C.A.L.L.

Communities At Large Letter

INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES DESK YAD TABENKIN

No. 47 - Winter 2020/21

Dear Readers,

The good news is that since you are reading these words, it means that we have managed to overcome significant challenges to get the latest issue of C.A.L.L. to you, our beloved readers.

The less than positive news, is that we too have succumbed to significant financial woes, and for the time being, will only be offering C.A.L.L. digitally on our website.

We kept going as long as we good with a print copy, but both printing costs and mailing costs proved prohibitive in a time when our income is, to say the least, uncertain.

There are some upsides to this new reality: Firstly, the environmental cost of putting out C.A.L.L. has been reduced to zero, which has to be a good thing in terms of doing our bit to protect our planet. Secondly, we have the potential to reach a lot more people this way – emails do bounce, but I presume less than 'return to sender', which have increased in frequency in these COVID-19 times.

We'll be transforming our distribution list from a mailing list to an emailing list, so if you want to make sure that future issues of C.A.L.L. find their way into your inbox, drop us a line at the email address below.

So, I'll leave you to enjoy a variety of articles on communal living from around the world. I'm sure you'll find plenty of stories that'll pique your interest. It is incredible how many of us are striving for similar things, in different places, and yet are so disconnected from one another. C.A.L.L. is here to try and create those connections, for us to share some our successes and failures, hopes and dreams.

You can send us your suggestions, corrections, contributions and retributions regarding C.A.L.L., to the usual email address,

Yours,
In community

Anton
anton@communa.org.il
www.communa.org.il

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I Was Parented by 15 Adults on a Commune & This is What It Taught Me

By Molly Leach

Most kids in this country grew up in some sort of a neighborhood — or even a cul de sac. Maybe you knew a few of your surrounding neighbors, or maybe not. Maybe Mom would wave at Jim across the street or sometimes chat with Karen on the curb / sidewalk / driveway / stairwell / apartment building hallway / what have you. Maybe your relationship with those who lived near you was friendly but never intimate or involved. Maybe you had one or two parents, or a big blended family, maybe one or more older siblings to teach you about life. Not me, though; I was raised by more than 15 adults.

Molly Leach, March 2020

It wasn't quite since birth, but since age three — when my family moved to a commune called Tierra Nueva Cohousing on the central coast of California. This intentional community of "parents" taught me everything.

Before I even learned how to share space with my younger sister, at the age of 3 I was already learning how to share almost everything with a community of over 20 families. Cohousing, which originated in Scandinavia, involves getting a like-minded group of people together and building a communal living arrangement. Typically, this means clustering houses so that cars are on the perimeter and open space is maximized. Though we lived in separate homes, we were all connected under a canopy of avocado trees through weaving terra cotta pathways.

In cohousing, sharing resources is key, and for this reason these communities have shared laundry facilities, workshops, game rooms, etc. We shared cars, cats, a garden, (free!) child care, a chicken coop, and a yoga studio. We also shared the common house, our general gathering place for shared meals, meetings, parties, and guest housing. (The common house was also where my friends and I would play dress-up, start a fire in the library unsupervised, sneak-watch inappropriate TV, and have our first spin-the-bottle experience.)

Tierra Nueva proper was established in 1997 after its founders Frank and Steph Recceri had already held years of meetings, retreats, and community-building activities in preparation. Cohousing is all about nonviolent communication, consensus-based decision making, and generally pitching in — so the Recceris cultivated a community where families were happy to collaborate, share, and grow together. As kids, we always felt safe as well as encouraged to

explore and figure things out on our own. I know it sounds like the wholesome beginning of the Rajneesh movement but don't worry: The Tierra Nueva community is to this day still thriving upon the same ideals it was built on over 20 years ago.

Growing up in this little community had its pros and cons. Living closely with people from all different backgrounds can be just as wonderful as it is challenging. I was not only raised by many adults ; I was also raised and taught by my peers. But growing up on a commune was, for me, the best possible parenting I could have had. Here's what it taught me.

Privacy is overrated

This became clearer to me when I was a teenager. Because we share almost everything in cohousing, there can be quite a lack of privacy. These adults watch you grow up, and then once you're a teenager you are under a microscope. They question your decisions and know all too much about that boy you're dating at school or that blowout fight you got in with your best friend. Sometimes it's great; you feel loved and seen. Other times, it can be a drag, especially in that weird teen stage of life.

When my cohousing sisters and I hit around 15, we began to experiment with marijuana and alcohol. Unlike a normal household, where you usually keep this stuff from your parents, try it at a friend's house or behind the school, we were trying it in cohousing. When one of my close friends started smoking weed out her window every night, the next-door neighbor threw a huge fit, called the cops, and threatened to send her to juvie. And this didn't happen only once: This happened nearly any time any of us would try to smoke inside, outside, on the roof, in the woods, you name it. Of course, we also tried to use the common house to throw a rager. And as any parent knows, teens can be careless, they don't necessarily clean up, they can be very loud, and they don't often give a rat's ass about where they are partying as long as it isn't their place. Needless to say, the rager attempt did not go well for us.
The girls and I also used to brag about where we lived. We were the cool, easygoing "hippies" who always had a good unsupervised place to throw a party. But because we were using communal space, we were actually under a surprising amount of scrutiny. We would usually get a scathing email to the whole community the next day — or a neighbor would just plain crash our party, frowning and muttering about the noise. But hey, sometimes we would actually get an elderly neighbor party crasher who just wanted to join in on the fun!

Independence (and imagination) is key

In cohousing, there was always something to explore, and we kids were lucky enough to do a lot of that exploration on our own. The entire community was a safe space in which we could play, grow, and use our imaginations. Every morning, I would wake up, run over to my best

friend's house, decide what game we were going to play that day, dress up, and hit the sidewalk. Our mothers wouldn't see us home until dinner.

We would spend all day playing out our elaborate imaginary games: We'd be orphans running away from the orphanage, we'd set up camp and start some mud soup for dinner. If the boys ever found their way into our game, they would have to be the "bad guys"; we would run from them, through the common house, down the green road to the garden and onto the trampoline. Through unsupervised play, we gained independence, creativity, as well as rooted communication skills.

Communication is everything

If conflict arose between us kids, we were taught the importance of nonviolent communication. For example, my best boy friend and I loved to fight with swords; we were usually Zoro and Elena or Lancelot and Guinevere. When it came time to pick out our clothes and character for the day, the adults around ensured that Riley and I used our words to get what we wanted — instead of hitting each other immediately, which of course was what we wanted to do.

This simple reliance on verbal communication from such a young age proved to be more valuable than I could have imagined, and it would even set me up for success when I went off to college. There, I was sharing ideas and space all over again — except this time, I got to show students from all different backgrounds the value of what was instilled in me so young. Throughout my life, this positive communication has improved my work, relationships, and creative endeavors.

If given the opportunity, would I raise my future children in cohousing? Absolutely. In the end, the pros outweigh the cons. I feel incredibly grateful that I experienced the childhood I did; being raised by a literal village provided me with a great sense of love, shelter, and what we all seek: community and connection. I learned how to empathize and walk in someone else's shoes.

