Ecovillages
- an integral approach to contemporary living
An **ecovillage** is a **human-scale full-featured settlement** in which human activities are **harmlessly integrated** into the natural world in a way that is **supportive of healthy human development** and can be **successfully continued** into the indefinite future.

- Robert Gilman, 1991
Precursors

Movements

Conservation Movement
1800s/1900s - John James Audubon, John Muir

Environmental Movement
1960s and 70s - Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, 1962

Ecological Movement
1970s-present - Deep Ecology/Ecopsychology
*Exploring the human relationship with Earth*
*The consequences of no separation (Earth/human health)*

Sustainability

Whole systems approach
Economic, social and ecological spheres interwoven

Ecological Design
Developing and re-discovering whole systems approaches to design - e.g. passive heating/cooling, natural ventilation, renewable energy, local/less processed materials
Precursors

Traditional Villages

Most traditional villages around the world share important features with ecovillages:

Limited in size, typically less than 500 residents.

Clustered housing.

Locally oriented - use of local materials and resources.

Tight social fabric.

Intergenerational.

Economically, socially and ecologically sustainable.
Precursors

Cohousing

History
Movement began in Denmark, 1968. Over 150 now in Denmark, over 55 now in U.S. All built by groups of people who created a joint process and defined how they wanted to live.

Design
Individual homes and community house. No cars allowed in settlement. Shared pathways. Some built around a community house, some in clusters, others along a connecting road.

Houses
Smaller than typical houses. Often combined dining w/ small kitchen. One to one-and-a-half stories.
Precursors

Cohousing cont.

Community House
Large enough dining area to seat everyone
Industrial/commercial kitchen
Kids rooms, game rooms, music rooms, TV rooms, music rooms, laundry rooms, offices etc.

Landscape
Shared gardens, chickens, ducks, other animals
Play areas, outdoor dining areas
Protected natural areas

Shared Resources
Alternative Energy
Cars, tools, hot tubs, etc.
History of Ecovillages

Solheimar, 1930 to present, Iceland

Considered the first contemporary intentional community with a strong ecological focus.

Funded in 1930 by Sesselja Sigmundsdottir, based on the ideas of Rudolf Steiner.

Seek social renewal through community building with children, youth and adults who have developmental disabilities (Camphill type community).

Ecological Center showcase green technology, including use of geothermal heat for year round food production.
History of Ecovillages

Findhorn, 1960s to present, Scotland

Funded in 1962 by Peter and Eileen Caddy and Dorothy Maclean.

Grew to 300 members in the 70s and 80s.

Today, several hundred members and thousands of visitors annually. Organize learning opportunities and conferences on a wide range of topics related to ecology, community, arts and spirituality.

Hosted the first global ecovillage conference in 1996.
History of Ecovillages

The Farm, Tennesee, 1971 to present

Funded in 1971 by 320 San Francisco hippies.

Based on nonviolence and respect for the Earth.

Changed in 1983 from income sharing to individual economies. Is now a cooperative.

Currently 250 residents.

Several businesses, including a guest house, cafe, video production, book publishing, midwifery, food products and crafts.
History of Ecovillages

Crystal Waters, 1985 to present, Australia

Founded in 1985 on permaculture principles.

130 residents, 35 of which are original members.

Residents are from 18 countries, and the age range from a few months old to early 90s.

Income is provided through a large number of small businesses, food production and permaculture training.
History of Ecovillages

Global Ecovillage Network

The term Ecovillage was first used in 1991 by Robert Gilman in the article “The Ecovillage Challenge” (In Context).

Findhorn hosted the initial Ecovillage conference in 1995 where the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) was formed, sponsored by Gaia Trust in Denmark.

GEN includes four major regions: Europe with 20 national networks, North and South America with 9 bioregional networks, and growing networks in Asia and Africa.

Depending on the definition, there is between 4000 and 15,000 intentional communities globally who has a significant ecological component and may be considered an ecovillage. These include urban and rural communities, and most have between 30 and 400 residents.

The largest GEN network is the Sarvodaya movement, which includes about 12,000 traditional villages.
Ecovillage Dimensions

There is a wide range of ecovillage types. Some of the various dimensions include...

