C.A.L.L.

Communes At Large Letter

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNES DESK

YAD TABENKIN

No. 29

Winter 2007

Dear Readers,

This issue is dedicated to our secretary Sol 'Shlomo' Etzioni, who sadly passed away recently. This time the cover, which is usually so colourful, is in black and white out of respect. As we remember Sol (see obituary on opposite page), I look back to the summer in an attempt to recapture the vibrancy and positive feelings I experienced at the International Communal Studies Association (ICSA) Conference hosted by the special community of Damanhur in Italy. It was due to Sol's determined efforts, and his wish that I experience what he did when he visited ZEGG in Germany for the 2001 conference, that I was able to represent the International Communes Desk (ICD) this year. I remember a conversation I had with Sol before I left for Italy, in which he told me that as an introvert, he often pushed himself out of his comfort zone to become a conspicuous, active participant, and he encouraged me to do the same. I was reminded of this conversation at the conference each and every time I met someone who asked after Sol and sent him their warmest regards through me. Many people remembered Sol fondly, and his desire to meet people made him many friends in the communal world; he will be sorely missed.

The conference was a fantastic experience; an opportunity to meet both academics and communards that are thirsty to both teach and learn about communal living. The host community of Damanhur was incredibly inspiring, an example of people that are attempting to actualize their values by the way that they live.

This issue of C.A.L.L. has much content related to the conference, written by people that were there. I'd like to make particular reference to a wonderful sharing conversation I had with Anaconda Papaya, an educator at Damanhur, some of which can be read on page 25. As educators, we agreed that there is a strong connection between communal living and education. Many communities are not only building a more just society for themselves, but are also involved in affecting the outside society around them through education and living as a personal example. The Damanhurian approach to education reflects this, and is congruous with the following words written by Martin Buber which I used in my presentation at the conference:

In these recurring encounters between a generation which has reached its full development and one which is still developing, the ultimate aim is not to transmit a separable something. What matters is that time and again an older generation, staking its entire existence on that act, comes to a younger with the desire to teach, waken, and shape it; then the holy spark leaps across the gap.

Coincidently, the theme of the latest Camphill Correspondence is education, and the following quote appears on the front cover, written by their inspiration, Rudolph Steiner:

It is aliveness that must be the guiding principle. Aliveness in the teacher must pass over to aliveness in the pupils. Joy and happiness for living, a love for all existence, a power and energy for work - those are among the lifelong results of a right cultivation of feeling for beauty and art.

Finally, I'd like to add Sol to this esteemed company; an educator who, from his whole being, became a role-model for many to learn from and follow.

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From the Secretary's Desk

In Memoriam
1929-2007

Dear Reader,

It is with great sadness that I report of the passing of our beloved secretary Sol (Shlomo) Etzioni.

Sol was born in Australia and spent his youth as a member of Labour-Zionist Youth Movement Habonim. It was here that he began his life as an educator, a guide, and an inspiration to Jewish youth.

His first taste of communal living began in 1951, when Sol went to live on Habonim's training farm in Springvale, Melbourne. The idea was that Sol and his contemporaries would learn what it was to live and work on a 'Kibbutz', before emigrating to Israel and doing it for real. Sol remembered communal life as being very primitive, and described the unlined fibro huts as follows: "[without even] electric light to give the illusion of warmth. There's nothing that casts a cold spell over … dreams of sun-scorched Israel more than dressing in pitch-dark in freezing cold - literally freezing, for the rain-puddles froze over solid - to learn Hebrew.…[Those two years] enhanced my maturity and expanded my horizons.…I found that I could live in close quarters with others whom I didn't necessarily like."

Leadership by example is a concept that Sol imbibed from growing up in the youth movement. He duly fulfilled the highest goal of Habonim by arriving in Israel in 1954, and joining Kibbutz Tzora. There he spent most of his career as a high-school Chemistry teacher, with a hiatus from 1962 – 1964, when he left the kibbutz to become an emissary of both the Kibbutz, and Israel itself to a whole new generation of Habonim Youth in New Zealand. It is no surprise to find many of the people that Sol worked with during those years in New Zealand following his example, and can today still be found on Kibbutzim in Israel.

In recent years, as Kibbutz Tzora has undergone many changes, Sol recognized both the need for change in today's modern reality, whilst always retaining his strong belief in communal living and shared responsibility. In January of this year he wrote thus: "The problem is that no one wants to put more money into the public purse - by means of a progressive 'income tax' - and this means inevitably that there is pressure to reduce communal services even further. The fact that almost everything is judged by its cost means that there is pressure to shut down 'unprofitable' activities".

Similarly, even though Sol described himself as not being political, in this sphere too he saw the complexity of issues and never expressed a dogmatic one-sided opinion. He could recognize Israel's imperfections but it always pained him to read over-the-top criticisms, or even being blanked by communities outside of Israel. In setting the record straight on his beloved Israel, he always called for fairness and even-handedness in any criticism, whilst stressing Israel's legitimate concerns and it's right to live in peace and security.

When most pensioners would be taking their foot off the gas, Sol was looking for a new challenge and in 2000 he became the secretary of the International Communes Desk. His belief in communality and his many years as an educator, combined with his dedication, enabled Sol to bring the communal scene in Israel to the world and the world communal scene to Israel. He courteously ran our meetings with patience and humour and worked tirelessly behind the scenes: corresponding with communities around the world, hosting visitors that came to Israel to learn about Kibbutz, editing the content of the website, attending conferences all over Israel to promote the Desk, fundraising, proof-reading this publication, etc etc.

Sol is survived by his wife Rene, 3 children, 8 grandchildren and the many, many people, all over the world, who have learnt from Sol, been inspired by Sol - a true leader by example.

ICSA CONFERENCE 2007

International Communal Studies Association Conference at Damanhur by Bill Metcalf

This June I met with 120 communitarians and academic researchers from more than a dozen countries at the 2007 International Communal Studies Association (ICSA) conference. We met at Damanhur Federation, a 32-year-old spiritual community near Turin, Italy. Every three years ICSA members meet and share research findings at an intentional community or university: in 2004 it was the Amana Colonies in Amana, Iowa; in 2001, ZEGG community in Germany; in 1998 at University of Amsterdam, and in 1995, at Yad Tabenkin Research Centre, Israel.

One of the most interesting and dynamic intentional communities in the world, Damanhur started with a small group in 1975 and has grown to about 600 members, or 'citizens', as well as several hundred affiliated members living in Damanhurian centers throughout Europe.

Damanhur members own and operate numerous businesses: making silk scarves, jewelry, specialist cheeses, and high-quality handmade goods. The community is involved in the government in the Valchiusella Valley: a Damanhurian is mayor of the local town, and 22 Damanhurians sit on other town councils in the valley.

Damanhur citizens live in small communal households, called 'nucleos,' of 12-30 adults, plus children. Nucleo residents eat and socialise together, and share expenses and responsibilities for children and work. Some nucleos comprise more than one house, and all 20 nucleos constitute the Damanhur Federation. Each nucleo appoints a member to sit on the Damanhur Federation Council, and this Council selects two senior members, their 'King and Queen Guides,' for a six-month period to co-serve in the executive director role for the Federation. These officers can be re-elected or replaced, offering the community both continuity and change. Damanhur has a sophisticated range of governance facilities to make and implement decisions and resolve conflicts. The community is famous for their 'The Temple of Humankind,' a complex of seven linked underground temples characterized by beautiful stained glass domes, mosaics, carvings, and tiles.

The ICSA conference was formally opened on June 29th by Professor Dennis Hardy of the UK, ICSA's retiring President. We were then welcomed by Damanhur's King and Queen Guides, Uria Sedano and Testuggine Cacao. Our first formal address was by Albert Bates, director of Ecovillage Training Center at The Farm in Tennessee, whose talk, "Communal Economics in a Post-Petroleum World," emphasised the importance of sustainability to the intentional communities movement - a theme which ran through the rest of the conference.

Over the next three days about 40 speakers covered topics about current and historical intentional communities, community networking, and a wide range of philosophical and theoretical issues.

Presentations about contemporary intentional communities included: "The Utopianism of Longo Mai Co-operatives," by Saskia Poldervaart (Holland); "Camphill: A Spiritual Community," by Jan Martin Bang (Norway); and "Shri Ram: a Modern Path to Enlightenment," by Tatiana Ginzberg (Russia). The talks about historic intentional communities included "An Owenite Community in Flotey-lès-Vesoul, Haute-Saône," by Megali Fleurot (France); "Visions of Peace: The Shakers, the Bruderhof, and the World," by Etta Madden (US); and my own presentation, "Ethnically Based Utopian Intentional Communities: The Example of New Italy, Australia."

Philosophical and theoretical presentations included "Intentional Community, Modernity, Post-Modernity, and Globalization," by Michael Livni (Israel); "All Things Common: Comparing Christian Interpretations of Biblical Communism," by Deborah Altus (US); "Integrated Ecovillage Design: A New Tool for Physical Planning," by Hildur Jackson (Denmark); "We Have Nothing to Hide: Public Nudity in North American Communes," by Tim Miller (US); and "The Sound of Communal Living" by Chris Coates (UK). Talks about networking to promote and sustain intentional community included: "RIVE: Network of Italian Ecovillages," by Mimmo Tringale (Italy); "Ecovillages," by Jonathon Dawson (UK); and "Experimental Fields for Sustainable Lifestyle Models" by Iris Kunze, (Germany).