There is wonderful value in humans working together to create something so special and sacred together, and each one of those 15+ adults — as well as the kids — in Tierra Nueva taught me and supported me in ways I will never forget.

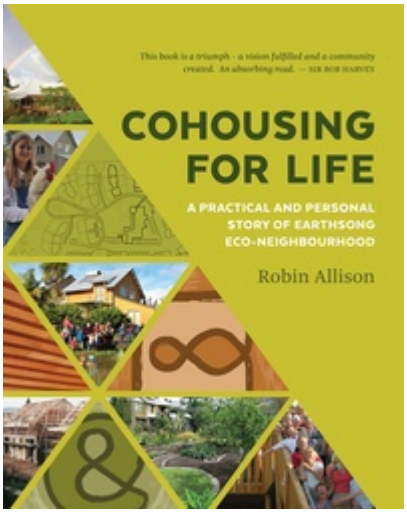
The Foundation for Intentional Community (FIC) defines an intentional community as a group of people who have chosen to live together or share resources on the basis of common values.

But what is a non-intentional community?!

Book review: Cohousing for Life

https://architecturenow.co.nz
By Abigail Hurst

Abigail Hurst finds Robin Allison's thought-provoking account of her life and the design and construction of the Earthsong eco-neighbourhood a frank and informative read.



The Earthsong 'eco-neighbourhood' was the first completed, purpose-built cohousing project in New Zealand – a tremendous feat, which was initiated and largely driven by architect Robin Allison. Cohousing for Life, written by Allison, is a documentation of her life and the 13-year design and construction phase of the Rānui eco-neighbourhood (1995–2008). Alternating between personal story and factual, 'theme'-related chapters, Allison weaves an engaging and informative read that captivates heart and mind.

The book contains useful information, tools and reflections to equip any person contemplating involvement with a similar project themselves. However, it is primarily self-focused and does not detail other cohousing projects or more-recent trends, such as coliving. Nor does it reference the history of cohousing, aside from in the notes. Cohousing has seen a revival of interest in New Zealand over the past five years, as more individuals and family units seek alternative modes of property ownership in the wake of the widening divide between income and house prices.

While largely written for the 'converted' – those already interested in alternative models of community living – Cohousing for Life does briefly target common doubts, arguing that, if designed well, cohousing can provide both privacy and community, and autonomy and cooperation, with the needs and rights of the individual balanced with those of the greater collective. This principle aligns itself with that of permaculture – recognising underlying patterns in nature and identifying the ways in which buildings can be part of, and care for, these systems. Allison's vision was based on this: to establish a cohousing neighbourhood that serves as an example of environmental, social and educational sustainability, and which ultimately contributes to the good of the planet.

A willingness to explore solutions at the edge of what is known led Allison and her team to fulfil the Earthsong vision, truly the first of its kind in New Zealand. Beginning with her childhood, we learn how the author set herself ambitious and admirable goals and, ultimately, found her purpose in cohousing. This journey is documented with surprising frankness, and the reader walks alongside Allison as she overcomes the trials of finding her place as a woman working in Auckland and architecture in the late 1980s and '90s while being a mother. This proved to be just the beginning of the architect's navigation of personal and professional life, as her interest in sustainability and alternative modes of housing grew and the Earthsong eco-neighbourhood began to form. Her involvement as part of the community

group and expertise as a building professional led to personal and interpersonal conflicts, culminating in her rejection by the group as project architect. Despite this, Allison resolved to remain involved and, eventually, her position as project coordinator was instrumental to the success of the eco-neighbourhood.

Cohousing for Life documents one person's journey towards cohousing, as she negotiates private life, work and a complex set of relationships. Allison's story is, in part, the Earthsong community's narrative, set within the context of community governance and group decision-making, community design, sustainable building methods, power and leadership, and financial and legal structures. These themes are addressed in the chapters and punctuated with personal history; alongside photo records of people and progress on site, diagrams and drawings, insight and practical advice are given regarding the numerous challenges and complexities of a cohousing project.

The Earthsong eco-neighbourhood cohousing development in West Auckland.

"The buildings are the picture frame, the people and the life between the buildings are the picture." This rings true and is fleshed out throughout the text, and we are invited to ask questions such as: What role should buildings play in our society? What good are we doing for the world in our own projects and practice? And might cohousing provide some of these answers?

Thought-provoking to the end, Cohousing for Life reveals the blood, sweat and tears behind achieving New Zealand's first cohousing project. Allison's continued perseverance in the face of endless obstacles to realise both her own and Earthsong's vision reinforces the scale of this accomplishment. This book is an enjoyable, passionate read that bears witness to Allison's rich contribution to educating the public in sustainability and to innovative housing design in New Zealand.

News of the Oaks

by Valerie

Hello from Twin Oaks! It's been a while since we published an issue of the Leaves, but quarantining has a way of making more time available.

We are currently in **lock-down** due to the COVID-19 pandemic—we are allowing **no guests or visitors** to come into the community, and only emergency trips out. We don't know when this will end, but it will continue for the foreseeable future.

There were various activities happening over the winter. Our mid-age home-schooled kids (ages 7 – 14) participated in **NaNoWriMo**--National Novel Writing Month—and during the month of November, each of them produced a short work which were all displayed for the community to see. We also kept busy with **Positive Gossip** each week; we put the names of every member in a hat, and as we drew each name, we went around the circle and people said the things they love and appreciate about that person.

Other news of the commune: We re-formed our **Diversity Team** to be POC-only (Person Of Color) and they have been working on encouraging the community to address issues of race as they manifest in our predominantly white community. Our **author-member Pam** spent 2 months this past winter promoting her second book The Year-Round Hoophouse by touring many sustainable agriculture conferences around the country. We're continuing being sustainable in the community by **constructing ponds** to turn what we treat as wastewater from our tofu business into a resource which will be captured and used for irrigating and fertilizing our pastures. A few of our members took a **trip to Costa Rica** pre-coronavirus and are now quarantining there—we keep in regular touch by email.

Twin Oaks wastewater ponds

Kibbutz in the city? The healing mission of Israel's new communes.

Old model, new mission: With a modern pioneering zeal and a passion for social justice, young Israelis are reimagining the kibbutz, planting scores of collectives in disadvantaged neighborhoods around the country.

By Dina Kraft

Beersheba, Israel
The youthful man in cutoff shorts and sandals punches in the security code of a nondescript apartment building in the center of this desert city, bounds up its three flights of stairs, and announces, "This is our kibbutz."

It's a jarring declaration for anyone familiar with Israel's iconic kibbutzim – the verdant, mostly agricultural socialist cooperatives that helped pioneer pre-state Israel and define the country's borders.

Yet in this so-called urban kibbutz, 16 members live here in four apartments, including members with children; another 14 members live in another building nearby, and a smattering live in apartments in the neighborhood. Members share not only living space, but some of their possessions, and pool their incomes.

They also share a modern mission: building a rich communal life for themselves, and doing so in a low-income, underserved urban setting in Israel's so-called periphery with the goal of improving life for local residents, specifically through education.

