

Living and Learning

Living and Learning Pedagogy:

Background.

All through history young people learned necessary skills by just living in a local neighborhood, which was sustainable, taking part in everyday life. At an appropriate time they went through a ritual to become full-grown members of society. This was true in tribal communities and with the apprenticeship, as we know it from later social structures. At a later time the church took over the role as the defining authority and later still the state. In today's globalized society education has developed into mega-institutions most often removed from the environments they were originally supposed to serve. The educational paradigm is now one of competition, hierarchy, separation of theory and practice, institutionalization and obliteration of our sense of interdependence with nature. The structure and content of these educational programs have correspondingly been geared toward making students suitable workers in a competitive, Western, industrialized, extractive society. This system has been exported to most of the world and has been an integrated part of cultural imperialism. An understanding is emerging all over the world that we need a revolution in education based on a different philosophy.

Liberating Pedagogy

100 hundred years ago Grundtvig and Ulrik Cold started the first Danish Folk High Schools stating that students "should learn for life". A free school law was introduced - and is still in existence making it possible for anybody to get financial support for schools offering all kinds of education without restrictions. It has led to an array of different schools and has deeply influencing Danish society. In other places in the world people like Tagore, Ghandi, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (in India) Montessori in Italy, Freinet in France, Steiner in Germany, England and many other countries, Summerhill schools in England, Paolo Freire in Brazil and Riane Eisler and many others in the US have paved the way for a broader, alternative pedagogy.

More recently we have been hearing about the 7 or 8 kinds of intelligences in order to leave the more narrow theoretical learning concept behind. Living and Learning is yet another step forward in this alternative tradition. Learning is not isolated to schools and universities. It can happen anywhere at any time.

The Thy Meeting 1998

. GEN has had promotion of education for sustainability as a major goal for more than a decade now. Ecovillage education brings the learning back to the local community as an immersion experience, while teaching how to live sustainably. And it opens the pupil to find the inner core of their being. The "Living and Learning paradigm" thus has two dimensions:

- The way in which you learn immersed in an ecovillage — the pedagogy

- The content of what you learn: how to create and live in an ecovillage — the curriculum

At an educational meeting in Thy in 1998, 55 educators from ecovillages all over the world agreed on this statement: "**Learning needs to return to its root in the whole community of people and no longer exist in separate institutions. In this way, context, methods and personal development will happen all at the same time for all ages. This is a living, evolving learning system that embraces global considerations alongside local concerns. This system is geared to plant seeds for the next 7 generations**".

This statement is about the pedagogy and the context of educating. Education in an ecovillage allows for this immersion experience, which is more often than not considered "life changing" for the many young people who have been exposed to it. Ecovillages have something very special to offer.

Gaia Education: Education for sustainability.

The content of the education for sustainability or the curriculum is in a process of being defined and refined. Three areas of learning stand out — the spiritual, the social and the ecological dimensions.

The word education comes from Latin e-ducare and means "to draw out" what is inside each person. So we need to create the conditions so that each person can find her inner core and through that contribute to the whole, to the healing of mother Earth. This is done through helping people get in contact with their innermost core, removing layers of culture and suppression hiding that core and telling the person that she or he is worth nothing. This is why personal development, meditation and a new worldview are such vital parts of any new education. Without that the pupils may learn something good but be unable to live a different life from that of a competitive power-obsessed society.

Living and Learning Centres

"Living and Learning" is a concept originating with GEN some years ago to describe the particular educational principle of teaching the theory of sustainable living and practicing the theory in the field at the same time in an ecovillage setting. The following indented paragraphs are quoted directly from the GEN brochure of the same name by Marti Mueller, Lucilla Borio et al., 2003.

We won't save the earth by depending on big summits like Rio, Istanbul, or Johannesburg. Real changes will only come about when we unite, pool our resources, and do it ourselves. Programs where people on the planet are making a difference today are, in fact, locally based.

Living and learning centers are powerful catalysts for change. They are places where people can come and learn about sustainable living through

practical experiences that can be replicated throughout the world. They are local planetary models. *See it, do it, take it home, share it with others, and recreate something new.* It's about training trainers through inspiring on-the-ground programs. Because what works in one part of the world often works in another. Because it's not about reinventing the wheel, but creating effective new ways of working together. Because the challenges ahead of us require real cooperation, fast action, and deep insights.

