can actively work to free themselves from digital dependencies. This includes building skills in repair culture for devices and networks, ensuring the longevity of their technology. It also means prioritizing offline knowledge preservation methods to guarantee access to vital information even during Internet outages, and fostering decentralised communication systems that resist single points of failure¹¹.

4 Fostering digital democracy and governance: Ecovillages can extend their established practices of participatory decision-making into the digital realm. This involves leveraging transparent decision-making tools and platforms that enable community-wide (or network-wide) input and agreement on digital policies, and collectively governing their digital spaces to ensure that technology truly serves the community's needs and values.

Our digital actions do shape the culture we decide to foster. The implications of our choices extend far beyond the screens of our devices. Whether you are an ecovillager or not, you too can become a part of this new paradigm. As Margaret Mead wisely observed: *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."*

<https://gen-europe.org/ecovillage-support/toolbox/>

6. <https://pppescp.com/2025/02/04/digital-sovereignty-in-europe-navigating-the-challenges-of-the-digital-era/>
7. <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2024/01/14/ai-will-transform-the-global-economy-lets-make-sure-it-benefits-humanity>
8. <https://www.euronews.com/next/2024/11/06/musks-x-sees-record-usage-during-us-election-yet-study-claims-he-boosted-the-algorithm>
9. <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/07/nx-s1-5251151/meta-fact-checking-mark-zuckerberg-trump>
10. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383471880_Digital_Detox_Experiences_of_Generation_Z
11. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2542660524000982>

GOVERNANCE IN COMMUNITIES: FROM CONSENSUS CIRCLES TO SOCIOCRATIC STRUCTURES



BY CAMILLA & STEFFEN
LONG-TIME SUPPORTERS OF GEN



“WHEN PEOPLE COME TOGETHER TO LIVE, WORK, AND SHAPE A SHARED FUTURE, TWO OF THE FIRST – AND OFTEN MOST CHALLENGING – QUESTIONS ARE: WHO WILL DECIDE? AND HOW WILL WE DECIDE? IN INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES, THESE ARE NOT JUST TECHNICAL MATTERS OF ORGANISATION. THEY TOUCH THE VERY HEART OF HOW WE WANT TO LIVE TOGETHER, HOW WE BALANCE INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM WITH COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY, AND HOW WE BUILD TRUST. IN THE GLOBAL ECOVILLAGE NETWORK (GEN), THESE QUESTIONS HAVE SHAPED COMMUNITY LIFE FROM THE BEGINNING.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steffen has been living in the gASTWERKe community near Kassel (Germany) for over 15 years – long enough to witness how a group of “strangers with big ideas” can become part of a village’s heart-beat. As a sociocracy trainer, networker, and long-time GEN activist, he is passionate about bridging the gap between intentional communities and the wider society.

Camilla Nielsen-Englyst lives in the Ecovillage Hallingelille in Denmark, which she was co-founding in 2005. She is engaged in the Danish Ecovillage Network as a project manager and in GEN Europe in different working groups. Her professional engagement involves community building in Bærebo. To make it easier for new startup groups forms her drive.

In its early years, many communities embraced consensus as the gold standard of grassroots democracy. The intention was clear: if we share land, food, and sometimes even income, every voice should have equal weight. Consensus means that all genuinely agree to a decision, not just by remaining silent but through a shared conviction that it is the best choice available. When it works, consensus can be a deeply unifying moment, treasured

by those involved. Yet in practice, it often proved messy. Many communities began with long plenary meetings where anyone present could weigh in, but “agreement” could range from wholehearted support to quiet resignation, and decision-making processes were rarely well-defined.

This lack of clarity caused difficulties. Should the whole community decide whether to cut down a tree, or only the garden team? Who should choose

the new washing machine? Without clear mandates, decisions piled up, meetings grew overloaded, and frustration mounted. Over time, some members withdrew from plenaries, only to raise objections later or disengage entirely. Another challenge was the sheer volume of decisions, from everyday matters to strategic questions. The ideal of involving everyone in everything often led to exhaustion.