"It's important for me to live a life that is full of meaning and feel like I'm doing something to make a difference, and this is the place where I'm doing that. It's also important that I take these dreams and try to fulfill them together with friends," says the cutoff-clad Nir Sabo, who helped found this kibbutz in 2005.

In the past two decades, some 220 urban cooperatives have been established across Israel, some in the form of kibbutzim and communes with shared economies, others in the shape of individuals or families who are economically independent but live in the same apartment buildings or neighborhoods and see themselves as a unit.

Impact on society
While the cooperatives take different forms, they all share a mission as activists committed to improving the education, social welfare, and social justice of the cities and towns where they live. In 2006 an umbrella organization called Eretz-Ir was formed to help support the cooperatives and encourage new ones in the name of promoting social change.
This growing trend extends beyond Israel's Jewish majority. There are also cooperatives made up of Arab citizens and Druze, and others with both Jewish and Arab members. There are also cooperatives made up specifically of young Ethiopian Jews.

These cooperative communities are most often located in what are called development towns, far from the economic and cultural heart of central Israel. Considered something of the country's backwater, these towns are not an obvious draw for educated young people. But those joining these cooperatives in growing numbers say they are choosing to live in these neighborhoods and towns precisely because that is where they can have the most impact on Israeli society.

A kibbutz for Millennials

Mr. Sabo, who grew up in the Tel Aviv suburb of Kiryat Ono, walks across his kibbutz building's sprawling roof deck, which is lined with potted plants growing herbs and tomatoes – perhaps the only nod to the original kibbutz movement's origins as an ideology rooted in not just communal, egalitarian living but working the land.

Ella Orion (left) and Bella Alexandrov, members of the Kama group, an urban collective in Beersheba, sit in Ms. Orion's apartment in the city. On the floor is art utilized in a ceremony that the group created for its children starting grade school.

On the deck are scattered picnic tables and chairs where group members like him – graduates of one of Israel's largest youth movements – gather sometimes late into the night discussing ideas and educational projects they have underway in the city.

These intense, often ideological discussions would be familiar to the country's original halutzim – the Hebrew word for pioneers – who over a century ago laid the groundwork for creating what became the State of Israel. They were the generation who founded the first kibbutzim – envisioned as utopias of egalitarianism and social justice – and serve as inspiration for Mr. Sabo and his friends as they strive today to foster a more humanist, democratic Israel.

Mr. Sabo's kibbutz is one of 16 in the Dror Israel movement, the organization for adult graduates of a large socialist-oriented youth movement called HaNoar HaOved VeHaLomed, Hebrew for The Working and Studying Youth, that was founded in 1924. Their work focuses on education in local schools, but also with at-risk youth and vocational training for adults.

"The founders, the halutzim, they are our heroes," says Gilad Perry, a leader of Dror Israel and himself a member of an educational kibbutz. "But the question of today's young generation is what does it mean to be a pioneering Zionist today? … It is not draining a swamp, or settling the land. It's something else. But it is drawn from the same basic idea for being responsible for your life, for your country's life, and more broadly, for humanity."

Sense of belonging

"Today's kibbutzim are very good places to live in, they have nice swimming pools, nice living standards, this is great," says Mr. Perry. "But if you are talking about …

pioneering today, it is done in the neighborhoods, in the schools, in renewing a sense of what it means to belong to a society, a nation."

Someone who joins an urban kibbutz, he says, does this "because they feel a strong sense of belonging and attachment – their personal life and life as part of a society are one."

About 30 miles from Beersheba, near the border with Gaza, is Sderot, the most frequent target in the country for Hamas rockets. Its urban kibbutz is also run by Dror Israel.

Harel Felder, who grew up in Hod Hasharon, outside Tel Aviv, has been a member for nine years. It took time for his parents to understand this was his life, and despite the rocket attacks, and the town's struggling economy, and living with nine housemates – this was and will continue to be his home.

"I feel like this is where I am working for the future of my friends and the future of my country," he says.

Different models, same goal

In a high-rise apartment building in Beersheba lives the "Kama" group, a community that was established 17 years ago. It has evolved from young single people living in various apartments to 15 families with young children living on several floors of the building and in a few homes nearby.

The adults work mostly as educators or social workers. Sabbath dinners are eaten together, there are weekly meetings to discuss issues and update each other on their lives, members created their own ceremonies to welcome children born into the community and celebrate the start of elementary school, and they all contribute to an emergency fund for members who find themselves in need.

Among their civic projects was the establishment of Beersheba's first cooperative nursery school.

Bella Alexandrov, a trained social worker, describes herself as someone who never planned to live in Beersheba after arriving there from Latvia as an 8-year-old. She still remembers the shock when her family moved into one of its poorer neighborhoods.

"I thought about Israel as a place where bananas and coconuts fell from the trees, and I arrived and saw an ugly neighborhood with drug addicts and trash in the streets and I did all I could to leave," she says.

But a few years ago she heard about Kama, and after sharing a Friday night Shabbat meal she became intrigued, ended up joining, and eventually took over as director for Eretz-Ir, the urban collectives umbrella. Recently it has been focusing on how to develop employment in periphery areas.

"There is momentum, people are seeking communities, and the state understands the importance of having a strong periphery, so more state money is being allotted to these initiatives," she says.

For her, being part of Kama is deeply fulfilling. "We talk about leadership, about social change, but being a member gave me a feeling of connection I never had before."

Communal Living in Finland

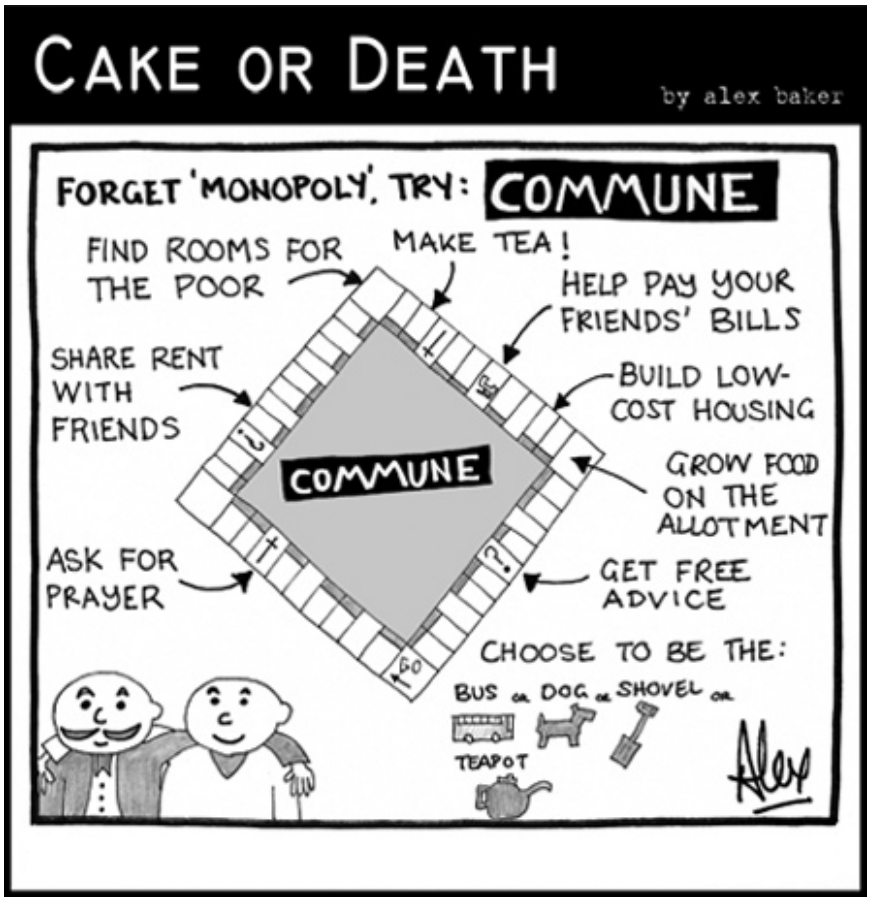
When musician Henrica Fagerlund separated from the father of her daughter five years ago, she didn't want to move into a small apartment and live alone with her daughter; instead she decided to start up a family commune where everyone is welcome, writes HS.