In our final, plenary session, which I chaired, Ross Jackson (Denmark) presented "A Gaian Utopia," about how environmental imperatives must dictate the ways that not only intentional communities but all societies develop. ICSA's co-founder, Professor Yaacov Oved (Israel), then presented "Changes in Modern Communes: from Utopian Propensity to Pragmatic Approach," based upon his half-century of research. We then collectively thanked the members of Damanhur Federation for opening up their lives, hearts, and nucleos to us.

As well as these fascinating, albeit heady topics of ICSA's formal presentations, we were entertained on the first evening with a concert of esoteric music and interpretive modern dance by Damanhur members at their Open Temple. On the final evening, we held an ICSA formal dinner, followed by a Laser Light Show, with accompanying dance, also put on by Damanhur members. On the intervening evening, we each had the chance to dine with different small groups of Damanhur members in the privacy of their nucleos.

After the conference many of us took a bus tour to Torri Superiore ecovillage near the Italian Riviera. Without a doubt, Torri Superiore is one of the most charming and welcoming intentional communities in the world. Thirteen resident adults and six children operate a Guest House and permaculture demonstration site, and offer various training programs. They live in a restored stone village dating from the thirteenth century but abandoned after the Second World War. The 160 rooms of this complicated and convoluted complex with eight levels are built against a steep hillside, with most rooms having vaulted stone ceilings—reminding me of what it would be like to live in an M.C. Escher print. ICSA conference members were welcomed with a tour, drinks, and a three-course dinner, on Torri Superiore's balcony, which overlooks their olive, grape, and vegetable terraces, stepped down to the Bevera River. Most of us slept that night at Torri Superiore.

On the final day, our tour buses took us from Torri Superiore to visit two nearby medieval architectural gems, the strikingly beautiful villages of Dolceaqua and Apricale. At the latter, we were welcomed by the mayor and given lunch at the hilltop castle, Eidechsenburg, with its extraordinary views. Our buses then headed home, taking delegates to catch trains, buses or planes back to our homes around the globe.

During the conference, the ICSA Board decided that our next President will be Professor Michal Palgi, a long term member of Kibbutz Nir-David ("The field of David") between Haifa and Jerusalem, Israel. Michal is a sociologist who has been involved for years in studying organisational and gender issues within intentional communities, particularly within the broad range of Israeli kibbutzim. She has been an ICSA member for many years.

The ICSA Board unanimously decided that our next conference, in 2010, will be held in northern Israel, under the auspices of the Institute for Research of the Kibbutz and the Cooperative Idea at the University of Haifa, and will focus on both the history of the traditional, rural Israeli kibbutzim (which began in 1910) and on the recent establishment of numerous urban kibbutzim in that country. These latter intentional communities appear to be modifying the kibbutz form of communal living, which suited the 20th century, into a new form of communal living which might be more appropriate to the 21st century.

Among the associated issues discussed by the Board were questions of security and justice in the Middle East, since we recognised that such issues will be in the minds of people who will participate in our conference in 2010. We resolved that ICSA2010 should have the issue of peace as a key element. We need to explore what intentional communities can contribute to promoting ethnic accord and peaceful communities.

And will I be at ICSA in 2010 in Israel? Absolutely! ICSA gatherings are a wonderful opportunity to learn, contribute, and enjoy a wonderful few days of fellowship with a wide range of good people, all of whom are involved in intentional community in one way or another.

Professor Bill Metcalf, PhD., of Griffith University, Brisbane, is author of nine books on community, including The Findhorn Book of Community Living. He is a past president of ICSA.

ICSA CONFERENCE 2007

Following the successful ICSA Conference this summer in Italy, we commissioned both the outgoing and incoming presidents, Emeritus Professor Dennis Hardy and Professor Michal Palgi respectively, to write exclusively for C.A.L.L.

Communities and a Changing Agenda

The International Communal Studies Association (ICSA) is alive and well! At the end of June, members gathered for the latest in its series of international conferences. This time the location was the beautiful Val Chiusella, in the foothills of the Italian Alps to the north of Turin, where ICSA enjoyed the warm hospitality of the well-established Damanhur community. As well as a unique opportunity to meet like-minded enthusiasts from around the world, the event offered a rich mix of reflective papers and community practice. An additional attraction was a post-conference visit to an inspirational eco-village, Torri Superiore, as well as to some more traditional examples of Italian community living.

On a personal note, the conference marked the end of my tenure as President of the Association and I am delighted to welcome Professor Michal Palgi as the incoming holder of this office. It was a privilege to serve as President and I'd like to share a few thoughts on the experience.

Firstly, ICSA has now been in existence for 22 years and it seemed timely at Damanhur to ask whether the organisation still has a meaningful role. This was discussed by the ICSA Board and, while it is recognised that the nature of community issues changes over time, the rationale for a body that straddles theory and practice in this way and whose remit crosses international boundaries remains as powerful as ever. Regular conferences of the sort that were held this past summer continue to serve a valuable purpose for scholars, practitioners and policy-makers alike.

Secondly, if ICSA is to remain relevant and attract new members, changing priorities need to be recognised and accommodated by the Association. At Damanhur, the traditional core of ICSA interests was well represented, with challenging papers on historical communities, on the still evolving story of the kibbutz movement, on the significance of contemporary experiments and on some of the practical aspects of community living. As well as this traditional fare, there was also a strong and welcome presence of 'eco-villagers', who see in communities a natural ally in the current search for sustainable lifestyles.

Thirdly, reflecting the dynamism of communities themselves, it is vital that the ICSA membership is itself constantly revitalised. It is a sign of strength that many of the founding members are still leading lights in the organisation but no less is it important that a new generation becomes more involved. At Damanhur it was encouraging to see so many new faces and it is to be hoped that many of these will, in time, define new directions for ICSA.

Finally, the next conference, in 2010, will be held in Israel, coinciding with the centenary anniversary of the foundation of the first kibbutz. This is a fitting location, if only because the kibbutz represents arguably the most important communal experiment in modern times. It is also fitting because of the opportunity it will offer to demonstrate how communal values can transcend political divisions and cultural conflicts, and chart a way forward that is no less relevant in our present century than it has proved in the past.

Emeritus Professor Dennis Hardy
ICSA Past President, 2004-2007

ICSA – A Synthesis of Community Living Practice and Academia

It was an honor and a challenge for me to be elected president for ICSA (International Communal Studies Association). ICSA has gone a long way since its establishment in 1985 at a conference held in Yad Tabenkin, Israel. Today there is a growing need for an association such as ICSA which combines the various threads of the broad range of intentional communities with ongoing research. Therefore, the main challenge of ICSA in the coming years, as I see it, is to follow practice with academic studies. In order to do this there must be a large network of researchers and practitioners who, by working together, produce insight on intentional communities. This network of people should analyze processes and needs within and surrounding intentional communities for further learning and application.

Last June, at the very successful ICSA conference in Damanhur, it was decided that the next ICSA conference will be held in Israel for the following reasons:

a) 2010 will mark 100 years since Degania, the first kibbutz, was established.

b) Recent changes, in the traditional rural kibbutzim and the development of a range of urban kibbutzim mean that there is a great deal for non-Israeli scholars to see and experience.

International Communal Studies Association

c) The endorsement of the Institute for Research of the Kibbutz and the Co-operative Idea at the University of Haifa, as well as other academic bodies in Israel means that ICSA should have a good reception.

I hope that the next ICSA conferences will continue to have both an academic track and a practical community track because the meetings and the exchange of ideas between these two groups benefit both.

What will be in the next conference? A few preliminary suggestions have already been sent to me but a decision will be made by the conference committee. Any additional ideas are welcome and will be considered.

Some of the suggestions for themes for the next conference that I have received are:

a. Challenges confronting the communal life in the Globalizing world.

b. Learning from the ecological intentional communities.

c. Learning from the intentional communities of the Far East.

d. The contribution intentional communities can make to peace and the reduction of violence.

e. Architecture as a representation of the development of intentional communities.

I hope to see as many of you as possible at the coming conference.

Professor Michal Palgi
ICSA President

ICSA CONFERENCE 2007

Sustainability was a prominent topic at the 2007 meeting of the International Communal Studies Association in Damanhur, northern Italy. Both the opening and closing plenary sessions included presentations on the topic by leading activists and scholars in the field: 'Communal Economics in a Post-Petroleum World' by Albert Bates and 'Gaia in Utopia 2107' by Ross Jackson. Many individual papers also explored the theme such as Joshua Lockyer's 'Environmental values and contemporary intentional community building'. Both Albert Bates and Joshua Lockyer agreed to write pieces specially for C.A.L.L., on the connection between communal living and sustainability.

The potential links between sustainability and intentional communities was a main theme that prompted me to write my recently completed anthropology doctoral dissertation on ecovillages and other sustainability-oriented intentional communities. While I was aware of the massive surge in the number of sustainability-oriented intentional communities over the last ten to twelve years, the conference made it clear to me that this is a topic of great interest among young scholars and community activists.