ECOVILLAGES AS LIVING LABORATORIES, ALSO IN DECISION-MAKING: INTRODUCING SOCIOCRACY

Around 10 to 15 years ago, curiosity about Sociocracy began spreading in the ecovillage world. First adopted by a few pioneering communities, it is now a valued tool across the GEN network, from local groups to national and even international levels. Sociocracy combines equality and inclusiveness with a clear and functional structure. Rather than making all decisions in one large group, it works through smaller, interconnected circles, each responsible for specific domains. These circles are “double-linked,” ensuring information and consent flow in both directions. Decisions are made by consent: a proposal moves forward as long as there is no reasoned and paramount objection. Objections are considered gifts, helping to improve proposals and prevent harm. The guiding question shifts from “Do you like it?” to “Is it good enough for now, safe enough to try?” – a phrase that has liberated many groups from perfectionism and enabled them to experiment, learn, and adapt. And by distributing authority, Sociocracy reduces overload in plenary meetings and allows people to focus on what matters most to them, while keeping decision-making transparent and accountable.

I (Steffen) experienced this in the gASTWERKe community. At some point, I felt relief at not being asked for my opinion on every matter – whether we should install a new photovoltaic system or what the next community car should look like. As a group,

Even committed members began longing for a clearer way to delegate without losing equality.

Over the years, many realised that goodwill and open meetings are not enough. A resilient group also needs clarity about who decides what, a transparent process, and a structure that supports both participation and efficiency.

we had already decided that new vehicles would be electric rather than combustion engines. Beyond that, I was happy to let the mobility group, which also manages our e-bikes and overall fleet, choose the specific model. At the same time, I know I can join any project or working group that interests me. That combination of clarity, trust, and open doors has been a real gift.

I (Camilla) have been part of Hallingelille’s gradual shift to Sociocracy over the past ten years – a journey that has truly transformed how we make decisions. We did not adopt it overnight but wove sociocratic principles into our existing consensus-based structures. At first, there were mixed feelings. Some worried when a final decision at a common meeting could differ from the original proposal, which often came down to an issue of trust – and letting go of the need to control every detail. Now, our common meetings have fewer agenda points and sometimes also fewer participants, which is actually positive. It does not mean nothing is happening; rather, most decisions are made in the circles closest to the work, by those who understand the nuances and have the mandate to act. Over time, meetings became lighter, smoother, and more respectful of everyone’s time and energy. It took patience and a willingness to grow together, but now we not only “get it” – we embrace it.

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIOCRACY

The impact of Sociocracy reaches far beyond ecovillages. Today it is applied in schools, cooperatives, grassroots networks, municipalities, and businesses, often introduced by people who first encountered it in a community setting. From our perspective, a thriving community – whether using Sociocracy, consensus, or a blend – needs three essentials: a shared vision that gives meaning and direction, a healthy social fabric built on trust and constructive communication, and a functional decision-making structure suited to the group's size, culture, and purpose. Neglect one, and the whole project can falter.

Communities in the GEN network have pioneered not only ecological innovations like permaculture, renewable energy, and natural building, but also social tools. Nonviolent Communication, Dragon Dreaming, and the CLIPS model for newcomers are integral parts of our communities, and are now spreading into wider society. These strengthen the social dimension of sustainability, making collaboration more resilient and relationships more fulfilling.

Thirty years into GEN's journey, governance in communities has evolved from informal plenaries to refined participatory systems. The tools have

changed, but the core principle remains: decisions about our shared lives are made with respect, transparency, and the belief that every voice matters. Whether through the deep unity of consensus or the structured flow of Sociocracy, what matters most is that the process reflects our values and supports our vision.

Perhaps most exciting is that by refining these models in our own communities, we are contributing to governance cultures of the future – cultures that may one day become the norm far beyond our ecovillage borders.