"I tried to find a family commune via Facebook, but as nothing suitable came up, I decided to start a commune on my own," Fagerlund tells HS.

When she found a large eight-bedroom house in Vantaa's Vapaala, she took on the lease and sublet rooms to other tenants, some of who are divorced or separated and have children, and others who are single.

Currently, 14 people – five children and nine adults - live in the two-storey house, which covers 300 square metres and has a yard. The average rent per person is about 500 euros.

"One of the benefits of this way of living is that there are always other people around and a babysitter is easy to find, " Fagerlund tells HS.



Millennials Are no Different – the World Is Why We Need New Communities

September 29, 2020
By Aharon Ariel Lavi

An intentional community can serve as a framework for both individual growth and moral behavior, as well as give people the opportunity to work collaboratively to make the world a better place. To become the better version of themselves.

A Hasidic tale tells of a Rebbe in a Russian village who used to take a dip in the river every morning. One day, the new local policeman saw the Rebbe diving into the frozen river. He ran to the strange old man, shouting, "Who are you? Where do you come from? And where are you going?" The old Rebbe smiled gently and asked the policeman: "How much do they pay you?" "Ten Kufeykas a day," answered the baffled young man. "I'll tell you what," said the Rebbe, "I'll pay you twenty if you come every morning and ask me who I am, where do I come from and where I am going to."

Human beings are dynamic and ever evolving creatures, and just like our muscle system becomes atrophied if it is not stimulated enough, so does our moral and intellectual system. Hence, it is crucial we get asked those questions constantly. Today we can get a mobile app to remind us, but here I would like to argue that communities, and more specifically intentional communities, are the optimal environment for becoming the better version of ourselves.

These last few words may ring a bell with many readers as a common catch phrase among what has been termed "Millennials," meaning people born after 1982. Many see us as a challenge to be addressed, especially in the Jewish context which is worried – and rightly so – of diminishing affiliation. That catch phrase may even serve as an explanation: See? All millennials care about is themselves.

As one of the oldest Millennials alive (born in December 1982) I would like to offer another way of reading it. Millennials, like any other generation, are made of the exact same building blocks and have the exact same needs. Human physiology and psyche do not change over a short time (i.e. eons). What does change is the environment. Like everybody who preceded us we have the need for food and shelter, and the problem with Millennials begins where this problem ends. Indeed, poverty still exists and making a living always seems tough, but relatively, especially in the Jewish context, Millennials are expected to possess more resources than all previous generations.

So, what's next on the list? After satisfying their basic needs, people are craving a sense of belonging, identity and meaning. The aspiration to become a better version of one's self comes from there, not from egocentric selfishness. In fact, data shows that almost half Millennials would move to less paying jobs if they offer a better sense of meaning and serve a greater purpose than themselves. One can only wonder what would such a poll show in our parents' generation? But again, it's not people who changed but rather the circumstances, and today even a relatively low paying nonprofit job enables higher quality of life than corporate jobs of the past.

However, the unprecedented economic-technological leapfrog has its side-effects. We all know of the environmental and immigration crises, but there's another one: loneliness. According to a recently published Harvard research, loneliness is already an epidemic, riskier to health than physical inactivity, and almost as risky as smoking. The UK government even established a new Ministry to deal with loneliness. And no, social media doesn't alleviate loneliness. Research shows it actually increases it. Like we still don't have a better solution to hunger than food, we still don't have a better solution to loneliness than families and communities. What we do have is new technologies to produce those.

One idea that has been tested successfully in Israel and other countries, rather lately, is Intentional Communities. An Intentional Community is a small and non-hierarchal group of people who have consciously decided to live together spatially and temporally around a shared purpose. In this sense, an intentional community can serve as a framework for both individual growth and moral behavior, as well as give people the opportunity to work collaboratively to make the world a better place. To become the better version of themselves.

In an Intentional community, togetherness is not a mere byproduct of something else, nor is it simply a means to other ends, but it is an intention in and of itself, what sociologists call a "primary group." At the very same time, the group gathers for a purpose larger than itself, what sociologists call a "secondary group." It seems fuzzy, I know, but that is not because Millennials are fuzzier human being than their predecessors. We have the same genes and underneath our neocortex we have the same lizard brain. The world has become fuzzier and harder to make sense of, and those who will succeed in attracting Millennials, the leaders of the new world, are those who will offer – no, sorry – create with them the appropriate complex response.

Rabbi Aharon Ariel Lavi is a social entrepreneur who believes that Judaism can inform all walks of life. He is Co-founder of MAKOM: the Israeli umbrella organization of intentional communities, and of Hazon's Hakhel Jewish Intentional Communities Incubator.

Detention River Christian Community, Australia

Detention River Christian Community is a mixed gender religious order located on the Island of Tasmania, Australia. The functional set up of the community is, in many ways, consistent with the historical set up of an Anabaptist Hutterite community and at the same time has aspects that are more consistent with a biblical Christian Community.

The community was established in 2005 by the Elmendorf Christian Community from Mountain Lake Minnesota, a community consisting of predominantly ethnic Hutterites.

The Hutterites came together in 1528 as a result of persecution from The Roman Catholics and Protestant reformers of the time. The main reasons for the persecution were:

- their practice of baptising or rebaptising based only on the candidates expressed desire to follow Jesus Christ, there by rejecting infant baptism and geographical identification as a Christian which was the practice at the time.

- their belief that the Kingdom of the world (local rulers, territorial kings, governments) and the Kingdom of God were entirely separate entities and were not to be confused. This position is often referred to as the separation of Church and State.

- their refusal to take up arms against other human beings under any circumstances.

Consistent with the historical practice of Hutterite communities, Detention River has a common purse economy where by all the funds earned are pooled and all the expenses covered from the pooled funds. This practice began is 1528 and has been the economic standard for all Hutterite communities for most of their history. All members of the community have made the commitment of non accumulation of personal property or wealth often referred to in religious orders as a vow of poverty.