**Urban vs. Rural**
- downtown to removed

**Small vs. Large Scale**
- a few households to several hundred residents

**Close to Mainstream vs. Experimental**
- relatively conventional lifestyle
- far from mainstream socially, ecologically and/or spiritually

**Light vs. Dark Green**
- intentions of moving towards sustainability
- leading edge technology and lifestyle

**New vs. Adaptive Reuse vs. Transformation**
- built from scratch
- adaptive reuse of existing buildings
- transformation of existing neighborhoods
Typology

Human Reasons

Holistic View
Sustainable human settlement
  Economical, social and ecological

Community
Push
  Social alienation and fragmentation

Pull
Social support
  Emotional
    - human connections, wide age range.
  Instrumental
    - sharing resources: facilities, tools, transportation, vehicles, food, child/elder/sick care.
  Informational
    - sharing of information and knowledge, informally and formally through educational events.
Typology

Human Reasons cont.

Ecology

Push
Ecological deterioration
   World’s population consuming resources faster than the Earth can regenerate

Pull
Live more aligned with Earth and future generations

Spiritual

Connections to:
   Self, community, Earth, past and future generations

Personal growth and wholeness

Conscious evolution
   Explore and model a new way of life
Typology

Spatial Configuration

**Clustered**
High density housing
Leaves green space for recreation, food production and wilderness

**Shared vs. private**
Balance between shared and private space
  - Easy access to each
Co-housing patterns
  - Central shared facilities
  - Peripheral dwelling spaces

**Design for community connections**
Increase chance encounters through configuration and paths.
Residents meet on the way to parking area, shared facilities, etc.
Front porches.
Peripheral parking, core is pedestrian only.
Front doors face each other.
Threads

Related Views

**Life Centered Orientation**
Decisions and design are made on the basis of what serves life (for residents, the larger community, ecosystems and future generations).

**Systems View**
The Earth as one integrated system.
The health and well-being of the Earth, society and individuals are inter-related.

**Integral**
Integrating insights from several movements: ecology, social justice, peace, holistic health and consciousness.

**Seven Generations/Deep Time**
Decisions take into account future generations.
Threads

Related Views

Egalitarian
Flat/ter social structure.
Participatory democracy.
Consensus decision making.

Ecopsychology/sociobiology
Humans evolved as a social species and in relatively small social groups, so we tend to function optimally in similar settings. Social groups should be small enough for familiarity, and large enough for variation (estimated maximum size is about 500).

Ecological design and Permaculture
Care for the Earth.
Care for the people.
Return the surplus.

Open Source/Shared Knowledge
Collaborative development
Freely shared information/knowledge
Examples: open source software (Linux, mozilla, firefox, open office), Wikipedia (open source encyclopedia), cars, building designs, etc.
Threads

Community

Ownership & Money
Combinations of cooperative and individual ownership
Typically private economy but some do income sharing
Often interns

Process
Often resident owned and developed

Design
Collaborative design
  Whole founding group involvement
  Design committees

Building Community
Decision making process
  Consensus or modified consensus
Conflict resolution skills and methods
New membership process
Threads

Community Formation

Why Ninety Percent never get off the ground.

Lack of... money, interpersonal skills, information, clarity.

Finding property and approved zoning.

Six “Ingredients” for Success

1. Establish common vision, mission and purpose.
2. Choose fair and participatory decision making process.
3. Establish clear agreements in writing.
4. Learn good process and communication skills early on.
5. Learn needed head and heart skills.
6. In choosing cofounders and new members, choose for emotional maturity.

Starting a community is like simultaneously trying to start a new business and begin a marriage - and is every bit as serious as doing either.

-Diana Leaf Christian
Threads

Appropriate Technology

Energy
Renewables
Solar, wind, water, biomass

Shelter
Design with nature/climate
Passive heating/cooling
Natural ventilation
Local and less processed materials
Natural building

Waste is Food
Living machines
Composting

Transportation
Public transportation
Car sharing

Telecommuting
Work at home!
Case Studies

Overview of Types

New
Ecovillages designed from scratch. (Ithaca, Findhorn, Earth Haven, Dancing Rabbit)

Advantages:
- Maximum design ability,
- Design site to best potential.