Camilla: *"Community is where connection turns into collective action".*

Steffen: *"Community is when I can take part in the decision-making, but do not have to, knowing that I am not alone".*

LINKS & RESOURCES:

www.procorde.net

<https://www.sociocracyforall.org/>

<https://soziokratiezentrum.de/>



Sociocracy working group

GENOA: AN EMERGENT JOURNEY



BY THAO NGO
GENOA NETWORKING COORDINATOR

SOMETIMES, THE PATH INTO A COMMUNITY BEGINS WITH A LONGING—
FOR BELONGING, FOR PURPOSE, OR FOR ALIGNMENT. THAT'S HOW I
FOUND MYSELF STEPPING INTO THE GENOA FAMILY.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thao Ngo (Kin) is an environmental educator and Deep Ecology practitioner living in the Project Awe community, Vietnam. She started volunteering for the youth network NextGENOA in 2016 and later joined the team at GEN Oceania & Asia (GENOA) in 2020. Since then, she has been serving as the network weaver and coordinating education projects related to community, ecovillage and resilience. Kin is also a member of GEN's Network Steward Circle.

JOINING GENOA

The first time I heard about ecovillages and Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) was in the Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) course at Gaia Ashram in 2016. Being somewhat burnt out and disillusioned with my work in environmental education at the time, I found the concepts of ecovillages fascinating. I began my journey with the ecovillage network as a member of the NextGENOA core team – the youth body of the Oceania & Asia region. In 2020, after attending the European Ecovillage Gathering in Italy, I accepted the offer to join the Office Team of GENOA (Global Ecovillage Network Oceania & Asia) working alongside Trudy Juriansz and Dhanushka Jayanetti.

Little did I know that this first step would lead me

to become part of a global team navigating a rapidly changing world. I joined the GENOA team during the Covid-19 outbreak, which forced GENOA to move the planned in-person network gathering to an online format. This was the first time I had the chance to help organise such a big and rich online event. The gathering, with a powerful name: Restore & Re-story – Coming Home to Ourselves, Our Communities and Mother Earth, brought together over 300 participants through 11 sessions focused on healing, regeneration, and community connection. Co-created with regional and global partners, the event blended somatic practices, reflective dialogues, and cultural celebrations to uplift body, mind, and spirit. It fostered deep exchange and

collaboration among regenerative communities, opening new paths for ongoing co-creation in the ecovillage movement across Oceania and Asia. I was amazed to meet more than 60 people, including core team members, workshop facilitators, speakers, and volunteers from different countries in the region who contributed wholeheartedly and freely to the program. Imagine—before all the fancy high-tech tools on Zoom that now support live perfor-

mance—we had people playing guitar from South Korea and Vietnam, traditional dance from Bangladesh, and a live band playing from the Philippines. The technology had limits, but it surely helped bring us together across space and time. I still remember the warmth in my heart when watching these genuine, blissful offerings, streamed through a patchy Zoom line. It was imperfect—and yet, it was exactly what we needed to feel close across borders.

FACING CHALLENGES

With the withdrawal of our main funding source - the Gaia Trust Fund - in 2022, it became challenging for GENOA to hold in-person gatherings. To keep our online circles alive, we launched a wide array of programs: Community Calls (initially bimonthly, now quarterly), the REGEN-Nations course, Ecovillage Talks, as well as online meetups with national networks and hubs. These offerings have not only kept the network connected, but also nurtured a shared sense of purpose in a time of isolation. Our online offerings are rich and diverse, featuring network members from different countries and touching on topics of the four dimensions of regeneration (social, cultural, economic, and ecological). However, as the world becomes increasingly virtual, sustaining attention and engagement for online activities has become more challenging. At the same time, most ecovillagers want to spend less time in the virtual world and more time in the physical space with communities doing hands-on work. We are now exploring ways to bring back in-person trainings and events, including supporting training courses like Ecovillage Design Education in the region and gatherings like Dances of Universal Peace events in Asia.