Major differences with other Hutterite communities exist in the areas of the role and function of women, access to information regarding finances, the treatment of children, the form and function of male leadership and in the decision making process. In each of these areas Detention River has established positions that they regard as based more accurately on the biblical standard set out by Jesus himself, as opposed to the traditional Hutterite manner based on the historical structure found in most cultures worldwide.

Detention River is a partially self sufficient having made major investments in solar heating, gardens and pastures. Currently there are four families with a total of 24 people.

Celebrating Our Land: A Dancing Rabbit Update

October 26, 2020
by *Parmejean (John) Demaree*

Dancing Rabbit's six founders purchased 280 acres in Scotland County, Missouri, on October 1, 1997. They chose this location because it was close to Sandhill Farm, an intentional community that had been in the area for over 40 years, the land was cheap, and there were few land restrictions. Every October, Dancing Rabbit celebrates our founding on Land Day, with events to commemorate our good fortune to live simple lives in community.

Parmejean here, relating to you the doings of our village of late. Land Day began with a muffin breakfast, sponsored by Alline and Kurt in the park outside the Milkweed Mercantile. Besides Alline's muffins and cider, we had banana muffins made by Dorothy and corn bread muffins made by several people, including myself. The weather was lovely to boot. This outdoor celebration drew a nice crowd and lots of lively conversation. The large pin oak shading the park was planted by Kurt and Alline, symbolizing their 20-year commitment to living at Dancing Rabbit.

That afternoon we had a formal Land Day celebration in our town center with several rounds of singing, including the song, "We're Building Dancing Rabbit." Alyson brought a large collection of flowers from her home at nearby Red Earth Farm to share with all the participants. We also had a round of individual testimonies, sharing why we love this land and this community. It was emotional for me to hear the heartfelt comments of long term members as well as new arrivals. **The common values we share to live lightly on the Earth gave me a renewed commitment to quit driving my personal vehicle** and use our ride sharing vehicle cooperative for any trips I might need.

My connection with this land goes back to a brief visit here with my family in the year 2000. The land was quite open around the village then, with just a few trees around the edges and now it looks like we had to clear a lot of trees to build the homes that are here. After our visit in 2000 I started getting the DR monthly email newsletter, the March Hare, and so kept loose track of events in the village. I remember reading about a third intentional community, Red Earth Farm, being established on land abutting Dancing Rabbit, thus creating what we refer to as the tri-communities.

When I retired two years ago and started traveling, I thought I should visit DR and

see how things were going. I signed up for a visitor session and really enjoyed the experience. I asked around if someone would sponsor me as a guest. Right away Mae offered me a position as a wexer, or work exchanger, and my experience working on Fox Holler Farm was excellent. I am most proud of the timber frame barn that we built that summer, led by Cynthia Main and Thomas Kortkamp. I also moved a large steel-framed greenhouse. It was a challenge to remove about 200 bolts!

I became a resident in August, 2018, and a member this year on May 17th. **I believe in the mission of Dancing Rabbit to showcase sustainability and demonstrate cooperative community.** The community is what I love here, with so many wonderful and helpful people. Though I grew up on a farm 100 miles east of here and farmed for a while there, the knowledge and experience of the folks here are a great help in eating healthy and locally.

Though I lived in Texas for 30+ years, it is easy for me to readjust to Midwest weather. The weather does seem a little more erratic these days, with 80 degrees here yesterday, a hard freeze forecast for tonight, and snow on Monday! I love the snow and still wonder how I managed to live in Texas so long!

With winter coming on we have some building projects that are going well. Roofs are the priority on the new homes which will make it possible to work inside through the winter. Arune, with the help of Jed and three wexers, has made great progress on her home. Her house sits on sturdy black locust timbers with about eight feet of clearance underneath. **Connie's home is coming along, and includes a hydroponic greenhouse for farming tilapia fish.** Connie has been raising tilapia to see what needs they have and how to incorporate them with hydroponics.

As winter approaches, eight of us are forming a dinner coop at Skyhouse. A few of the people joining us have been eating at an outdoor kitchen which is closing this weekend. **Our dinner coop will feature a vegetarian diet with occasional meat options.** Organizing grocery shopping and cooking schedules takes time, and as we are starting from scratch there will be a learning curve. Hopefully all eight of us are good cooks and know how to make good-sized portions!

Cat gave me a gift last week of homemade bread, fresh from the oven (thanks again Cat!) With the cold weather here it is a wonderful time to be baking. I think of making soup and filling Skyhouse with savory aromas.

We are shifting to indoor activities, and though this can be cozy, we are well aware of the risks. We take precautions seriously here and as cautious as we may be, there is always the risk of COVID-19 infections, so we must limit outside contacts.

With holidays coming and people visiting outside the village, it is difficult to completely eliminate risk. Social distance and wear a mask when out in public, please. **That said, I hope you all have wonderful holidays and stay very safe.** Much love to all of you!

Parmejean (John) Demaree is a member of Dancing Rabbit ecovillage. He is a regular at happy hour in the park and keeps our shared vehicles in good running order.

Communal Living

By Alice Jones

When we were young and immortal

what would we have said,

if an angel had come down

to our shack in Oregon's green

hills, as we warmed ourselves

beside the woodstove in a dark

soot-laden dawn, waiting for

Enid to make a pot of oatmeal,

Wayne to chop more wood;

if she waded her way among the piles

duffel bags, the psychedelic

watercolors, the cans of Bugler,

packs of Camels with rising suns,

waves of color and stars drawn on,

found us in overalls and hiking boots,

our long cotton paisley skirts,

hair down past the waist, our manes

blowing in the smoky early morning

as we rolled our first cigarettes

or weed, maybe someone put on The Band,

Jackie Lomax or Fresh Cream.

She would furl her wings, point and

say--you, dead at 23, a suicide; you,

medical school; you, a life of loss and

unemployment; you, a mother, activist

in Vermont; you, filmmaker in Russia;

you, one year of law school, one son,

then dead at 40, an unnamed virus.

Would we have tilted back our

uncombed heads and laughed?

Inside a coronavirus commune with 16 people: 'Who's to say we're not family?'

By Maria L. La Ganga
May 31, 2020
https://www.latimes.com

The plan started simply enough. As the pandemic forced schools to shutter in March, three families in a leafy corner of downtown Riverside banded together to make sure all their children kept learning.

The record-producer dad taught music classes. The court-commissioner mom gave speech lessons. There was time for art and silent reading and yoga and schoolwork assigned remotely by teachers who seemed very far away. Class began at 9 a.m., no pajamas, no excuses.

The students of "Brothbush Academy" cheer for their home school on the Roths' front lawn in the midst of the coronavirus outbreak in Riverside.

But achieving that modest goal — caring for each other's children — became far more complicated as the virus' toll mounted. What began as a home school dubbed the Brothbush Academy ended up as a kind of coronavirus commune, as the quarantined families came to depend on each other to stay healthy and safe.