A Sane World

High on our list of priorities are land conservation and earth restoration, poverty alleviation through food security and meaningful livelihood, renewable energy use, protecting indigenous cultures and species diversity, offering meaningful contexts for youth, and providing the resources for good family planning for a child-friendly planet. All of these are part of local solutions to counter global warming and to restore the earth's balance.

Eco-Communities

Ecovillages in rural and urban areas are one of the most effective ways to make real change happen because most sustainable communities have Living and Learning Centers built into their equation. From the outset, people are committed to *sustainable plus* living, putting more into the environment than they take out of it, and their infrastructures reflect this. Without dedicated people on the ground with a strong social base, local programmes don't work. And Living and Learning Centers are ideally suited to making an exponential difference in everything from earth restoration to poverty alleviation.

The Road is Long and Time is Precious

In a nutshell, L&L Centers:

- create local replicable models of sustainable community that provide people with a sense of belonging
- show people how to protect and restore nature
- honor indigenous people and keep them from becoming beggars on their own land
- protect rural life and create new urban models
- show how renewable energy and effective waste systems work
- create partnerships and give youth a new mandate

- provide integral lifestyles and offer experiential learning
- focus on food security and meaningful livelihood
- reflect the world's great cultural, spiritual, and artistic diversity
- encourage a child-friendly world
- support local solutions to planetary problems because we live on One Earth

The GEN Network

The Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) is a federation of 15,000 diverse communities worldwide that are committed to *sustainable plus* living. The GEN network has a rich and diverse variety of Living and Learning centres in 3 geographical spheres. This means that good models already exist where people live together and are manifesting practical examples of *sustainable plus* living.

Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka is a network of more than 12,000 self-sustaining villages that focuses on participatory community development with no poverty and no affluence, agriculture, micro-banking, livelihood training, cross cultural-meditation, and pre-school development. The Tanamalwila Living and Learning Centre located near two national parks in the Southeast of Sri Lanka, focuses on permaculture, species diversity, human rights and peace initiatives. It offers regular courses to community-linked people in Southeast Asia.

Auroville in India is a multicultural eco-city that has been endorsed by UNESCO. It has a wide variety of programs and receives visiting researchers, university students, and international volunteers. Programs exist in low cost building technology and sustainable living, food security and organic farming, training in architectural applications and town planning, environmental education, seed banks, medicinal plant gardens, traditional botanical knowledge, experiential education, philosophy, medicine and healing. Auroville's Forestry group works on land restoration and can serve as a training center for programs like the International Earth Restoration Corps.

Bija Vidyapeeth in India (means education for Earth Citizenship) near Risikesh is an International College for Sustainable Living at the Navdanya organic farm in cooperation with surrounding sustainable villages. The rich

bio-diversity of the farm provides the context for education for earth democracy in which participants (80% local 20% international) learn from nature and each other, while they study, live, clean, cook and eat together. Programs also include yoga, practice of music and theatre. Founded and run by Vandana Shiva, teachers include: Satish Kumar (Resurgence), Edward Goldsmith, Sulakh Sivaraksi, Fukuoka, Fridtjof Capra, Jeremy Rifkin, Wolfgang Sachs, Brian Goodwin (See www.vshiva.net).

Crystal Waters in Australia offers courses in permaculture design, environmental restoration, and community work. The UN Habitat Award-winning ecovillage features housing in rammed earth, pole structures, mud brick, domes, and straw bale. Demonstration sites exist for water harvesting, waste water use, rainwater collection, swales, dams, artificial wetlands, biolytic treatment, compost toilets, stand-alone and grid-connected solar power systems, heat pumps, cell grazing, land restoration, reforestation, orchard culture, wildlife corridor and rainforest applications. Crystal Waters has an excellent range of eco-systems, and abundant and diverse wildlife, which live in harmony and close proximity with humans. The Eco Centre is an ideal place for a genuine immersion experience and is linked to credit-earning university programmes.