Disadvantage:
- Typically most costly,
- Long, demanding design process.
- Building and zoning restrictions

Adaptive Reuse
Converting or renovating existing buildings, or complexes ing to ecovillages. Often converting non-housing buildings such as old factories. (LA Ecovillage, Lebensgarten)

Advantages:
- Often cheaper than building new
- May be faster start-up time
- Gives life to old buildings

Disadvantages:
- May not be ideal location or site layout
- Limited design opportunities

Transformation
Transforming existing villages and neighborhoods into ecovillages. Incorporating community into the existing. (Tiara Street, N-Street Cohousing, EcoYoff).

Advantages:
- Potential to be created in any existing neighborhood, positive alternative to conventional lot ownership
- May be easiest type to establish
- Cheapest construction costs
- Minimal or no zoning or code compliance issues.

Disadvantages:
- Often hard to locate enough adjacent lots.
- Typical block plan often not ideal
- Typically no design options for building placement
- May be difficult to establish community building.
Case Studies :: New / Urban

Auroville, Southern India

Created in 1966 by the Sri Aurobindo Society, the Indian Government and with support from UNESCO.

Currently has a population of 1,700, with the aim of increasing to 50,000 (an eco-city rather than an ecovillage).
Case Studies :: New / Suburban

Ithaca Ecovillage, New York

Two miles from downtown Ithaca.

176 acre site, 55 acres in land trust, CSA farm.

Two developed neighborhoods (FROG and SONG), and two more planned, clustered around a village center.

Cohousing model, shared meals.

Research project in cooperation with Cornell.
Case Studies :: New & Transf. / Suburban

Maitreya Ecovillage, Eugene, Oregon

Founded in 1991 by builder Rob Bolman.

27 residents. Landlord/tenant system.

Urban ecovillage on Broadway and Almaden, west of downtown Eugene.

Combination of retrofit and new construction.

Developed around central garden and common space.

Natural building techniques used including community strawbale and cob guest house.

Permaculture principles used in building and garden design (including animals).
Case Studies :: New & Transf. / Suburban

Maitreya Ecovillage, Eugene, Oregon

Eugene Permaculture Guild, Fall Gathering 2004
## Case Studies

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Case Studies :: New / Rural

Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, Missouri

Formed by motivated Berkeley graduates in 1993
Skyhouse: income-sharing group
Silicon Valley computer-internet jobs
Strawbale buildings
Rainwater harvesting
Big visions
Very rural
Case Studies :: New / Rural

Earthaven Ecovillage, NC

Purchased land in 1994
320 acres with no building codes
60 residents aspiring to 120 residents
11 neighborhoods
Beautiful natural buildings
Wood: harvested, milled, dried on site to build houses
Strawbale, cob, clay-straw, passive solar...
Case Studies :: Adaptive Reuse / Urban

BedZED, London, UK

BedZED, the Beddington Zero Energy Development, is an environmentally-friendly, energy-efficient mix of housing and work space in Beddington, Sutton.

Adaptive reuse - former sewage works.

Mixed use - 100 living units.

Compact/high density.

Local, renewable materials.

Combined heat/power unit (co-generation) using tree waste.

Solar and energy efficient design.

Water use reduced to a third.

Car sharing program.

Community.
Case Studies :: Adaptive Reuse / Suburban

Lebensgarten, Germany

Former German military base and arms factory built in 1936.

Bought in 1986 and renovated.

65 row houses and a variety of community buildings.

Existing buildings were converted into kindergarten, offices, bookstore, kitchen, bakery, dining rooms, food stores, lecture rooms and related facilities. Outlying troop quarters were converted into apartments.

More than 130 residents, wide age range and backgrounds.

Communal meals and social gatherings.

Solar retrofit, renewable energy retrofit, permaculture gardens.
Case Studies :: Adaptive Reuse / Rural

Lost Valley Educational Center, Dexter, Oregon

Former Christian Camp, bought in 1988

Educational emphasis.

Vision
Model intentional community
Positive part of the world
Invite visitors to come and learn

Heart of Now / Naka Ima
Personal growth
Communication
Community glue
Income

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Lost Valley Educational Center, Dexter, Oregon

87 acres rural ecovillage w. cohousing configuration.

Nonprofit status.

Three clustered housing areas w. central community lodge.

30 residents, 3-8 interns and visitors.

Income from interns, retreats, workshops and conferences.

Majority of people work on site.

Consensus decision making.

Two shared meals a day.