The Bristows and the Roths live side by side in century-old houses, one Craftsman-style, one Spanish Revival. Classes are held in one home or the other, and the gate separating their yards swings wide seven days a week, a constant stream of kids and parents, dogs and food, flowing back and forth. The Furbushes live 900 feet away — walk to the corner, hang a right, and you're there.

The families had been inseparable since long before anyone heard of COVID-19. Which is what made the March 28 meeting at the Roths' long dining room table so painful.

After dinner, the grownups began hashing out the most difficult details of caring for seven adults and nine children ranging in age from 6 to 14 as the deadly disease spread around the globe. Hard choices normally made in the confines of a single family were suddenly being debated by a committee.

The group had to figure out how to balance its collective well-being against the needs of two of its members: Truck driver Will Furbush, the group's only "essential" worker, whose livelihood requires him to be out in the dangerous world, and Dalina Furbush, his 14-year-old daughter from an earlier relationship, who was about to leave the safe circle to spend time with her mother.

Allison Furbush cheers thinking that PE is next on the schedule after science class.

The Bristows, Roths and Furbushes had vowed to support each other through the dark time ahead. After all, they'd had each others' backs for years. But the choices they would make had the power to shatter the tight bond that held them together.

Kristen Bristow had spent nearly two decades teaching third grade in the Riverside Unified School District. So, when school ended abruptly on Friday, March 13, she knew she had to do something to keep her family from lolling around in pajamas for weeks at a time.

Starting on March 16, the three Bristow girls had six and a half proscribed hours a day: 9 a.m. classwork; 10 a.m. physical education; 11 a.m., more classwork; noon, lunch; and on and on. The Roth kids joined in a few days later, bringing the student load to six.

Music producer Gabe Roth teaches rhythm to Allison Furbush while his son Sylvester Roth keeps the beat on the drums during music class.

Then came spring break, and with it, the big decisions. Gov. Gavin Newsom had put the whole state on lockdown. Dr. Cameron Kaiser, the Riverside County public health officer, had banned all gatherings of more than 10 people.

And Gabe Roth asked Kristen and her husband Dave if the Furbushes — Will, who is married to Gabe's sister Samra, and the three Furbush children — could join the collective home school. All of a sudden, there would be 16 people in the quarantine commune, a half-dozen over the limit.

Kristen's sister-in-law sent her a text: "I guess your whole 'school thing' is out the door." A few weeks later, Kristen recounted her hopeful response: "But families are not subjected to that."

She was sitting on the Roths' porch, trying to keep her face mask in place while explaining the intricacies of Brothbush Academy. On the other side of a big front window, Gabe was playing a sequence of notes on a guitar and having the little kids echo it back to him on piano.

"We just decided, who's to say we're not family?" Kristen continued. "Not that we wanted to break any rules. But it was so beneficial to all of us, and we're being so careful."

Staying in was the order of the day. All groceries were purchased online and delivered. Food was shared. No one outside of the three families and Wayne Gordon, a visitor from Brooklyn who was stranded at the Roths' for nearly three months, was allowed inside the homes. No grandparents. No friends.

"We're really trying to compensate for the luxury of being together by being extra vigilant in our contact with everybody else," Gabe said during an interview at his roomy, brown-shingled home.

Students at Brothbush Academy have learned a few things that aren't in the curriculum at what they call "real school."

Students and parents of "Brothbush Academy" walk from the Bristows' house to the Furbushes' for a

At 9 a.m. on a Thursday in April, Andie Bristow was already at the kitchen table, her head peeking up over her sky-blue laptop. Her hair was tied up in two little buns and she was munching on cantaloupe, clutching her baby doll, ready for school.

The Brothbush parents are not fans of distance learning for the youngest students — children such as Sylvester Roth, 8, and Andie, who are still learning the basics — but twice each week, Andie clicks into a live video chat via Google Classroom with her two teachers and 20 or so fellow first-graders at Benjamin Franklin Elementary School. The group's done video scavenger hunts and guessing games and accomplished a little math here and there.

Penelope Roth, 11, and Carmen Furbush, 10, were at the Bristows' dining room table, heads bent over laptops. Kat Bristow, at 12 one of two middle-schoolers in the bunch, was curled up in an overstuffed chair, typing fast. Her bare feet hung over the chair's striped arm.
The highlight of every school day starts at 1:30 p.m. Lunch, music, art and silent reading have ended, and the students gather around the Roths' dining room table. Sometimes there is instruction, but often the students are paired up — a young child with an older one — and given a research assignment that ends in a presentation to the group.

They've looked into nutrition, reporting on what happens if you have too much or too little of, say, carbohydrates or protein. They've researched life in other countries, and what makes people tick, sharing the intricacies of culture and diet.

On the Brink Co-Housing, Leeds, UK

Our membership is now up to full strength (20 adults and six young people). We have been joined by Linda and Adrian who will be moving into flat 4 in the New Year - after all the building work is completed. It's a fantastic scoop for On the Brink that they are joining us from Leeds. They have an impeccable background of decades of sustained community development work and their energy, skill and enthusiasm will be much welcomed here.

During various stages of lockdown and going through tiers of Covid control so far the weather has been kind and many meetings and activities have been held in the garden. There's been regular dancing on the lawn or in the courtyard and meals and birthday celebrations etc. have been held al fresco. We're doing our best to keep safe and cheerful.
We've now got a super gazebo in the courtyard to give an opportunity for some social interaction while keeping safe...

The young people on site are our beating heart. It's such a treat to have each and every one of them contribute to our community in their special ways. If it takes a village to bring up a child then the opposite is certainly true. What sort of 'village' would this be without them? For the reasons that you will certainly respect we don't take many photos of them or put their pictures in the newsletter or on social media... But they are very much here and we wish you could see them growing up and enriching our lives.

A pleasant surprise

Jan Martin Bang

Nazareth Illit in the Galilee, Northern Israel, is not even remotely a fancy town full of Biblical sights and experiences. To such an extent that a couple of years ago the authorities decided to rename it Nof HaGalil, "A view of the Galilee", a pathetic effort to upgrade the place. Below this collection of concrete buildings that have seen better days, lies the Biblical city of Nazareth, well known in Christian culture as the place where Jesus grew up, and still a popular destination for pilgrims and tourists.

The city on the hill is a mixture of very different ethnic groups, most of them situated in the lower strata of Israeli society. Russian immigrants, not entirely successfully integrated, Arab communities, both Christian and Moslem, struggling to make ends meet, poor people surrounded by stained concrete. Neighbourhoods living in poverty, their income largely based on government support of various kinds. Inefficient local government that struggles to clear the garbage from the streets does not create an attractive first impression.

I arrive in order to visit Mishol, an urban inner city kibbutz. Inspired by the traditional village kibbutz community, urban kibbutzim are meeting the needs of 21st century cities. Instead of settling the country and defining its borders, these urban collectives do social work and teaching within the poorest cities and towns all over Israel.