Being part of the operations team in GENOA, which carries out the basic functions of networking, organising events, responding to individuals and communities interested in ecovillages, and promoting the ecovillage work and events in the region, I experienced firsthand the complicated relationship between GENOA as a network of communities and GENOA as the team or organisation that supports the network. The network of communities is always there - vast, diverse, and rooted in on-the-ground community projects. The fact is, there is so much regenerative work being done at the grassroots level throughout the region. Ecovillages in our region are not only intentional communities—many of them are traditional or local villages working with NGOs. As Oceania & Asia is a big region with many different cultures and languages, using English as our main communication tool has certainly prevented many communities from engaging with the network. To connect with that vast network out there, we dreamt of many different projects and activities, various pathways to connect and diverse resources to mobilize. In reality, only a small fraction of the dream is being manifested since we are a small team with limited funding working to support the network.

GENOA Meeting



WHAT GENOA MEANS

I believe the presence of GENOA—and GEN, the Global Ecovillage Network at large - is vital for communities, intentional or traditional, who often work in silo across vast distances, diverse cultures, and economic conditions while sharing the vision of regeneration in polycrisis. It offers visibility, shared learning, inspiration, connection and a sense of belonging in a wider movement. Through navigating financial constraints, online fatigue, and regional diversity, we have learned that flexibility, relational trust, and grassroots ownership are critical. GENOA is not just a structure—it is a living, evolving ecosystem that thrives through co-sensing, co-creation and deep listening.

There are questions I keep holding for myself:

- *How much of our work is really representing the true movement on the ground?*
- *How can we connect more to the local movement and showcase their work, as well as support them, given the complexity in the region?*
- *How can we support communities to build resilience for the uncertainties ahead?*
- *How could a volunteer-based organization maintain its financial sustainability while*

holding the energy needed to carry out all the beautiful work guided by our vision?

Perhaps the work of GENOA is not to represent everyone or be everything we aspire it to be, but rather to become a bridge—between languages, between cultures, between worlds, between the vision and the village. And maybe, in holding that bridge, we also find our way home, to each other and to our true purpose.

Looking back, I realise how deeply the journey with GENOA has shaped me—not just professionally, but personally. I learned to listen to emergence, to collaborate across cultures, to hold space for ambiguity and difference. I earned so much knowledge, inspiration and courage to start my own community journey with Project Awe in Vietnam. Through GENOA, I found not only a network but a mirror—a place where my values, doubts, and aspirations were reflected and challenged in equal measure. It is this belief in the network—and a deep connection to Self (not just myself, but the social self and the ecological self) —that continues to nurture me on this path.



GENOA After-Meeting

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FRACTALS OF CARE: GEN's 30 YEARS OF CONNECTION AND HEALING



BY MARGARITA O. ZETHELIUS
EX-BOARD MEMBER OF GEN INT, CASA AND GAIA

TO ME, GEN IS A LIVING FAMILY AND A GLOBAL NETWORK OF FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES, DREAMERS, DOERS AND CELEBRATORS. IT IS A NETWORK OF COMMUNITIES THAT INSPIRE HOPE AND STRENGTH. IT TEACHES US THAT AVOIDING CONFLICT DOES NOT SOLVE IT AND INVITES US TO FACE THE CHALLENGES, "MISTAKES", PAIN AND DESPAIR, AND TO FIND STRENGTH IN THEM TO CONTINUE THE PATH OF TRANSFORMATION, HEALING AND JOY.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Margarita O. Zethelius is an activist for life. She creates places, programmes and experiences that promote care for Mother Earth and human wellbeing. She is a biologist with an MSc in Conservation and Rural Development. She has served on the boards of GEN-International, CASA and GAIA Education. She is the founder of the Falun Natural Reserve, the UBUNTU Centre, and the NGO Alianzas para la Abundancia. She is currently one of the CASA Latina representatives in the GEN Network Steward Circle.

WHAT IS ALIVE?

When you close your eyes, breathe and feel connected to the beautiful, colourful energy and lights surrounding the planet, you sense the vitality of GEN.

When you light a fire as part of a community, attune to other fires around the planet and sense other communities gathering around fires to sing, talk and plan ways to regenerate the land, support ecosystems and help people to heal, you sense GEN's vitality.