The fact that small scale, cooperative, communally organized societies are often more sustainable than are large-scale, hierarchical, complex societies is a point that becomes increasingly clear when one examines the plethora of anthropological and other social science research on the topic. Very often in tribal and traditional agricultural societies, we see people cooperating in order to protect and sustain the resources and ecosystem services upon which there is a common dependence. This type of cooperation requires the social familiarity, shared values, and direct connection to people and place that are more readily achievable in small-scale, cooperative, communally-organized societies than in the massive, mobile, and consumerist societies in which so many people reside today.

In a sense, what we are faced with today is the necessity of sustainably managing what is increasingly recognized as a global commons. This task will require a combination of global awareness and local action. While we cannot be expected to forgo some of the benefits that arise from large-scale social, political and economic institutions – benefits such as medical technologies that save human lives and prevent human suffering – small-scale social organizing will be a key to global sustainability. It is thus heartening to see a growing movement of ecovillages and sustainability-oriented intentional communities bringing a global awareness to the task of relocalization. These communities are natural experiments that are pointing the way toward a more sustainable future and cultivating the kinds of values and practices that must become more widespread if we are to create a more just and sustainable world. It is also heartening to see a growing number of academics and politicians paying attention to these experimental communities. If we are to effectively address the many challenges we face as we strive for sustainability, people from all walks of life must be brought into the fold of cooperative, intentional community organizing. Spread the words and the ways!

Joshua Lockyer, Ph.D., Dept. of Anthropology, Univ. of Georgia, jlockyer@uga.edu

I believe people are sensing, as Ivan Illich called it, "the shadows our future throws." Once you grasp the full significance of runaway climate change, and the exhaustion of virtually all of our natural resources under the pressure of human consumption, you go through a change in your personal outlook. History becomes nearly irrelevant in these circumstances, as do most of the plans our parents made for us. We will not be colonizing Mars. In the centuries to come, we can speak of success if there are still human colonies on Earth.

Ecovillages are seen by many as kind of quirky, radical environmentalist communes. In reality they are the prototype of the future we will have and must have, if a future for humanity is still an option. I often say that we have the wind of inevitability at our backs. There is an ecovillage coming to your neighborhood, soon.

Many years ago, the movement began defining "success" in village design by creating a set of objective criteria like net carbon sequestration, wilderness expansion, and so forth. A metaphor we often use is a three-legged stool, with one leg being ecological - permaculture, renewable energy, green buildings, recycling; a second leg being economic, that is, how you financially support yourself does not offend your principles and should contribute to a healthy planet; and the third leg being social - the ways you manage the community should be fair, transparent, and egalitarian. It should also be fun, because if it is not fun, no one would want to live there.

The three legs create stability and beauty. If one is weak, the whole stool totters. What we have seen is that where the stool is strong you get tremendous creativity. Arts, music, sports, science, literature, and other human pursuits all flourish. That makes for a good ecovillage.

For the past half century the environmental movement has been fighting a defensive, rear-guard battle. In recent years it has begun to go on the offense, with Al Gore's slide show and Leonardo DiCaprio's new movie marking a kind of transition. Ecovillages (and Green Kibbutzim) are part of the remedy. They point a new direction, a positive one, for environmentalists to walk their talk. We are the future, and this is where it starts.

The Farm's main contribution to the ecovillage movement is its staying power. We are in our fourth generation now, with midwives assisting at the birth for mothers whom they midwived as babies 20 years ago. My mother lived here until she died, and my granddaughter was born here, just last year. We have the whole package here: a 5000-acre conservation land trust, consensus governance, primary health care, socially responsible businesses, our own school, and a tight, multi-generational bond.

In 1994 we founded the first ecovillage training center here. Today there are others like it on six continents. Of our thousands of graduates, who can now receive university degrees for this work, many have gone on to design and inhabit ecovillages elsewhere. That may be the major contribution of The Farm. When we left the Haight Ashbury in 1971 as 320 hippys in school buses, we said we were "out to save the world." This is one way we are doing it.

Albert Bates is a permaculture instructor at the Ecovillage Training Center at The Farm community in Summertown, Tennessee. He was founder of the Ecovillage Network of the Americas in 1995 and is past president and a founder of the Global Ecovillage Network. He is author of several books, including Shutdown: Nuclear Power on Trial (1979), Climate in Crisis: The Greenhouse Effect and What We Can Do (1990, with foreword by Al Gore) and the Post-Petroleum Survival Guide and Cookbook: Recipes for Changing Times (New Society, 2006).

School of Living: 50 Years of Learning in Community

In 1934, during the depths of a worldwide depression, Ralph Borsodi established an educational organization committed to empowering individuals and communities to explore more ecological, self-directed, and humane ways of living. Since that tumultuous time, the School of Living (SoL) has been experimenting with new social and economic models based on ecological principles, equity, self-reliance, freedom, and stewardship of the earth's natural resources - especially land resources. The vision was to create a network of decentralized, ecological, self-governed communities where land was held in common through the use of Community Land Trusts. Today, the SoL has evolved into a loose educational network of six communities in the Mid-Atlantic region in the eastern U.S. with more than 60 residents living on over 500 acres of community land trust property. In addition to building intentional communities based on the community land trust model, the SoL actively supports permaculture education, alternative (democratic) education (primary through high school), and group training in non-violent communication and facilitation.

The Community Land Trust (CLT) is one of Ralph Borsodi's most enduring and guiding visions—that is, land that is controlled by the community with the economic benefits fairly distributed among the larger community. Borsodi was heavily influenced by the writings of Henry George, a 19th century economist. "Georgist economics" argues that humans have a right to claim the value of their labor but cannot claim the value of the earth and its resources. Borsodi's promoted CLT's as a way to hold the value of the land for all of humanity, and to redistribute any increase in value to the larger community.

Another guiding principle within the SoL is Permaculture - a comprehensive ecological approach to creating human settlements that merges human and natural system goals in larger wholes. Permaculture pulls from the fields of "applied ecology" and "geonomics" with a clear focus on creating sustainable human settlements. In practical terms, permaculture design means that SoL communities strive to create living landscapes, food forests, and other vertically "stacked" farming systems. SoL communities are experimenting with alternative waste water treatment, earth-sheltered homes, and recently began expanding their permaculture education efforts with the establishment of a new GAIA University learning center at the Heathcote Community in Northern Maryland.

The School of Living has been experimenting for more than a half century with both progressive ideals and practical social goals. As a "learning community" we have developed a diverse group of communities where residents are able to live collectively on the land, collaborate on community projects, and pursue their own dreams within a framework of common social values. Borsodi's vision is alive and well today - and there is still a pressing need to address long-standing problems of resource depletion, centralized control, poverty, and the steady degradation of the world's ecosystems. Like so many intentional communities around the world, we don't have all the answers, but we are committed to living lives that properly value ecology, equity, social justice, and ultimately, the whole of humanity.

The author of this piece, Frank Higdon (frankxhigdon@yahoo.com), presented a paper on the School of Living at the ICSA Conference 2007, and agreed to write this summary especially for C.A.L.L.

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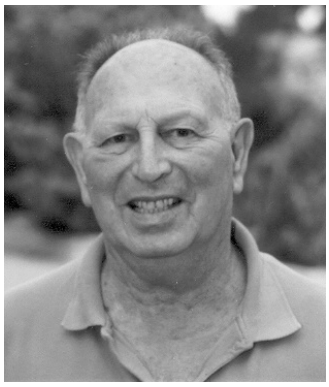


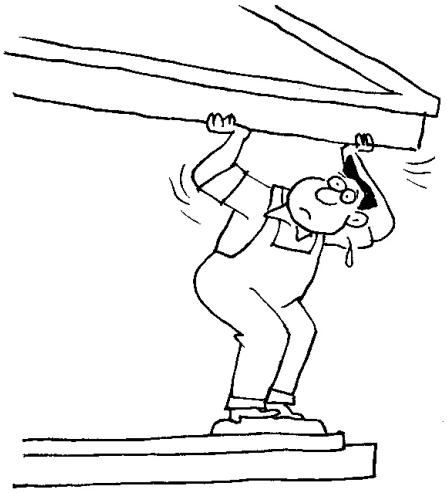
The Communitarian Scene from all Over and Under
Compiled (and partly translated) by Joel Dorkam

Here in Israel what we like to call 'Volunteers' (a.k.a. interns, guest-workers, work-exchangers, co-workers) are simply strangers who come to stay with us for a limited period, working for their upkeep, living amongst us without sharing most of our benefits and duties. In a way they contribute to our culture and they certainly enjoy great popularity with our youngsters. They provide valuable manpower at crucial peak seasonal times. When they return home they frequently become ambassadors for Israel and for the kibbutz. Sometimes they reappear after many years with wife and children to show them 'my kibbutz' and refresh old memories.

But - there is a but too - sometimes they bring along certain habits and customs and ideas which don't quite fit in with ours and may spell trouble. Things like drugs or alcohol abuse, dishonest practices, sexual promiscuity and occasionally even violence. Research done on these subjects indicate that these visitors have long-term effects on our lifestyle, for better and for worse.

Sometimes a volunteer stays on and on and on, becoming either a full-fledged kibbutznik - or a pain in the ass, depending on the circumstances. We have half a dozen of the first kind at my kibbutz, who eventually converted, married and became esteemed members of our community. Other places, having experienced some kind of trouble, or simply lacking accommodation, are not taking them any longer. One shining exception is kibbutz Bar'Am in upper Galilee, as reported in a recent issue of "Green Leaves" by Ohad Hay:

Thomas Berger (25) from North Carolina, an American student of Journalism at Haifa University, returns almost yearly to work as a volunteer at kibbutz BarAm, where he first arrived 5 years ago. He has friends here, 30, 60 and even 70 years old with whom he discusses politics. This year's visit was especially moving, "like coming home".