Due to the chaotic nature of life in Israel, next morning I find myself in a local neighbourhood school, celebrating "The festival of festivals". Hundreds of people in the school sports hall, crackling microphones and loudspeakers. Crowded, buzzing with excitement, the kids are dressed up in all kinds of costumes, class by class. The youngest are in the first grade, six year olds and full of themselves.

On the back wall there are decorations. I see a big Father Christmas, in his red and white costume, lacking reindeer, but with a sled - at least that. Totally incongruous here in the Galilee. It's also the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, the festival of light, when traditionally an 8 armed candlestick is lit every day for 8 days. There is a picture of that on the back wall too and other symbols of the festival. There is also a green crescent and other symbols from the Moslem tradition.

The festival opens, much crackling from the microphone, with a group of children explaining that this is a festival for all three religions, Christmas and Hannukah, and even though the Moslems don't have a specific festival just now, we are also celebrating their religion. Not their religion, our religions. The children here in this school come from all three faiths and many ethnic backgrounds. The grand entrance of the first group of dancers would have fitted well into Red Square in Moscow, with music that could have come straight from the Red Army Choir.

For the next hour we have Jingle Bells sung like I never heard it before, traditional Jewish Hanukkah songs and several Arabic tunes played over the loudspeakers with dancing, culminating in a belly dancing show

This school is very special, maybe half the teachers come from Mishol, the principal too. Many of the children are from the kibbutz as well. It's a 10 minute walk away, and the school very much reflects the ethos of the kibbutz. Cooperation between ethnic and religious groups, social justice, and a decent life for all regardless of their background. Mishol is big, 150 people living collectively under one roof, half of them children. No one gets a salary, there are no private cars, and there are lots of shared facilities. A music room, a training room, camping store, meeting rooms and guest rooms.

One of the more recent projects the school has initiated is a big greenhouse in the school yard, completed just a few months before. That was the reason I was invited, to give a permaculture presentation about designing urban gardening and growing, and to explore how to use permaculture design thinking when integrating different ethnic groups. At the talk I met several people from Bustan, a multi-ethnic group that has been developing for the last year and a half.

In permaculture we have a principle of starting in the worst area when developing a site, designing paradise out of accumulated waste and destruction. A phoenix arising from the ashes. Is this a glimpse of a possible future? Can we really overcome our cultural, religious and ethnic differences and create a society where we live next to each other in friendship and respect? Is this the meaning of ideological intentional community that has an aim of creating a better society?

I was there only for a short visit, less than 24 hours, but I realised what a difference an intentional community can make when its members are committed to social renewal and really work at it. I shouldn't really be surprised, that's what intentional community can do, what it has often done, and what it will carry on doing.

Building Eco-Paradise in End Times: Lessons from Ecoaldeas (Ecovillages) in Mexico

September 29, 2020
By Olea Morris.

What might it mean to be "self-sustainable" in a world that is more connected than ever? During the wave of lockdowns in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, self-sufficiency was having a moment. As supply chains became less certain and millions became indefinitely homebound, popular interest in the "simple life" flowered – hobbies like baking bread, planting backyard gardens, or sewing masks were suddenly hot. The surge in interest in sustainable living suggests there's something undeniably appealing – therapeutic, even – about imagining and practicing alternative livelihoods, especially the face of intensifying social, political, and environmental precarity. But what might it mean to be "self-sufficient" in a world that is more connected than ever?

In order to explore this question, I spent a year living in "ecovillages" – ecological communities with a focus on sustainable living and self-sufficiency – throughout Mexico, primarily visiting sites in Yucatan, Veracruz, and Jalisco. Ecovillages, a community model popularized in the late 1990s by practitioners in Europe and organizations like the Global Ecovillage Network, have gained a substantial following in Latin America over the last decade. In Mexico, ecovillages are an emergent thread of a much wider constellation of interlinked environmental, agricultural, and social justice movements. My goal was to understand how diverse sets of actors – young people from the cities, hippie caravans, feminist separatists, and foreign retirees – understood and practiced community differently, depending on how they were articulated to these broader networks.

Huehuecoyotl is one of the most well-known ecovillages in Mexico and part of the Global Ecovillage Network. Photo by author

Ecovillages can be understood as enactments of what Burke and Arjona (2013) call "alternative political ecologies" – new iterations of how communities, systems of production and consumption, and relationships with the environment are, and can be, interrelated. Because ecovillage communities are designed by their residents with the aim of creating socioecological systems that sustain their community, they're useful artifacts for understanding how different groups imagine these systems to function. Of course, plans don't always work as expected – plants and animals die, others seem to refuse cultivation, and social groups break apart. But these

challenges also generate new sets of practices and understandings about the environment, and the ways that human communities might live well within them.

Research on ecovillages has tended to focus on a number of well-known case studies – including Damanhur, Auroville, Findhorn, Sieben Linden – which are largely (but not exclusively) located in the Global North. But what do alternatives from countries like Mexico, uniquely positioned at the boundaries of the Global North and South, look like? Mexico is an enormously diverse country – not only is it one of the most biodiverse countries on the planet, but is also home to one of the largest indigenous populations in the Americas. It is also a country of extremes – poverty, corruption, and violence from organized crime organizations are widespread, while small enclaves of elites enjoy much of the results of economic development. In 2019, the year I conducted my dissertation fieldwork, Mexico set a new record for (reported) homicides, despite newly-elected president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's campaign promises to address the issue. Frustration with the status quo, and deep mistrust of the capacity of local authorities to address social problems, have worked to activate and encourage grassroots community initiatives across the country. Here, I explore a few takeaways from the Mexican ecovillage movement that can challenge more general understandings of sustainable community initiatives.

First, the process of designing community systems is deeply rooted in place, both ecologically and culturally. While some research has suggested that the ecovillage "model" could be translated and applied to different geographical regions, much of this discussion doesn't leave so much room for examining the importance of social and environmental context. Moreover, although the term ecovillage also belongs to a global network of related initiatives, it's important to note that ecovillages don't all look, act, or operate in the same way. The Council of Sustainable Settlements of the Americas (CASA), a division of the broader Global Ecovillage Network focused on Latin America, recognizes a wide variety of projects and grassroots initiatives as interrelated parts of a broader sustainable community movement, of which ecovillages constitute only a small part.

Different communities across the country subscribe to different styles of landscape management and design strategies, and have distinct underlying ideologies and networks of social relationships. Some communities experience a high turnover of visitors on a regular basis, allowing long-term backpackers a place to stay in exchange for light labor and a small contribution, while others are completely closed to all but invited guests. For example, one community in Yucatan was largely vegetarian, and cultivated complex agroforestry systems to support diverse diets; another in Veracruz insisted that cultivating livestock through careful rotation was the most effective way of building regenerative soils.

The language of growth and "scaling up" a model, then, doesn't really apply here. Rather than fitting these different approaches into a singular sustainability rubric, I think instead we could be talking about communities as place-based, collaboratively defined sets of ethics and ways of relating with the natural world. "Scaling" a solution requires a model that can be stripped down and transferred to other ecological and social contexts. Shifting away from the language of growth to describe grassroots sustainability initiatives – especially ones that

are explicitly anti-growth – is an important first step. This allows for a broader view – seeing community projects as the emergent products of broader social relations, rather than as a blueprint that can be replicated elsewhere.