Earth centered spirituality.
Case Studies :: Transformation / Urban

Los Angeles Ecovillage, LA

Formed in 1992 in an existing two-block neighborhood. 500 people in 13 apartment buildings and 164 housing units.

An alcohol and drug recovery home is located on the block, along with two auto repair shops, a K-2 public school, the Bresee Foundation, the Mijoo Peace Church and a public adult school for English as a Second Language.

Diverse population, low to middle income levels, full age range.

Communal potluck dinners, workshops and neighborhood activities, often in the street.

Urban gardening and other neighborhood building projects.

Rent discount to non-car owners, big bicycle community.

Urban Cottage Industries: natural dyes, gardens, weaving...

Committment to challenge social norms by meeting and creating community.
Case Studies :: Transformation / Urban

Portland City Repair

Portland City Repair is a non-profit organization with a mission to stimulate a sense of community and ecological sensibility in Portland and other cities across the country.

Recognizing a lack of community gathering places within American grid-based cities, City Repair has initiated numerous projects...

Intersection Repair
breaking down the grid and reclaiming neighborhood intersections as community gathering places.

Village Building Convergence
Annually in May with guest speakers, discussions, and hands-on workshops.
Case Studies :: Transformation / Suburban

Dignity Village

Dignity Village is a unique community of do-it-yourself, previously homeless people that gradually developed from small tent village to more permanent and sustainable village.

Located in Portland suburbs, Dignity Village has reclaimed a concrete brownfield site.

As a community and with volunteer assistance, residents are able to build their own ecologically and energy efficient homes from salvaged and natural materials.
- Tarp nests to beautiful clay-straw passive solar homes.
- Large common building with kitchen
- Potted gardens
Case Studies :: Transformation / Suburban

**N-Street Cohousing, Davis, CA**

Started in 1968 with two adjacent houses.

Organically grew through a series of fence-tearing-down parties.

Typical 60’ x 120’ lots converted from typical 40’ fenced yards into expansive shared yard with large vegetable gardens, chicken yard and open space.

Central house purchased by community as LLC to serve as common house for dinners, gatherings and projects.

Some absentee land owners allowed conversion or rentals after seeing the initial success and the desirability of stronger community.
Case Studies :: Transformation / Rural

EcoYoff, Senegal

Urban community development program started in 1996 in Yoff, a traditional fishing village on the coast of Senegal.

28 villages are members of the network
Transforming traditional villages to become ecovillages

Program components
- Culture and Religion
- Food Security and Economy
- Education and Training
- Population, Health and Nutrition
- Environment, Infrastructure and Geographic Information Systems

Examples: conflict resolution, village social action, green technology, food security, permaculture, microenterprise, co-op formation, eco-tourism, childhood education, integrated health, nutrition, early child development.

Participants are mostly women
Future

Reflections :: role in society

Laboratory
Explore, develop and refine new technologies

Educational Institution
Serve as model and educational center
Workshops, presentations, publications

Catalyst
Ecovillages can serve as one of many catalysts in transforming our neighborhoods and communities into communities that meet our current challenges in a life-serving and life-sustaining way.
Resources

Networks and Learning Opportunities

Global Ecovillage Network
http://gen.ecovillage.org

Ecovillage Network of the Americas
http://ena.ecovillage.org/English/region

Living Routes
http://www.livingroutes.org
Accredited college programs based in ecovillages around the world.

Portland City Repair
www.cityrepair.org

Ecovillages

Solheimar
http://www.solheimar.is

The Farm
http://www.thefarm.org

Findhorn
http://www.ecovillagefindhorn.com
Crystal Waters

Los Angeles Ecovillage
http://www.ic.org/laev

Ithaca
http://www.ecovillage.ithaca.ny.us

Lebensgarten
http://www.lebensgarten-steyerberg.de

N-Street Cohousing
http://wheel.dcn.davis.ca.us/go/nstreet/homepage.html

EcoYoff
http://www.cresp.sn/defeng.htm
Resources

Publications

Rebuilding Community in America, Housing for Ecological Living, Personal Empowerment, and the New Extended Family, Ken Norwood, AICP and Kathleen Smith

Creating a life together: practical tools to grow ecovillages and intentional communities, Diana Leafe Christian.

Ecovillage living: restoring the Earth and her people, Hildur Jackson and Karen Svensson, Eds.

Communities Magazine
fic.ic.org/cmag