Thomas is one of 64 volunteers presently staying at Bar'Am. Contrary to most kibbutzim, who shut down their volunteers programs for economical and other considerations, the volunteers scene at Bar'Am is alive and kicking.

"We have volunteers from India, Turkey, U.S.A, England, Denmark, Sweden, Poland, Australia, Ecuador, Brasil, Columbia, Mexico, South Africa, and Korea" tells Aviv Gutman, the volunteers coordinator for the last 2 years. He has had to refuse dozens of applications from people who hear about them from friends, or who have stayed here in the past and want to come back.

What inspires hundreds of people from all over the world to come back every year to Bar'Am, and then subsequently refuse to leave? Part of the answer stems from the good conditions (5-days workweek, monthly trip through the country, Internet, Playstation , and no less important - a pub with free beer!) A central factor is the ambiance. The amazing landscape, the relative isolation and the great number of co-volunteers creates a sparkling, young society with which it's fun to stay along. Any criticism or complaints? From the many conversations I have had, I get the feeling that it is almost utopia. You just don't hear anything negative from them".

Let's see what's going on in some other parts of the world. Help yourself to assorted reflections on the subject, beginning with Dona Willoughby's "Is Hosting Work Exchangers Worth it?" taken from Communities 134 of Spring 2007, mostly dedicated to just this topic. Let's see:

Is Hosting Work Exchangers Worth It?

Brittany stops by my cabin for a few moments of intimate talk before dinner. (Brittany came here at age 27 as a work exchanger, and after six months of living with us and loving our land, decided to pursue membership. We're elated that she has chosen us as her family and home community). As she and I listen to the melodious birdsong resonating through the rainforest, she gazes out the window and asks, "Do you think it is worth it having work exchangers? Wouldn't it be easier to just do the work ourselves?"

It's a valid question. At La'akea, our intentional community on the "Big Island" of Hawaii, we invite folks to live and work here in exchange for a place to stay and the chance to share community life. Today two work exchangers left, and as a result Brittany feels lighter, like a burden was lifted.

La'akea was a permaculture demonstration and educational center for 12 years when our group purchased the site in 2005. Our five members and four trial members include teachers, healers, administrators, facilitators, co-counselors, permaculturists, tropical gardeners, carpenters, coconut palm-climbers, and long-term communitarians. We embrace sustainability in our relationships and in our interactions with the Earth, and attempt to produce most of our food on the land. Although the tasks necessary to grow food and keep our home and retreat center functioning are immense, our lives flow with nature and with each other. Life is abundant and good! Why then, do we invite people we don't know to live here"?

It began when, shortly after our arrival, various people began asking that they live with us in exchange for labor, and we agreed. While we called these folks "work exchangers," we soon realized they were much more than that. We are such a small and intimate group that even short-term residents become woven into the fabric of our community and our individual lives. They not only work alongside us, but participate in our heartshare meetings and morning check-ins, cook with us, eat with us, play with us, and sometimes even bathe with us. We want to support them and we want them to support us in return. Actually, I would like more than that: I would like to open my heart to them and love them. I prefer that people who live here become long-term friends, extended community members, or even core community members.

These temporary residents come from all walks of life. They are of varied ages (more younger than older), and are of varied ethnic, educational, and socio-economic backgrounds. They find us in assorted ways: from our exhibit at a local Earth Day celebration, the WWOOFER catalog ("Worldwide Workers on Organic Farms"), our larger Network for New Culture community, our website, or by word of mouth in our local community here on the Big Island. Some arrive penniless and with no transportation. Most have never lived off the grid or lived in an intentional community…

…At the same time, hosting work exchangers has sometimes burdened us with additional work and emotional turmoil, especially when we attract people who don't share our values of openness, realness, and transparency in communication. We have learned to understand and conserve our own resources of emotional energy. We cannot be available to minister to the emotional needs of work exchangers having difficulties, for example, when our own energies are depleted. The delicate balance of keeping ourselves nourished while nourishing others is not easy. In a community as intimate as ours, maintaining this energy balance is both a personal and a community challenge.

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Darin Fenger, on the other hand looks at the flip side of the problem in his "What Interns and Work Exchangers have to say about Us":

I absolutely loved my stay at Lost Valley, recalls Polly Robinson, who served as an intern and later a live-in course participant at Lost Valley Educational Center in Oregon. "I loved being surrounded by people of all ages who genuinely cared for me, and the generally relaxed atmosphere of the place, I felt like I was a community member the whole time I was there."

Nathaniel Nordin-Tuininga, who also lived at Lost Valley, first as a work trader, then an intern, and lastly as a residential student, is equally enthusiastic about his time there. "Interacting with Lost Valley and participating in both their permaculture and personal growth workshops taught me so much about myself, my relationship to the surrounding environment, and my connection with others. I learned a great deal about my own capacity to grow and develop into the person I most want to be, while cultivating a harmonious relationship to the rest of the natural world. I was introduced to new ways of interacting with plants and animals in order to meet my basic needs. I received personal instruction and hands-on training in land and garden projects. I participated in yoga, dance, mediation, saunas, hot tubs, stargazing, sports, games, group outings and other events - and always had an amazing group of people to share these experiences with. And emotional well-being was better attended to at Lost Valley than in any other community I have visited or been involved with."

Get some useful free advice from the same D.F. in "What community hosts should know" and what guests should take into account in "Planning your own Community Adventure" - although it pays to keep in mind (possible) discrepancies between planning and REALITY!

If you're planning your own short-term stay in community, consider the advice of these experienced community visitors.

• Get comfortable with the community members. I was hesitant to open up at the beginning, but when I saw community members speaking from their hearts, it made me comfortable enough to follow suit. Do your research. I read about La'akea first, and went there with some confidence that I would fit in. It's important to know what you're getting into. -Ron Laverdiere

• Don't be shy or embarrassed to ask questions or ask for what you need. Strive to be emotionally honest - even if what you have to say is not the 'easy' or 'pretty' answer. Don't be afraid to share affection or appreciation. Be confident that you can handle anything that comes your way. -Travis Fowler

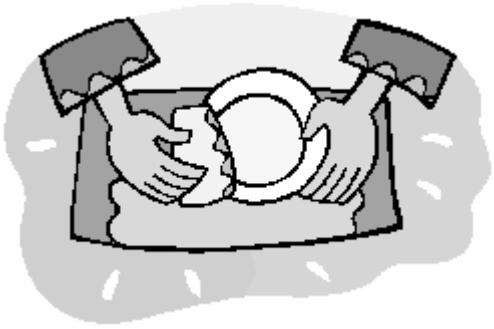
• If you have a good sense of what you want to learn and experience while at a community, make sure you communicate what you want clearly and have an agreement about how this is going to happen. Go into the situation with an open mind and heart to see if you can learn and experience things you'd never have imagined. -Molly Morgan

• Discover and establish boundaries between your personal time and community time. If you don't take the time for personal space, it may become difficult to engage fully with the community. Keep an open mind, actively seek out projects that engage you, and cultivate kindness. –Michael “Mojohito" Tchudi

• Live it fully. Plunge in with abandon and trust those around you to respond to your zeal. Act as a community member to the extent that you can, contributing to making the community one that you would like to live in. -Ted Sterling

• Even if you already know a lot about community or the subject of focus in its course or program, really learn to be a student; stay in a proactive observer space. Take what you need from the experience. And if things aren't quite what you expected, know that you can change your experience; it's only temporary! -Jodie Emmett

From my very own extended personal experience as coordinator, I gleefully remember some unusual stories. There was that French girl Sylvie who did an outstanding job as evening dishwasher - I dare to say, at least equal to the present, complicated machinery. Not one evening did she miss for months, until one day she quite suddenly announced that she needed a few days break. Why? asked the disconsolate kitchen boss, what is wrong? Did anybody hurt your feelings? No, responded the dishwasher abashedly, my mother is coming for a visit to Israel - and if she sees me washing dishes I'll have to wash and wash all my life!



Then there was the story of J.D., a young American who appeared quite unannounced with a letter of recommendation from some personality, stating that he would appreciate it if we could accommodate this deaf-mute person. I leave it to your imagination what my first reaction was - which branch would be interested in a deaf-mute worker? It took some pleading and persuading to make me receive him on trial, and I didn't regret it. Our glass plant enrolled him reluctantly, and he turned out to be an outstanding worker, after a while they wouldn't let him go. In the Haaretz newspaper of July 7 , 1988 you could read the following comment by Elie Elad: A sample of the beauty of Kibbutz Tsuba is the case of J.D. from the U.S.A. He happens to be deaf-mute, and for the last year and a half has worked in Quality Control in the local plant. At the end of that period he went to a conversion Ulpan at Kfar Etzion. Before leaving he handed a message to the local Newsletter, which read:

To all Tsuba members, Shalom. Lots of thanks to Joel Dorkam who was in charge of Volunteers and accepted me in spite of my infirmity: Thanks for , allocating me a responsible job at "ORAN" - I truly loved my work. Thanks for encouraging me to go to an Ulpan. Thanks for letting me share your life for a while - Tsuba was the only Kibbutz that would take me in at the time.