Opening ceremony of a festival held at an ecological community in Veracruz, performed by local indigenous groups. Photo by author

Second, studying ecovillages from outside Global North countries helps to confront the social and economic disparities between different groups of ecovillage residents. Critics of ecovillages point out that not everyone can "opt out" of fast-paced, high-waste urban lifestyles to pursue an idyllic rural life. To a large extent, they're right – owning land, having some degree of financial resources, and social connections to like-minded folks are elemental components of getting an ecovillage off the ground. In order to understand the prospect of supporting sustainable communities, it is also necessary to understand why certain actors are foreclosed from these movements.

These different versions of sustainability are particularly visible in Mexico, which has become a popular destination for long-term tourists and migration of citizens from more affluent countries. The emerging possibilities of working remotely or working while traveling (i.e. "digital nomads") has led to many moving to Mexico in search of building sustainable places for a fraction of the price in their home country. Migrants ("expats") from Europe, Canada, and the United States often take advantage of the relatively lower costs, particularly for property and labor, in order to construct and maintain eco-friendly homes and communities abroad. These initiatives, however, reveal deep divides between who is able to pursue more sustainable, communitarian livelihoods, and who is not. Expats that dream of creating their own "sustainable paradise" in Mexico largely rely on these lower prices of labor and goods that have resulted from decades of socioeconomic inequality and Mexico's implementation of increasingly neoliberal policies. These policies, such as the privatization of previously communal held lands called ejidos, quite literally created the conditions by which foreigners could even begin to think about purchasing land in Mexico in the first place.

In post-COVID times, these speculative ventures and visions of a sustainable future are more important than ever. We would do well to listen to voices from the Global South, which resist a "return to normalcy" without critical examination of what this means in practice ("normal" for whom?). One of the ways academics and activists can do this is by looking at the unique ways that alternative movements envision and construct sustainable futures. By recognizing the diversity inherent in these approaches, we can begin to see the future as a diverse patchwork of possible approaches, rather than a unilinear track.

Olea Morris is a PhD candidate in the Department of Environmental Science and Policy at Central European University. Her research focuses on the production of environmental knowledge in alternative community and agricultural movements, primarily in Mexico.

These communities are experimenting with greener and fairer ways of living

July 10, 2020
By Kirsten Stevens-Wood

Frankie lives in a six-bedroom house on the outskirts of Leeds. She is her own landlord, but doesn't own the house. Instead she is part of a co-operative housing group: together, they have been able to buy the house and then rent it at an affordable price back to themselves as tenants.

Just a few miles away, another group has secured funding to design and build an eco-community of up to 30 households, including what is known as a common house: a shared house with a kitchen, laundry, workshops, a meeting space, guest rooms and gardens.

The plans. Chapeltown Cohousing

Much further away in north-east Germany is a 37-acre site where a group of people live and work together sharing food, childcare and resources. They have created a community where relationships and the environment are given primacy.

All three of these are examples of intentional communities: groups of people who have chosen to live together in a way that reflects their shared values. These communities come in a variety of shapes and forms, from squats and housing co-operatives to communes and co-housing communities.

Intentional communities are by no means a new idea, but they have often been cited as the experimental spaces or test beds for the future. They are sometimes considered as utopian experiments where groups and people strive to create a better life.

Many people are looking for antidotes to ever-increasing consumption and feelings of social isolation. There is no single solution, and we will need to look at all aspects of our lives, from the way we consume to day-to-day practices. But for some, the solution is to be found in

communal living and intentional communities. It may be that some of the ideas being tested in these communities can create the blueprints for the towns and cities of tomorrow.

Alternative lifestyles

There is some evidence that intentional communities are formed as responses to the concerns of society at any given time.

Back in the 1970s, many new communities were formed as a backlash to mass urbanisation and industrialisation. Such groups bought up rural property, often with land, and attempted a "back to the land" lifestyle informed by ideas of self-sufficiency.

Many of these communities failed, but some still function successfully today, often in their original form. For example, Canon Frome Court collectively manages a 40-acre organic farm in Herefordshire. Together, the community grows much of its own food and keeps cows, sheep and chickens.

On the farm at Canon Frome Court, May 2020

It is difficult to estimate the number of intentional communities worldwide, but they are certainly in the thousands. In the UK alone there are around 300 listed (and many more that are not), with new communities springing up every year.

If we were to use intentional communities as a gauge of social discontent, then the multiple pressures of housing, lack of community, an ageing society and, of course, climate change would be central to this feeling. Look a little deeper, and these problems are actually part a much wider group of social concerns around consumption, global inequality and planetary limits.

In mainstream society, the solutions to these interlocking ideas are presented as top-down measures made via policy, legislation and global agreements, but also as personal choices made by individuals and groups: driving and flying less, consuming more ethically, eating a more plant-based diet, changing the way we work and live.

Those within intentional communities would say that they have been ahead of the curve on this for many years, with ideas such as vegetarianism and self-sufficiency often central to their way of life. They often occupy the necessary middle ground between government policy and individual action. The documentary maker Helen Iles named her series of films on intentional communities "Living in the future".

Living in the future

So what can we tell about possible directions of wider society from the intentional communities of today?

Some rural communities have embraced low-impact development. For example, Rhiw Las, a rural eco-community in west Wales, has created a sustainable settlement based on strict ecological guidelines.

Meanwhile, urban-based communities, such as Bunker Housing Co-operative in Brighton, look to create high-quality affordable housing for local people. Such co-operatives are based on the principle of collective control and management of property.

They enable groups of people who might not have access to secure housing to form a legal entity, which enables them to collectively buy and own property. They also have the capacity to incorporate or support co-operative businesses, such as food or printing co-ops.

Urban housing co-ops are particularly relevant in areas where house prices and rents can be prohibitively high and exclude certain groups, such as precarious workers or younger people. Housing co-ops can offer secure housing options that also empower people and enable them to live within their means.

The group Radical Routes (a network of radical co-ops) also suggests that when people are freed from excessive rent payments, they are then freer to engage with their communities and participate in social change.

Today's urban communities capitalise on urban cycle networks and public transport. They are also more likely to engage with green transport options such as electric car pooling and on-site work spaces to reduce travel entirely.

Lancaster Co-Housing

Fishponds Co-Build, a prospective community on the edge of Bristol, has created its own sustainability action plan. Together, they have outlined ways they intend to reduce their carbon footprint through communal living.

The ideas fermented in past communities, such as straw-bale building and shared ownership, are being developed in exciting and creative ways to transform rural and urban living. This can incorporate new building techniques, such as PassiveHaus design in Lancaster Co-Housing, and the development of alternative spaces, such as car-free neighbourhoods.Intentional communities may not be the solution to all our problems, but they certainly represent an area of experimentation in the ways we share space, shape community and provide a peek at potential ways forward in uncertain times.

C.A.L.L.

Communities At Large Letter

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