When you consider the current opportunities for

young people, many of whom want to travel, learn more about the world and have different experiences, and you think of all your friends in different communities around the world doing amazing and meaningful things like tending gardens, working the land, respecting the weather, soil, fire and air, and working in conflict management and recovering ancestral wisdom, you realise that the opportunities for young people are immense, meaningful and beautiful.

When you watch mainstream news (which I rarely do) and feel despair about the state of the world, you are filled with hope by the knowledge that there are thousands of people around the world in communities, projects and organisations who work daily

to heal themselves and their relationships, reconnect with Mother Earth and learn from landscapes, rivers, lakes, forests and coral reefs. They are also creating new enterprises that generate great and meaningful economic flows of abundance.

PART OF MY STORY

In 2011, I won a scholarship to take part in the Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) course at the Sieben Linden community in Germany. I was aware of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN)'s existence because of my relationship with the Colombian network of ecovillages. However, it was far removed from my world. However, the work of Kosha Joubert and other supporters created opportunities for people like me all around the world, especially in the Global South, to attend these amazing training programmes. Spending a month with people from countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Norway, Spain and Germany, doing such profound work, was an opportunity I had never had before. My life will never be the same, as I have gained knowledge, depth and meaningful friendships that connect us through local experiences and the certainty of a global family.

Many stories could be told from there, of long days and nights spent working with Kosha Joubert, Jane Rasbash and Steffen Emrich. Sonita, Sarah, Macaco, Robert, Katie, Lua, Trudy, Ethan, Clio, Konkankoh, Mugove, Tim, Rob, May, Visolela, Michiyon, Albert, Robin, Anna, Abbie, Rodrigo, Eva, Taisa, Daniel, Laura, Amena and Yuluka, among many others. As I start to recap, I can see in my head images of so many moments and places, and of so many amazing people doing their best. I can also see other beings connecting and co-creating with us as we learn to make space for others and give voice to

those who have none.

I feel gratitude for these beings that we are and for the moments we have shared: dreaming, planning, doing, discussing and celebrating. My heart is full of joy. However, I also feel a sense of sadness as I believe we could have achieved so much more. Nevertheless, I am at peace, knowing that we did the best we could with the tools available to us at the time, and that new opportunities lie ahead. Each of these people, along with many more, brought their communities, teams, experiences, knowledge and love to GEN.

For many years, in pursuit of its mission to serve as a bridge, GEN has participated in several events, including the COPs on climate change. I have had the opportunity to support several of these events, showcasing the efforts of various grassroots communities around the world to care for Mother Earth. As GEN has become more 'professional', we have been able to establish metrics and translate our stories into indicators that help us 'tell the story' in terms of public policy, enabling us to scale up and strengthen the grassroots work carried out by communities every day.

The Ecovillage Development Programme is a great example of our potential and networking strength, waiting to be born when the time is right. Projects such as "Keystone Communities and Resilience" demonstrate this strength.

<https://ecovillage.org/keystone-communities/>

FRACTAL CARE, CONNECTION AND HEALING

In my experience of GEN, people have come and gone, some returning closer, while others concentrate on their land. Some regional networks grow stronger while others pause, and people and groups create new projects. It feels like a dance of co-cre-

ation. Grief for missing key moments or losing the support of pillars of the community turns into compassion, gratitude and trust in being channels of the great spirit's love.

GEN RESEARCH: BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE



BY TAISA MATTOS
EX-GEN RESEARCH COORDINATOR

“THE GLOBAL ECOVILLAGE NETWORK (GEN) HAS LONG STOOD AS A VIBRANT ECOSYSTEM OF GRASSROOTS INNOVATION, MODELLING REGENERATIVE LIFESTYLES AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE. YET, FOR MANY YEARS, RESEARCH INTO ECOVILLAGES REMAINED FRAGMENTED—UNDERTAKEN BY SCATTERED INDIVIDUALS WITHOUT SHARED FRAMEWORKS, ETHICAL GUIDELINES, OR PLATFORMS FOR EXCHANGE. THE FORMATION OF THE GEN RESEARCH WORKING GROUP MARKED A TURNING POINT: A GROWING NETWORK TO CO-CREATE KNOWLEDGE WITH COMMUNITIES, NOT JUST ABOUT THEM.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Taisa Mattos coordinated GEN International's Education and Research efforts for many years, bringing expertise in ecovillage design education and transformative learning. She currently serves as the Face-to-Face Programmes Coordinator and Gaia Schools Coordinator at Gaia Education.