In "Camphill Correspondence" of May-June 2007 we found the following report by Sebastian Groh of Mannheim , Germany entitled: "How it is for a young Co-worker at Camphill":

It is said that people can only cope with a difficult situation if they see meaning in it. Meaning nowadays is in short supply. Thus it is an indescribable feeling for a co-worker to work in Camphill with the belief in doing something which is truly meaningful.

Having left the Camphill Community Thornbury in the UK and thinking back to that time which lies just half a year behind me, brings up a whole lot of emotions. To start from the beginning: I decided to do my National Service in England basically in order to improve my English. By 'chance' I came to this residential school with no expectations but with some curiosity. After only a short time to get used to the community's way of doing things, the workload began to be high, as was the level of responsibility, but it was also very fulfilling. We young co-workers needed to learn to hold back our personal needs from time to time because it was sometimes a day and night job.

In the course of the Foundation Year which contained subjects from Child Protection Issues, Syndromes and Polarities to Biodynamic Farming, for a new co-worker a totally new world was gradually unfolding itself. As well as many educational and welfare matters in which a co-worker is involved on a daily basis, you can also get to know an entirely different philosophical world view,

something which strained the constructs of my education but which offered aspects of understanding from an entirely different point of view.
This year went far beyond the often stated simple goals of progress in English language skills and getting to know a different culture. In retrospect I can say that this helped my personal development tremendously. Self control, personal stress management, showing initiative, lots of patience are a short list of key skills which I developed there and are preconditions in nowadays job market. Looking back I couldn't imagine the possibility of starting my studies right away as is usually proposed in order to enter the rat race as soon as possible. I couldn't help but see this year in Camphill as a great growth point for a pre-student's horizon. Due to living together with lots of others your age, a nice and homogenous group is created by itself in this community. This is the place and the year to build up very strong, perhaps even lifelong, friendships. Talking to other Camphill-experienced young people you always feel a kind of connection and of course you can relate easily to them but there's something else, there's something special about all these people. It's not easy to explain!

Sheiling School, Thornbury

Needless to say that you can have in a group like that loads and loads of fun with your mates, but Camphill shows you that there's something else as well, which opens us, young persons, gradually the eyes and we see that the time comes when we have to stop this life in a bubble with a horizon barely reaching the two next obligations of debauched enjoyment.
A very important thing for me personally was this total freedom in respect to the philosophy underlying the whole concept. Just as Steiner did not intend to inspire belief, each co-worker was free to concern himself with the fundamental idea or just leave it, for, thanks to the good instructions, each co-worker was capable to do a good job without any specific anthroposophical knowledge.
Of course this whole thing depends pretty much on the quality of its staff, probably far more than in usual establishments. Thanks to my houseparents this was an extremely pleasant year and I learned beyond the daily routine a lot about life itself.
Back in Germany I started university, but trying to build up a new daily routine wasn't easy. I didn't expect it but having talked to the other young co-workers back home, at first most of us felt a bit uncomfortable and alienated. Then I remembered a line I read long time ago in Camphill Pages: '"When you make peace with the urban jungle you almost forget the vision of Camphill special schools as an island of sanity in a maddening world". Having learned in Camphill to appreciate and to be grateful for the small things in life I consider it a big step to true happiness.
All in all it's a healthy progress of giving and taking in Camphill. A giving of the idea of Camphill, a giving from the community's staff, but above all a giving from the residents themselves. It's up to you to seize these chances and to have this great feeling of giving back all these wonderful things by doing a good job with your students. For these reasons a year at Camphill is a unique chance for each young person considering time abroad.

Sebastian is a student of economics at Mannheim University, Germany. He was a co-worker at the Sheiling School, Thornbury, UK, for a year.

That's it, folks.

Yalla Bye.

Joel Dorkam

Return of the commune

By Gavin Alder, Yahoo Australia
July 20, 2007

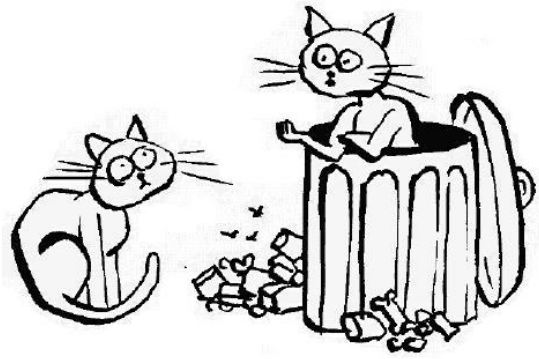
The ads might sound like advertising for the latest housing estate, but the New Age communities they feature are a modern twist on the hippie lifestyle.

Today, more than 200 people live on acreage blocks at Crystal Waters. Sepp Hock and Isabella Shodmak run a health retreat from their Crystal Waters home. They have their own chickens, grow their own fruit and vegetables, and life has never been sweeter.

Griffith University Social Historian Dr. Bill Metcalfe has spent 30 years studying so-called "intentional communities" in Australia. “There's a long and very rich history in Australia of intentional communities” he said. Forget Aquarius. According to Dr Metcalfe, we have entered a new age of group living. “When I started my research, there wasn't a council in Australia that wanted anything to do with any of these groups," he said. "They were seen as dirty, they'd reduce property values, these things." Now, he says many councils encourage them, because the communities take responsibility for their own roads, their own water supply, a lot of their power requirements and much of their waste management.

Developers are catching on, too. Kerry Shepherd is co-developer of the Currumbin Valley eco-village on the Gold Coast, the first eco-village actually being done by property developers. “The methodology of doing this project has been done in a very mainstream way," Kerry said. "Because we wanted to appeal to the development industry, to say 'this is how it can be done'."

It certainly appeals to Melissa and Eric Pearson. “Everybody is so approachable and friendly and we know most of them already," Melissa said. "Those we don’t know are worth getting to know, because they're here, they've come here." At the moment, their block is home to the local wildlife, but even before construction has started on their house, it feels like home, especially for their children Kirra and Jordan. “Letting kids be kids, not having so many restrictions on them, so they enjoy life and they can explore," Melissa said. "We're not worried about them going out onto a busy main road."



At a time when many of us are grappling with terms like global warming, climate change and environmental sustainability, people living in this eco-village are literally thinking globally by acting locally. The preferred mode of transport is pedal power and every home has its own water supply and generates its own solar power. Dennis and Claire Johnston’s home won't need artificial heating, thanks to the rammed earth walls retaining the warmth of the sun. It won't need cooling either because the design allows for the breeze to travel through the entire house. Ten solar panels will provide more than enough electricity. And the rest, they'll sell back to the power company. Once they are established, they will grow their own food, like the members of Crystal Waters community - where you won't find hippies. They call themselves ‘happies’.

“This is a renaissance, in a way, where it's not alternative anymore, it's becoming mainstream," local resident Max Leddigger said. For 20 years, Max has held firm to the belief that this is the way forward. It has been a long time coming, but now he says he doesn't just look like a pioneer, he feels like one too. “At the moment, I think we have a choice," Max said. "At the moment, we can choose to do certain things and learn certain lessons. In 10 or 20 years, we might be in such a tight spot, the change will be forced upon us."

Welcome to "Kibbutz Shorts", where we discover what's new on the Kibbutz in an update from around Israel.

Compiled mainly from the Kibbutz weeklies by Yoel Darom, Kibbutz Kfar Menachem

Searching for kibbutz values

"Ten years ago", said Avi, "I left my former Kibbutz, not only because they were in the process of changing to a fully privatized society, but a majority of opponents made life sour and the impasse created an impossible social situation for all. So I joined this one, and in the course of time my new community also started to take the path of paying "differential wages". But there is a huge difference: my 'new' Kibbutz sticks to the former key principle of 'mutual responsibility' and keeps under its control large sums of money - mostly from progressive taxes on members' salaries - to guarantee the continuation of the many communal services for all."

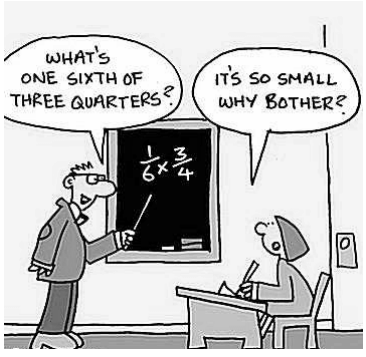
"But a second reason for my staying here with my family, rather happily, is the way our Kibbutz approached the whole issue. The 'new order' was carefully mapped, worked out and decided upon step by step, so that at every stage a large majority was well persuaded and voted step by step in favour of the proposed changes."

Avi went out to study and now fills the central role of the farm manager. He manages to find the right way of combining economic efficiency with the old Kibbutz values.

Israel absorbs refugees

Even before its independence, the State of Israel took in thousands of Jewish refugees. It absorbed millions during and after the holocaust. Now a new refugee problem has appeared: people fleeing Darfur, the genocide-ridden district in Sudan, infiltrate into Israel. Many of them are being accepted, even if only temporarily, and are trying to find work and shelter. Quite a few Kibbutzim have taken in a number of Sudanese as a humanitarian gesture.