Eco-Yoff in Senegal is a sub-urban community development program oriented towards aiding people to protect their natural resources and village wisdom, insure their long-term survival, and alleviate poverty. It is the headquarters of a large network that has on-site demonstration projects, which include preserving mangrove ecosystems, village social action, green tech, waste water recycling stations, food security, solar cookers, water conservation, conflict resolution, micro-enterprise and employment, eco-tourism, integrated health, nutrition, and early child development. Through Colufifa village co-operatives, farmers and local women - are trained in community resource management and organic farming and are able to receive organic certifications. The network has been endorsed by the Senegal Ministry of the Environment and the UNESCO Chair of the Environment at the University of Dakar.

Ivory Park Ecocity in South Africa is a demonstration project located on the edge of a new and very poor township in Midrand near Johannesburg. It fuses African indigenous technologies with western tech. Models include ecologically-friendly homes, a zero energy community centre built by local women, solar energy, water conservation and harvesting, medicinal herbs, paper-making and traditional crafts, smokeless fires and solar cookers, eco-tourism, youth and women's empowerment, youth environmental activities, sanitation, product recycling, food security; finance and eco-banking, eco-construction, eco-businesses, co-operatives; non-polluting transport, eco-

urban planning; pollution, waste, and natural resource management. This is a courageous experiment in sustainability and poverty eradication for people living and working in cities and who need ecologically-friendly community models.

Tlholego in South Africa is a small rural-based living and learning community that offers certification courses in permaculture, sustainable building technology, and ecovillage design incorporating local African traditions. Programs are being planned to train trainers in science, solar technology, biology, sanitation, herbals, ecology and household food security, in order to respond to the growing challenge of prosperity and poverty living side by side.

Findhorn in Scotland offers holistic education programmes. These include an annual ecovillage training programme, permaculture workshops, courses in personal development, spirituality, arts and crafts. Findhorn is part of a large organic community-supported agricultural scheme, and has its own currency and bank, uses renewable energy systems (solar, wind and biomass), recycles waste, including sewage treated in a reed-bed living machine system. It has many community-based enterprises and is creating a village of eco-sensitive houses. Findhorn is home to an award-winning reforestation project, Trees for Life, and promotes an ethic of voluntary simplicity.

Zegg in Germany stands for Centre for Experimental Society Design and is a community sharing a common idea of peace and sustainable living. Zegg offers courses in ecological building and renovation, mud-construction, organic gardening, permaculture design, spiritual ecology, the arts, social communication, conflict resolution, social networking, strategies for peace, and environmentally sustainable enterprises. The Zegg annual summer camps offer courses on everything from child rearing to countering global consumerism and resolving planetary crises.

Damanhur in Italy is a community with its own currency, a diverse social structure, many successful businesses, organic farms, solar installations, and an experiential school for children. Damanhur offers courses in the healing arts, communication, personal and spiritual transformation, community building, and the arts, especially in mosaics, ceramics, painting, tiffany glass work, and weaving. There is research in fields such as color therapy, plant response to music, and subtle body acupuncture. Work exchange programs exist, especially on Damanhur's farms.

The Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) in Wales is run by a small community of dedicated tech environmentalists with hands-on holistic experience and academic expertise. A wide range of courses that cover green oak building, solar water heating and installations, timber frame self-build dwellings, wind turbine construction, alternative building methods, eco-design and eco-construction suitable for practicing architects and professional builders who want to learn how to be more environmentally-friendly. Courses also include green woodworking, blacksmithing, working with living willow, and providing participants with traditional local knowledge.

Tamera in Portugal intends to invite 200 people for 3 years in order to research what a Healing Bio-tope will be like. The name of the project is Monte Cerro.

The Farm in Tennessee is oriented towards low-cost high satisfaction community living and self-reliance. It offers excellent examples of solar building design, micro-enterprise, large scale composting, food production, and regenerative hardwood forest management. The Ecovillage Training Centre at the Farm offers total immersion courses ranging from basic and advanced permaculture and village design to solar electricity, water treatment, natural building techniques. It provides a walk-thru visit to a straw bale dwelling, a dome, organic gardens, rainwater harvesting facilities, greenhouses, root cellars, a wetlands filtration system, and a solar car prototype. The Farm manages 400 acres of designated wilderness preserve, has a nursery for indigenous tree species, a forest mushroom laying yard, and many species of temperate bamboo. The community has outreach programs in Central and South America.