Anne-Kathrin Schwab is a researcher and facilitator focused on holistic sustainability, community-based innovation, and resilience.

With contributions from Rebeca Roysen, Ana Margarida Esteves and Daniel Greenberg.

ROOTS OF GEN RESEARCH

The roots of GEN Research go back to 2014, when a group of researchers and practitioners—invited by Kosha Joubert, then Executive Director of the newly formed GEN International (GEN-I)—started to gather online with a shared aim: to make ecovillage research more connected, collaborative, and impactful. Activities like the Research Poster Exhibition and Workshops at GEN+20 Conference in Findhorn (2015) gave the initiative visibility.

Foundational tools soon followed: a mailing list, a shared bibliography, a code of conduct, and regular online meetings to build community and clarify ethical procedures in ecovillage research. A key priority was to bridge the cultural and epistemic gap between academic researchers and ecovillage practitioners—translating different “languages”, aligning expectations, and ensuring mutual benefit.

Momentum increased in 2019, when Taisa Matos joined GEN International as Education and Research Coordinator. Alongside Anne-Kathrin Schwab and Rebeca Roysen, she expanded GEN Research into a vibrant community of practice. The GEN Research Colloquium Series, supported by

institutions like the University of Vechta, became a space where researchers and practitioners could exchange ideas on topics such as social innovation, degrowth, transformative education and community resilience. The Ecovillage Research Circle supported early-career scholars and co-learning.

KEY MILESTONES INCLUDED:

- EN Research presentations and workshops at international conferences such as the ICSA and the GEN Europe Gatherings.
- Strategic partnerships with universities including ISCTE-IUL, the University of Basel, and the University of Vechta.
- Contributions from leading researchers and experienced practitioners, including: Iris Kunze, Daniel Christian Wahl, Daniel Greenberg, Flor Avelino, Jan Martin Bang, Joshua Lockyer, Karen Litfin, and Ana Margarida Esteves, among others.
- The launch of national and regional research groups and communities of practice.

REGEN4ALL PROJECT

A significant leap forward was the ReGEN4All (Regenerative Communities for All) project, funded by Erasmus+, which helped to build a digital infrastructure: a shared research library, a protocol for ethical research collaboration, a researcher-community matchmaking pilot, and active communities of practice at both national and international levels. These efforts laid the foundation for a robust and accessible knowledge commons on ecovillage research.

Led by GEN Europe and co-created with ISCTE-IUL, LOES (the Danish Ecovillage Network) and ECOLISE, the ReGEN4All project exemplifies the integrative ethos of GEN-Research. It provides a digital platform where researchers can access resources, communities can articulate their research

needs, and both groups can collaborate. By supporting national research nodes and training events, ReGEN4All helped translate theory into action—while ensuring research is shaped by the lived experience of ‘ecovillagers’ themselves.

Ecovillages are more than sites of sustainable living. They are real-world laboratories of transformation—demonstrating how regenerative practices can be integrated across the social, ecological, economic, and cultural dimensions of sustainability. Unlike abstract models, ecovillages embody systems thinking in daily life. Their long-term, place-based nature offers insight into governance, resilience, and learning over time. Many ecovillage researchers are also practitioners, enabling deeply participatory, transdisciplinary inquiry.

REGEN4ALL Meet-up



WHAT MAKES ECOVILLAGES SUCH VALUABLE CASE STUDIES?