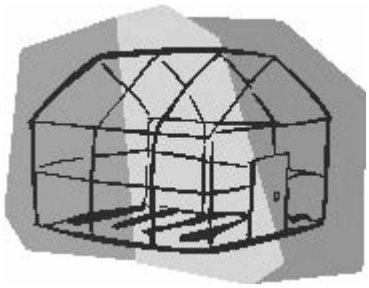
Teachers approved by pupils



One of the Kibbutz-based High Schools in the Galilee, introduced a new, probably unprecedented interpretation of "democracy at School": the students have to approve of each teacher. This includes not only the well-known teachers of the last years, even the newcomers to the teaching body will be interviewed by students before the students' delegates give their O.K. Some teachers gave their blessing to this new venture, others rejected it right away and refused to co-operate, seeing it as a kind of insult and an unfair infringement on their authority.

Living in Green Houses

Kibbutz Ein Dor - among others - is now building an additional neighbourhood in order to be able to accept newcomers, mainly young families with children. But this one is going to be different: all the 80 buildings will be "Green Houses", paying special attention to the ecological aspects of life (which are rather neglected in most Kibbutzim). Each house will have a solar heating system, second use of water which will then be used for irrigation, and all the arrangements needed for recycling waste.



Well-developed and talented

Many 'experts' condemned the old, (long-abandoned) Kibbutz system of children spending the night in their respective 'children houses', separated from their parents. Lately some of the Kibbutz-bred men and women complained of psychological and social problems which they attribute to these nights 'away from daddy and mummy'. Nowadays a new wave of books and articles have appeared, which try to analyze and interview these 'products of Kibbutz education', and many of them have discovered that "Most of the Kibbutz-born adults are as different and varied as any other society, and most Kibbutzniks display an enormous amount of human warmth; a well-developed, rich individuality and a talent for 'making it' under any life-situation in and outside the Kibbutz".

SOLIDARY ECONOMY

In a world, in which not only daily food and clothing are turned into mere "goods", but also interpersonal relations, our lives are more and more shaped by wild competition, many of us strive now, urgently, towards solidarity and mutual aid. With these words, the German "" (Monthly for "Self-organization") opens its leading article.

At our recent congress in Berlin (on Self-Organization and Ecology), the article continues, the central topic for discussion was "Solidary Economy in Global Capitalism". From our debates it became clear, that many of those who had engaged in criticism of globalization or in workers' unions, seek now more practical, daily-life expressions of solidarity.

In the last few decades we have witnessed many experiments and practical start-ups of "Alternative Economies": communes, living-communities, joint housing projects, no-pay-shops and more. It seems that this congress succeeded in recognizing some very real developments - a giant step forward to minimize the social isolation and in bringing about a proper dialogue between these societies and globalized capitalism, even if we did not find a satisfactory answer to the question: "What does 'Solidary Economy' mean to people who do not accept a decrease in their living standard but no longer want to be part of the 'War of Competition'", which is the major drive of private production?

The majority of the participants at the congress favored the establishment of more new enterprises, but a minority pointed out that in the last decades thousands of new projects, which entered the market as "collectives", turned within a few short years into perfectly "normal" private shops. And the question arose: do we really want to go through this process of "adjustment to normality" again?

(From CONTRASTE, POB 104520-69035, Heidelberg, Germany [no signature])
Translated by Yoel Darom

Green Acres: Communities Reduce Ecological Footprints

Published on Worldwatch Institute (http://www.worldwatch.org)
Aug 8 2007

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Municipal leaders from San Francisco to Melbourne are engaging in sustainability actions from banning plastic bags and water bottles to making commitments to address climate change. But within and beyond cities, growing numbers of local communities are also going green, according to a new Vital Signs Update from the Worldwatch Institute. Worldwide, the 379 "ecovillages" currently registered with the Global Ecovillage Network are sharing innovative solutions that connect residents socially while collectively lowering their ecological footprints— including local food co-ops, community-supported agriculture programs, and carpooling.

"Planned communities tend to evoke over-developed suburban neighborhoods and mini-malls," says Erik Assadourian, Worldwatch Research Associate and author of the Update. "But increasingly, planned communities will come to mean neighbors living with a purpose beyond consumerism, embracing a sustainable lifestyle and forging meaningful connections with their neighbors."

Europe leads the world in the number of registered ecovillages, with 138, followed by North America (110), Latin America (58), Asia/Oceania (52), and Africa/Middle East (21).

Many ecovillages are reducing energy use, localizing farming, and creating more sustainable local businesses. Other environmentally minded communities, including the more than 450 "co-housing" projects found in North America and Europe, focus primarily on improving the quality of life of residents. Co-housing typically includes clusters of smaller houses with shared dining halls and other spaces, facilitating stronger social ties while reducing the material and energy needs of the community.

Even mainstream developers are pioneering green principals in their ventures. The Beddington Zero Energy Development (BedZED), an 82-unit housing complex in London, aims to produce as much energy as it uses through a combination of passive solar design, energy efficiency, and greater use of walking, cycling, and public transit. A resident living at BedZED—or at the Findhorn ecovillage to the north in Scotland—has just 60 percent of the ecological footprint of an average individual in the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, in Germany's Sieben Linden ecovillage, per capita carbon dioxide emissions are just 28 percent the national average.

While all ecovillages and other environmentally minded communities strive toward a similar goal, the diversity among them is striking. They can be found in rural, suburban, and urban areas, and in industrialized and developing countries. Ecovillages in Mbam, Senegal; Porto Alegre, Brazil; and Munksøgård, Denmark, all contribute to the growing global movement.

"Many people think living in an ecovillage would be a life of sacrifice. But research shows that residents have lowered their ecological footprints and financial costs, and maintain closer bonds with their neighbors, all of which translates to a less stressed, more fulfilling lifestyle," says Assadourian.

Congratulations to Twin Oaks for celebrating its 40th anniversary this summer. Over the following pages we reprint the thoughts of three of their members about their labor system, excerpted from FEC's online newsletter, Dirt & Dreams, Winter 2007, followed by an article about the community from the Richmond Times-Dispatch Newspaper.

Twin Oaks' Labor Credit System:

At Twin Oaks community in Virginia, we each commit to working 44 hours a week in tasks which we deem "labor creditable" and which we value equally: cooking, cleaning, group child care, tofu production, hammock production, gardening, dairy work, and the hundreds of other jobs we do here. (Although we can set the number of hours we work more or fewer than 44, depending on Twin Oaks' needs at the time.)

We each have a great deal of autonomy over constructing a week's labor scene that fits our individual needs and desires, as we get to choose most of the work tasks we will do in a given week. And it's a trust-based system: we keep track how much of which kinds of work we've done each week. Hours done over or under quota get added to, or deducted from, a member's running balance for vacation time. Our labor system is central to our community's functioning, and lately we've been talking about what it means to us.

Pele: Our labor system is a mix of positive and negative, like virtually everything. I genuinely appreciate its dependency upon honesty, cooperation, and equality. One hour of work is worth one labor credit regardless of the type of job.

But a system that relies on trust and honor can be easily abused and exploited when communards refuse to or fail to act with the spirit of the system.

This is disheartening to me. I live here for the trust-based way that we share our work in order to share the benefits. The labor system's effect on the community is also both positive and negative. We tend to be very work-focused, which can interfere with cultural pursuits.

However, we are highly productive. Our tofu business and garden are the first two examples that come to mind of hard work paying off. Even as a work-focused community, our system offers much more flexibility than the 'outside.' Each of us is an owner of several businesses, not an employee. This gives each of us more power and autonomy over our jobs than someone with a boss.

Personally, I greatly enjoy the freedom that our system offers. It provides me with the opportunity to hike in the woods for long periods of time. Although getting out of the labor hole (when a member owes work to the community) is challenging for me due to my physically demanding work scene, I still wouldn't change our labor system. I live with the consequences of my choices.

Shal: A labor credit is earned per hour of work, no matter how much or little is accomplished in that hour. On the positive side, it is a very important part of an egalitarian system to recognize that some people are able to work faster than others, and slow people should not be punished for what they cannot help. This is especially important to me since I am a slow person, and I love that I am not punished for that here. It is one of several major reasons why I live here. However, although a faster person's range is different than a slower person's, both have the ability to work quicker or slower. The upper part of that range requires pushing ourselves hard, and most of us would not want to be required to do that since we want to enjoy our work, and we own the place. But much of the range can be done without undue hardship, at least in repetitive jobs (like most of our work), by looking for ways to work more efficiently.

Shal

As I see it, it is a major weakness that our system has no built-in incentives for working more efficiently. I think this has the effect of making our community significantly more inefficient than it could be, thus costing us as a community quite a bit of time. I think we could chip away at this problem in a couple of ways. On a formal level, for our repetitive jobs we could teach efficient methods to new members, and hopefully even retrain established members in more efficient methods. And on a more informal level, we could try to create more of a culture of trying to work efficiently for the good of the community, while still working at a humanely comfortable pace. This would serve the community better in that we would get more done per hour. Then we could do more and/or work less.

Apple: Sometimes I hate our labor system. Sometimes I notice that I am comprehending life only through labor credits, deciding what to do with my time based not on what I would enjoy doing, or what I think needs doing, but on what I could do that I could write on my labor sheet. Sometimes I find myself looking at what other people are doing for labor credits and judging myself against them. At times like these, I start to think that the labor system is a gigantic and ugly institution that's slowly crushing me into the ground.