The Manitou Foundation in Colorado fosters a network for different cultural and spiritual traditions and runs the Earth Restoration Corps (ERC), a training of trainers program in earth restoration, environmental technologies, micro credits, environmental businesses, and meaningful livelihood for youth. The ERC is dedicated to helping establish and maintain training programs in ecovillages throughout the world and the protection of indigenous peoples and traditional wisdoms. ERC teams have partnership programs with communities in India, Brazil, and the Philippines.

La Caravana is a mobile ecovillage working in Central and South America that uses theatre arts, workshops, conferences and bio-regional events to teach people how to take better care of the Earth. La Caravana has inspired the creation of ecovillage networks and projects in Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Jamaica, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Brazil and helped to create the Ecuadorian Women's Leadership Network for Peace. International volunteers teach permaculture, ecovillage design, consensus decision-making, facilitation and conflict resolution, appropriate technology, natural

building techniques and community development for positive planetary change.

Barus in Brazil is a network of viable appropriate technology models in applied permaculture and village development, food production, natural architecture, nature conservation, reforestation, urban kitchen gardens, organic produce certification, permaculture design certificate courses. There are village women's co-operatives, eco-tourism, aquaculture, organic agriculture, appropriate housing design, environmental education textbooks for schools, and appropriate village building technologies. Barus has strong links to the landless movement, as well as the indigenous communities.

Unity and Diversity

GEN LIVING AND LEARNING CENTERS are just a few of many diverse sites where people in the world are living *sustainable plus* lives and learning from each other and the environment. What characterizes L&L Centers is that they have a strong educational component and are based on social and ecological equity, in which people and the environment around them matter and are integrally linked.

These models can be replicated because they are easily adaptable to different cultural and social contexts. The idea is to train trainers in outreach programs based on global planetary awareness, provide meaningful livelihood at home, work in co-operation with like-minded people to build community, have a strong commitment to restoring the earth and using renewable energy systems, invest strongly in young people's future.

Indeed, we can transform the world if we set our energy to doing it. Our modest efforts multiplied many thousands of times over will make for a better and healthier planet.

A few of the GEN affiliated university programs include:
University of Dakar, University of Washington, Cornell University, University of Madras, Ithaca College, Pacific Lutheran University, University of New Hampshire, Kalamazoo College, University of Brasilia, University of Colorado, Environmental University of Curitiba, and others.

Awards by ecovillage associates include:
Rolex Honorary Environmental Mention, The Gandhi Prize, The Ashoka Award for Enterprise, The United Nations Best Practices Award.

For more information on how you can create an ecovillage, a L&L Centre, participate in an ongoing project, or fund programs, please contact the Global Ecovillage Network.

Other Gaia Educations

Below are some offerings we know of that fall within our definition of Gaia Education.

Builders of the Dawn, Denmark
 Earth restoration Corps - Hanne Marstrand Strong, USA
 Living Routes - Dan Greenberg. USA
 Ecovillage Courses at Findhorn - May East
 Findhorn College - Malcolm Hollick
 ISEC - Helena Norberg-Hodge
 CATS - Peter Harper
 Schuhmacher College - Stefan Harding
 The Folkecenter in Thy - Preben Maegård
 Auroville educations - Marti Mueller
 Sarvodaya Education Center - Sarvodaya (Vinya Ariyaratne)
 Eco-Yoff Education Center- Marion Zeitling
 Naropa University – Boulder, Colorado
 Kobunaki Ecovillage International Education, Japan
 Tamera/Zegg University
 Damanhur University and School- Lepre Viola
 Satyana Institute- Will Keepin
 Bija Vidyapeth (Education for Earth Citizenship)- Vandava Shiva
 Crystal Waters Education Centre - Max Lindegger.
 The Ecovillage Training Center - The Farm (Albert Bates)
 Ecovillage at Ithaca Education Center - Liz Walker
 Lebensgarten Institute for Green Currencies - Declan Kennedy