- Systems thinking in action: They integrate multiple dimensions of sustainability, highlighting their interdependencies.
- Long-term, place-based innovation: Decades of development provide data on regenerative practices and community dynamics.
- Embodied knowledge: Knowledge is gained through daily life, decision-making, and relationships, offering a grounded perspective.
- Community-led transitions: They are examples of bottom-up change, demonstrating resilient, low-impact lifestyles outside dominant paradigms.
- Diversity of contexts: Their wide variation provides rich material for comparative studies and theory building.
- Bridging theory and practice: The blurring of researcher and practitioner roles enables participatory and holistic methodologies.

WHERE WE ARE NOW—AND WHAT'S NEXT

As the climate, biodiversity, and social justice crises intensify, ecovillages show what is possible. They offer grounded, replicable models for low-carbon, low-consumption and high-quality living that transcends traditional disciplinary silos. This makes them essential to research on post-growth futures, commons-based economies, sustainable transitions and social innovation.

Eleven years in, GEN Research is blossoming. More students and scholars are choosing ecovillages as case studies. Research features in academic

publications, classrooms, and policy dialogues. The ReGEN4All platform and E-Community Library are active resources. Communities of Practice continue to emerge—locally, nationally, and globally. And the vision of a dedicated Ecovillage Research Institute is taking shape.

GEN Research shows what becomes possible when knowledge is co-created with care, commitment, and reciprocity. The work is not just about studying change—it's about living it.

LINKS & RESOURCES:

GEN Research page: <https://ecovillage.org/our-work/research-ecovillages/>

ReGEN4All Project Resources: E-community Research Platform and E-Community Library | Zotero

GEN Research exhibition



GAIA FOUNDATION: DESIGNING REGENERATIVE CULTURES TOGETHER



BY SALLY BOGALE
CEO OF GAIA EDUCATION

“I HAVE SEEN THAT COMMUNITY AND A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LAND CAN ENRICH HUMAN LIFE BEYOND ALL COMPARISON WITH MATERIAL WEALTH OR TECHNOLOGICAL SOPHISTICATION. I HAVE LEARNED THAT ANOTHER WAY IS POSSIBLE.”

(HELENA NORBERG-HODGE, 2017 - MEMBER OF THE ORIGINAL GEESE)

“IMAGINE A WORLD WHERE EDUCATION TAKES PLACE IN OPEN AIR CLASSROOMS ... WHERE ALL INVOLVED, NO MATTER OUR AGE OR BACKGROUND, ARE COLLABORATORS IN ECOLOGICAL IMAGINATION.... WHERE A THOROUGH RECKONING OF THE STATE OF THE PLANET IS MET WITH LOCALLY-FOCUSED, COMMUNITY-LED TRANSFORMATIONS... WHERE WE DESIGN ‘AS NATURE’, AND WORK AT THE EDGES OF BIO-CULTURAL-SPATIAL SYSTEMS TO CREATE UNIQUE, THRIVING HUMAN CULTURES NESTLING IN HARMONY WITH OUR NATURAL WORLD.”

(MAY EAST, 2025 - FORMER CEO OF GAIA EDUCATION)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sally Bogale has been with Gaia Education since 2016 and Co-CEO for 3 years. She has a background in international project development, management, and fundraising. She is a member of the Ecovillage Findhorn community in Scotland, where she lives with her husband, daughter, and dog.

OUR ROOTS

From the creation of the Global Ecovillage Network in 1995, a pioneering group of international sustainability educators known as GEESE- Global Ecovillage Educators for a Sustainable Earth - began distilling its learning into a new ‘4-Dimensional Whole Systems Design Framework’. This would support communities to design ways to thrive within planetary boundaries by enhancing their Social, Economic, Ecological, and Cultural/Worldview wellbeing

in an integrated, mutually reinforcing way.

Gaia Education was created in 2005 as an educational vehicle for this framework, reaching out beyond ecovillages to any global context, whether urban slums, traditional villages, urban centres or wealthy suburbia. To-date, we and 200 partners have run over 380 courses and projects across 111 sites, reaching more than 33,000 people from 55 countries.

ECOVILLAGE DESIGN

Our flagship programme is the 'Ecovillage Design Education (EDE)' - a four-week immersive, residential experience facilitated by certified partners. Participants draw inspiration from pioneers across the world, whilst putting their own local needs, priorities, and indigenous knowledge front and centre as they create 4D project designs.