And sometimes I love our labor system. I see freedom within it to choose work that feels good to me and that differs every day. I see it as a representation of all the members deciding what is important to us, and our agreeing to work on it together, equally, fairly. I see it as the basis of our egalitarian system. I see it as agreements that we individuals have made with each other, out of respect and shared interest.

I struggle with trying to uphold this second view of the system. I want to feel positive about it and about us. What's important to me is that we get the work done, and we regard each other with respect. I don't think there is any system that can make both of these things happen. It is the choices of individuals that make our society work. And on a good day, I do think our society works.

The Federation of Egalitarian Communities (FEC) is a network of income-sharing communities in North America valuing non-violence, egalitarianism, and participatory decision-making. FEC communities include East Wind, Sandhill Farm, Twin Oaks, Skyhouse, Acorn, and the Emma Goldman Finishing School. www.thefec.org.

Commune turns 40

By CALVIN R. TRICE
June 20, 2007 - RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH

At 40 years old, Twin Oaks in Louisa County is middle-age or even old by the standards of communes that sprouted during the 1960s. Yet it has survived, and even thrived, with a blend of strong foundational leadership, luck and a relentless practicality to balance the flower-children and behaviorist ideals on which it was founded in June 1967.

"We are part of the mainstream; there's no way not to be," said Hawina Falcon, a 10-year resident of Twin Oaks. "We use cars. That's very mainstream. We grow a lot of our own food, but we buy a fair amount, too."

The community, which celebrated its founding this past weekend, has about 100 residents. Its residents maintain strict rules of equality and a comprehensive volume of laws, and they carefully consider their ties to mainstream society.

Residents give a variety of reasons for settling here; one is the commitment to egalitarianism. "Here, the people making the decisions are the same ones cleaning the toilets," said Mala Ghoshal, who arrived in 2000. Others mention the opportunities to live according to environmentalist ideals or to make close friendships with others.

Members cook two meals a day that are shared in the central dining area. Television is prohibited, but not entertainment recorded on CDs, DVDs or the Internet. Otherwise, they entertain themselves. On a recent night, a group gathered at sunset and waited 30 minutes to watch the primroses open, Ghoshal said. "We do a lot of creating our own culture here -- engaging each other."

Asked why the community survived when others failed, many residents point unabashedly to an early source of steady income from an arrangement with Pier 1 Imports. Twin Oaks made rope hammocks for the retailer, which parlayed its line of alternative home furnishings and accessories to upscale chic. At the height of the arrangement, the 42,000 hammocks Twin Oakers wove accounted for up to two-fifths of the $500,000 the community earned per year. "We would not have survived without them," said Ghoshal, 31. "We were very lucky to find a source of income so early." But Pier 1 dropped Twin Oaks as a hammock supplier in August 2004.

Photo taken at Twin Oaks' 40th birthday celebration

When it did, the community slashed spending and work quotas and lived with less until its income rebounded with the expansion of other industries. Twin Oaks residents are considering a recent offer from Pier 1 to buy 6,000 hammocks per year. If they accept, the arrangement would occupy a much smaller share of the community's income than in the past, because of its expanded tofu business.

Residents don't consider their arrangement utopia. The intimacy can be a negative if personalities clash and if some residents don't get along. Living and working closely with others presents a problem when you disagree sharply with a decision-maker, Shal said. "It's not a problem if I dislike a politician, because I don't have to live with them," he said. "Here, when people make decisions I don't like, I have to live with them. That can make you want to go away." And people do -- about 15 a year.

Kat Kinkade, a Twin Oaks founder whose leadership is often cited for the commune's success, said people leave for a variety of reasons: Unfulfilled ideals. Inability to make a romantic connection. Aversion to the work. A nasty argument with a resident. "And we just didn't know what to do about it [the bad blood]," Kinkade said from her home in Mineral. She left in 2000 because she was tired of it. Ties to Twin Oaks are easy to make and break, said Kinkade, 76. "You don't have to pay to get in, and you don't have much to lose when you leave." Like many former residents, she maintains a close relationship with current ones.

During its four decades, Twin Oaks has also developed an extensive code of community by-laws governing use of community bikes, how to check out the community cars and the extensive process of complaint, hearing and advocacy by which a resident can be kicked out. Two such proceedings were initiated in the past decade, but residents didn't have to see them though because the people chose to leave after complaints were made, said Paxus Calta, a 10-year Twin Oaks resident and husband of Hawina. "Typically, you've already poisoned your relationship with a significant number of people, and it's not comfortable any more," he said. The by-laws help to diffuse accountability while achieving community goals, said Keenan, a 24-year resident. "We don't rely on personality to get things done or solve problems," he said. "What we try to do is create a system that supports where we want to go."

This summer, Time magazine, San Francisco Chronicle and The Independent, all printed articles on the Danish commune of Christiana under the headlines “Europe's Last Commune Braces for Battle”, “'70s utopia soon to be just another brick in the wall” and “On the barricades: Trouble in a hippie paradise” respectively. What follows are excerpts describing a community under threat:

In 1971, the original 700 Christianians established squatters' rights in an abandoned military barracks, just a 10-minute walk from the Danish parliament building. A generation later, this "free city" still stands -- an ultra-human mishmash of idealists, hippies, potheads, non-materialists and happy children (600 adults, 200 kids, 200 cats, 200 dogs, 17 horses and two parrots), even a handful of Willie Nelson-type seniors among the 180 remaining here from the original takeover. And an amazing thing has happened: The place has become the third-most-visited sight among tourists in Copenhagen.

Christiania, which sprawls just behind the spiral tower of Our Savior's Church in the trendy district of Christianshavn, welcomes visitors (even offering tours daily through the summer). They've become a major part of the economy. Tourists react in very different ways to the place. Some see dogs, dirt and dazed people. Others see a haven of peace, freedom and no taboos.


VisitDenmark / Bent Naesby

At the community's entrance is a sign announcing that you are leaving the EU (European Union). The main drag is nicknamed "Pusher Street" for the marijuana-selling stands that lined it before the recent police crackdown. Now the police drop in 10 times a day, and cafes post signs warning "No pot smoking." (Hard drugs have always been strictly forbidden.)

As you walk down Pusher Street, you'll see Nemoland, a kind of food circus. A huge warehouse called the Green Hall does triple-duty as a recycling center (where people get most of their building material), a craft center for kids and an evening concert hall. Nearby is a barracks housing a bohemian chic loft whose near-gourmet cuisine attracts smartly dressed professional types from all over town.

While biking through the community, it occurred to me that, except for the bottled beer being sold, there was not a hint of any corporate entity in the entire free city. Everything was handmade. Nothing was packaged. And, of course, that will not stand.

But Christiania sits on prime real estate in Copenhagen's upmarket Christenhaven neighbourhood, and Denmark's conservative government wants to reclaim the territory for an ambitious housing project.

Still, the old hippie idealism still shapes many of the rules that govern the commune: Selling property is not allowed, and instead of cars — also banned — residents use bicycles to ferry everything from groceries to children.

The enclave is arranged into 14 separate districts with the rights to each home ultimately residing with the community. The result is a culture of meetings, often lasting long into the night, to decide everything from who should be allowed to move into a vacant property to whether the grass verges should be cut. Among the meetings held last week was a gathering to decide whether one resident accused of repeatedly playing music too loudly should be asked to leave the area.

At the day care center set on the shore of the commune's wooded lake, minder Richard Lonsdale has just put on a movie for children after finishing school classes. "I've been here for five years and it's changed a hell of a lot," he says. "There's been a general hardening of attitudes [from the police] — they think we're the enemy, but we don't teach our kids that."

As well as the kindergarten, Christiania also boasts a health clinic, a book shop, a vegan restaurant and a concert venue, which gets transformed into an impromptu dining hall once a year when residents organize a Christmas party for the city's homeless.

The community of Damanhur in Italy hosted the 2007 ICSA Conference. What follows are their own words, taken from interviews, conversations and presentations with Damanhurians that took place with the editor of C.A.L.L.

Education at Damanhur, Gazzella Mimosa

Our educational model is based on nature, life and death. Our school is both practical and theoretical - applying theories and hypothesis to make them real by experiencing. Arts are done by our own hands. Education is a form of art. Educate by example. Self-education of adults is important - as they teach and guide they also learn something new. We strive as adults to become harmonious and to leave space for the natural talents of our little ones to learn and grow. The potential of each one can either come to life or stay hidden.

Various community figures play different roles in the lives of the children. The primary figures are the parents in the first years. The kids benefit from relationships with other significant adults. Godmothers and Godfathers have an effective role that is not just practical – they are present *in all* stages – having a constant relationship.

At birth children are hosted by the community that takes care of them. The children are assisted to connect with nature, wildlife and seasons, as well as to create a harmonious connection with mythological figures, which leads to enchantment for life and optimism.

Parents can also choose other people to connect with their children. These significant others, who can be people outside of the nucleo too, will be able to transmit qualities and talents they have to the new-born, exposing it to qualities that compliment those of their parents. The nucleo is a full partner from the time of conception - having a baby is a collective decision.

We have common pedagogic policies: At the beginning of Damanhur a group of couples took responsibility - now it is a much broader group.

The school serves basic needs. We promote a different teaching style to reawaken the human potential of these children.

We have tutors who are not just transmitters of knowledge. They create relationships with each student, following their growth with emotional and spiritual support. The tutors participate in their discoveries. It is different from regular teaching.

Learning through traveling is important. It is important to find experiences that you want to learn from by changing the kids' environment. This is true, not just for the children, but for the community as a whole. We intentionally take kids away from their comfort zone.

Every three months families and kids (that are old enough) are asked to define the needs of the children in that family. They make a program with clear goals that are agreed upon by everybody present.

We encourage active citizenship of our kids: we think of them as guests because they need to choose. At 18 years old they then ask to be a Damanhurian. We value the children as citizens and we listen to them. We explore how they think Damanhur can improve. We encourage them to express themselves and to be full active citizens.

Adolescence as a rebellion from family/community is a by-product of society. Kids and adults tend to live in different worlds, separated. By nurturing close exchange relationships of all ages helps this. This happens from a very young age and reduces rejection in adolescence.

Attendance at school is mandatory. It is a Family-school (home-schooling) here. Parents delegate education to the teachers. They sit formal exams in the external schools and do pretty well. Our school is up to 8th grade (13 years old) and then the kids go to an outside secondary school.

The middle school teaches them a combination of Damanhurian methods and regular school methods make the transition easier when the kids leave for the normal school.

Our education system is the future as opposed to the regular Italian system. We currently have 80 kids in the regular school system. Maybe in ten years we will have our own high school. The next step is a bilingual international school and an International camp for kids of all ages. Children can come here for a special experience.
In our school we have a ratio of 8 kids per teacher. We have two age-groups, mixed ages (two-year span in each group). The first level of responsibility is the parents, and then the community. If the child is co-operative, honest, non-violent – it comes from the parents. We are now holding monthly parental meetings. The parents actually want it once a week. We run a 'School for parents' – for them to learn about parenting.
Our framework is about humour, flexibility and intelligence but the heart of the structure is the heart. It's about trust and fun - a game. We don't take ourselves too seriously.

Anaconda Papaya

Comings and Goings
'We are not a revolving door community'. People leave. There are times that more people leave (because of changes) and times when it is more stable. Most of the original founders are still here (or have died).

Conflict
Every individual sees things according to their filter (attitude, character, history). No-one holds the ultimate truth. When we have a discussion, everyone knows that their opinion is not the only one. This reduces the chances of conflict. If a conflict arises in the family, it is discussed in the family. The family helps deal with the conflict. Even divorcees can remain in the same supportive family. If conflict arises at work then co-workers mediate.

Work
A way to express our talents and a way to express ourselves

Love
Love is the main energy. Love is the main passion. That is the secret. If I love you I help you.

Art and Craft
It is for each person to find the path to their spirituality. That is why art is so important. Not as work but as a craft. It is a way to express ones own potential. Many people come with one craft and learn something new and discover ones own potential. For example, we want to build a huge roof. First we must learn how to make it out of glass. Everything is a continuous education

Commitment
I make an oath, a commitment to the community in the level of my soul. It is profound. It has a weight. We are free to choose. We share a commitment to the same ideals. We are not here for ourselves but we want to change the world and we are willing to change ourselves first. What I appreciate about Damanhur is that it is 'radically real'. We strive for love and peace, knowing that it is not always easy.

Politics & relationship with the outside world
We focus on investing our energy and our values, into politics. 40-50 from Damanhur are involved in politics, from local councilors to national politics. How can we change things? We must try. There needs to be collaboration on a practical level to bring about change – on local, national and international levels. We have our own political movement. 600 people creates stability internally. Contact with the outside is important - We must not be closed but must nurture our strength as a group.

Children
We give our children tools to live their life in the outside world in a healthy way. They find their way in the outside world. When they grow up they have values.

The people
The most precious thing in Damanhur are the people. The community must exist because it lets people grow as individuals. Not everyone thinks the same or does the same – it is the opposite: we share the results of what the other person achieves. It gives everyone the opportunity to express their talents.

Formica Coriandolo & Capra Caruba,

From the magazine "What is Enlightenment?" (April-June 2007), published by EnlightenNext, which is "dedicated to liberating and harnessing the creativity and unparalleled positivity that is released when people come together beyond ego"

Or Haganuz ("Hidden Light")

Philosophy/Mission Statement: To usher in a global Messianic Age through communal life guided by a unique synthesis of socialist and kabbalistic principles, according to the revolutionary teaching of the visionary Rabbi Yehudah Leib Ashlag (1885-1954), and through dissemination of Ashlag's teachings around the world.

A CASUAL VISITOR TO OR HAGANUZ would not, at first glance, find the community all that extraordinary. In Israel, it is not uncommon to find a community in which all the members are Orthodox Jews, with men donning long beards and sideburns and women covered from neck to toe. You might first suspect something different, however, when you spot a bearded, skullcapped man doing tai chi or another sitting alone in the woods in deep contemplation. Or perhaps you wander into a classroom and see a rabbi in black Hassidic garb, hat and all, discoursing on acupuncture and Chinese medicine to a class divided by a partition that separates the men from the women.

And yet Or Haganuz is much more than a community of Orthodox Jews with New Age interests. Here in this small pastoral community of sixty-eight families (some four hundred inhabitants) in northern Israel, a high-stakes experiment in human potential is taking place. It is the first serious attempt to apply the revolutionary communal teachings of Rabbi Ashlag, a spiritual visionary whose work is responsible for the fact that Kabbalah is a household word all over the world.

"Rabbi Ashlag was interested in the transformation of humanity," explains Rabbi Uval Asherov, one of Or Haganuz's founders. "He felt that we are on the brink of the Messianic Age, which would be characterized by a fundamental shift in human motivation - from a desire to get and to have, which originates from the ego, to a desire to give and to share, which originates from God." Ashlag taught that such a shift in motivation, which was way beyond what humanity has been capable of so far, has only been glimpsed twice in human history - once on the occasion of the revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai and another time during the reign of King Solomon.

Surprisingly, what convinced Ashlag that we are approaching the Messianic Age was the advent of communist ideas and their increasing popularity about a century ago. "Ashlag saw this as an indication that there was global hunger for life that holds giving and sharing in higher regard than having and getting," says Rabbi Asherov. "It indicated to him that something new was now possible."

But Ashlag was well aware of the limitations of Communism, as it denied the vertical dimension of life and focused on matter. This lack of a spiritual dimension, he taught, was the reason why Communism had to resort to force and brutality in order to impose its ideals. What would a communist lifestyle look like, he asked, if it were not motivated by a desire for material equality, or even social justice, but rather was seen as a way of living according to the will of God - a life of endless giving? What if communist ideals were married to and practiced in the context of the teaching of the Kabbalah? Ashlag predicted that if such a lifestyle would he widespread, this would

usher in an age of collective enlightenment, not just for Jews but for humanity as a whole.

It was only in I989, thirty-five years after Ashlag's death, that one of his spiritual heirs, Rabbi Mordechai Sheinberger, inspired a group of his students to live according to Ashlag's communal ideals, and Or Haganuz was born. The initial group was made up exclusively of *baalei teshuva* ("possessors of repentance") - formerly secular Jews who have adopted Orthodox Judaism in adulthood. Sheinberger, it seems, wanted Or Haganuz to be free from many of the habits that have accompanied Orthodox Jewish life for millennia.

One such habit is the relationship to work. Traditionally, many Orthodox Jewish communities encourage males to devote themselves full time to the study of the Torah, supporting them with donations. At Or Haganuz, only a handful of select gifted scholars engage in full-time study; for most, the main spiritual practice is work. "Our life here is guided by the principle of 'Love your neighbor as yourself,'" explains Rabbi Asherov. "And 'love' for us is a very practical commandment: Your primary concern should not be your welfare but your neighbor's. Love of one's neighbor means that your motivation for work is securing your neighbor's needs."

This aspect of Judaism, says Asherov, has been neglected by Orthodox Judaism. Little wonder. By his own admission, transforming someone's motivation to such a degree is the hardest thing there is to do. Yet he claims that through the study of the Kabbalah, as well as through the constant guidance of their teacher, Rabbi Sheinberger, people change.

The way resources are allocated at Or Haganuz may be an indication of this change. In true communist fashion, everyone works according to their ability and receives according to their needs, and all the income is collected into a common kitty. "And who decides," we ask, "how much you should get?"

"You decide," says Asherov. "When members need some money, they withdraw as much as they need from the kitty. In the log book, they only write down the amount they took out, not their names."

Life at Or Haganuz is no summer camp. A typical day starts at 4:00 AM (though some start as early as 2:00 AM) with a few hours of Kabbalah study. At 6:00 AM, morning prayers are held. At 8:00 AM, kids go to the local schools and parents to work, mostly in one of the Or Haganuz-owned businesses, which include a printing press and publishing house, two regional supermarkets, and a large Chinese medicine school and treatment center. There are two more scheduled communal prayer times, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. However, meals - including the Shabbat meals - are taken at home, preserving the traditional structure of the Jewish family.

Commitment is measured at times of adversity. While living at Or Haganuz is never without challenges, the recent conflict between Israel and Lebanon raised the stakes considerably. Although well within the range of Hezbollah Katyusha rockets, none of the residents agreed to be evacuated, even after the village was directly hit. It was a statement of their commitment to a lifestyle that they see as both characteristic of the Messianic Age and the means of bringing this age about. And while their numbers are increasing steadily, they hope that through personal example and their efforts to spread the teachings of the Kabbalah many more will be inspired to adopt their lifestyle, both in Israel and abroad.

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