The EDE has proven so transformational that Gaia Education won the Luxembourg Peace Prize for Outstanding Peace Education in 2023.

Why so transformational?

It is the Worldview Dimension. Most of us are in a state of disconnect and numbness due to immersion in a degenerative and extractive global system that is causing multiple planetary crises. If we do not reconnect, move through our pain, and act from a deeper level of empathy and love, any efforts to tackle social, economic, or ecological challenges will exacerbate

the problem.

Participants in the EDE are supported to reconnect to themselves, each other, and to the natural world in whatever form suits their geo-socio-cultural background. Approaches include anything from meditation, to nature immersion or artistic practice, but the effect is similar - changemakers are born, and they have a toolkit for action.

A striking example of an EDE changemaker is Om Sunisa in Thailand. Inspired by EDEs and Wongsanit Ashram, she co-founded Gaia Ashram in 2012. In this learning centre and permaculture farm, 'people come to live holistically and realise the interconnectedness and oneness of all living and nonliving beings'. The Ashram regularly hosts EDEs and other training courses rooted in permaculture, deep ecology and yoga.

BEYOND THE EDE

Over the years, the EDE format has been adapted and extended for a wide array of learning needs. These include mini EDEs, Trainings of Trainers (mindful facilitation intensives), and an 'SDG' design workshop with flashcards that bring the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals under the 4D lens.

Gaia Jovem in Brazil supports teenagers and young adults to use the 4D process to map out Life Project Designs, hold festivals, and create self-directed learning paths within a free university, and our Gaia Schools network is blossoming, with, for example, Gaia Kool in Estonia celebrating its 11th anniversary here in 2025.

Certified partners run online EDEs for those unable to attend in person, or they have the option to follow our Design for Sustainability (GEDS) programme, which is a year-long digital journey through 4D Design with skilled facilitators.

Beyond the 4D framework, our community increasingly benefits from online course partnerships with pioneers in the field of regeneration, localisation, and indigenous knowledge. Daniel Wahl, Bill Sharpe, Lyla June Johnston, Jeremy Lent, May East, Connection First, and the Bioregional Learning Alliance, are just some examples.

EDE Nile, Kenya 2023



Alongside paid programmes, Gaia Education continually fundraises to support network members who otherwise could not participate.

Through statutory funding, partners in areas of extreme climate disruption and ecosystem breakdown have extended EDEs over multiple years to help communities adapt to and mitigate these challenges and model regenerative approaches. For example, in 2013, Bangladesh Association for Sustainable Development, funded by the Scottish Government, supported 2,000 villagers - 75% female - from 42 coastal communities facing rising sea levels, soil salinisation, and extreme weather, to improve habitation resilience, convert to regenerative agriculture, and set up 27 cooperatives, increasing household income by 23%.

With EU funding support, our Belgian entity has formed many partnerships with NGOs, universities, and community networks to create free, youth-focused programmes. In our four-year Horizon-funded

'Curiosoil' project galvanising citizen action to replenish soils, Gaia Education is co-developing Soil Curiosity Kits and MOOCs for primary, secondary, and head teachers. In our Erasmus+-funded 'ECO-Systems', 'InPACT', and 'Regeneration 2.0' projects, we and our partners are creating free handbooks, digital platforms and courses, exchange programmes and in-person trainings, so youth workers and young people can learn regenerative design, connect with eco-communities, and lead community change.

Not bad for 20 years of work, and this is just the beginning. In the words of Gaia Education's advisor, Daniel Christian Wahl (2022),

"I firmly believe that we are not destined to be a destructive species. I know we have the potential of healing the Earth and her people by co-creating diverse regenerative cultures everywhere."

Gaia Education will not rest till we get there.

LINKS & RESOURCES:

Website: www.gaiaeducation.org

Email: info@gaiaeducation.org

More information on our Ecovillage Design Education programmes:
<https://www.gaiaeducation.org/ede-ecovillage-design-education>



GAIA Youth