

GLOBAL ECOVILLAGE NETWORK



2007 - 2008 REPORT

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Global Ecovillage Network – Annual Report 2007 – 2008

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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview: What is GEN?

The Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) is the umbrella organisation for ecovillages worldwide. Network members include large networks like Sarvodaya (15,000 communities in Sri Lanka); Colufifa (350 villages in Senegal and three neighbouring countries); the Ladakh project on the Tibetan plateau; ecotowns like Auroville in South India, the Federation of Damanhur in Italy and Nimbin in Australia; small rural ecovillages like Gaia Asociación in Argentina and Huehucoyotl, Mexico; urban rejuvenation projects like the Los Angeles EcoVillage; permaculture design sites such as Crystal Waters, Australia, Cochabamba, Bolivia and Barus, Brazil; and educational centres such as Findhorn in Scotland and the Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales.

GEN's main aim is to support and encourage the evolution of sustainable settlements across the world, through:

- Internal and External Communications services; facilitating the flow and exchange of information about ecovillages and demonstration sites;
- Networking and project coordination in fields related to sustainable settlements; and
- Global cooperation/Partnerships (UN Best Practices, EU Phare, EYFA, ECOSOC).

1.2 Mission

We are creating a sustainable future by identifying, assisting and coordinating the efforts of communities to acquire social, spiritual, economic and ecological balance. We envision a planet of diverse cultures of all life united in creating communities in harmony with each other and the Earth, while meeting the needs of this and future generations. We serve as a catalyst to bring the highest aspirations of humanity into a practical reality.

GEN contributes to the worldwide transformation toward sustainability, by:

- promoting the development of sustainable settlements, urban to rural models
- joining with like-minded partners and leveraging resources in collaborative enterprises
- communicating the benefits of the ecovillage experience to wider society, to professionals in government, educators, the private sector, and other NGOs
- expanding education and demonstration programs in sustainable living, and
- working to strengthen the capacity of individual ecovillages as well as the national and regional ecovillage networks.

GEN and Climate Change

According to the association's charter, a core aim of the Global Ecovillage Network is to

co-ordinate the activities of regional ecovillage networks around the world, to promote information exchange and international initiatives of various kinds, including international services and partnerships, public policy formulation, conferences, meetings, educational programs, joint fundraising, allocation of funds, and development of guidelines for ecovillages related to areas such as renewable energy, ecological restoration, biodiversity, permaculture, alternative currencies, ecological building, conflict resolution, community spirit building, and education.

The common thread of all of these activities and association purposes is that they aid (and are indeed essential) in averting catastrophic climate change at the global scale. Ecovillages and Ecocities are the future, if humanity is to have one. Reversing climate change, and the underlying human relationship to the natural world that aggravates it, is the *raison d'être* for changing the pattern of human habitat, development of the built environment, and preservation of natural ecosystems, and therefore the principal justification for the existence of GEN.

1.3 Aims

GEN's aims are to:

- Support the development of ecovillages around the world
- Foster the dissemination of information on ecovillage concepts, practices and demonstration sites
- Build strong international, national and regional networks of ecovillages, and create an organizational structure capable of linking grassroots ecovillages and projects into a strong, participatory worldwide movement
- Develop Living and Learning Centres worldwide, to promote hands-on participatory education in sustainable living
- Promote the transformation of the human habitat and seek greater sustainability through whole system approaches which integrate ecology, education, participatory decision-making, green technologies and businesses
- Provide practical examples of the implementation of Agenda 21
- Support community-building activities
- Bridge cultural differences, encourage dialogue, and create tools for non-violent communication for community building that range from consensus decision-making to facilitation of meetings, forums and conflict resolution.
- Offer an ongoing educational opportunity for visitors, students and interns interested in sustainable development through guest programs and a variety of courses and workshops on Agenda 21-related topics
- Partner and collaborate with organizations and people who share our vision

1.4 Structure

GEN is a global non-governmental organization with consultative status at the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and is a partner of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). Founded in 1995 with the help of the Gaia Trust, currently it is run largely on a voluntary basis, and is an umbrella

organization consisting of three main regional organizations:

- **GEN-Europe:** *Europe, Middle East, Africa* – Headquarters: Berlin, Germany
- **GENOA:** *Oceania and Asia* – Headquarters: Moratuwa, Sri Lanka
- **ENA:** *Ecovillage Network of the Americas* – Headquarters: Colorado, US

GEN is constantly active in partnering with a variety of organizations, and has other subsidiary nodes. For example, NextGEN is the youth-based branch of GEN, and the prestigious GAIA Education Initiative was created as a GEN subsidiary in 2005.

1.5 What is an Ecovillage?

Ecovillages are urban or rural communities of people, who strive to integrate a supportive social environment with a low-impact way of life. To achieve this, they integrate various aspects of ecological design, permaculture, ecological building, green production, alternative energy, community building practices, and much more.

The motivation for ecovillages is the choice and commitment to reverse the gradual disintegration of supportive social/cultural structures and the upsurge of destructive environmental practices on our planet. For millennia, people have lived in communities close to nature, and with supportive social structures. Many of these communities, or "ecovillages", exist to this day and are struggling for survival. Ecovillages are now being created intentionally, from the grassroots up, so people can once more live in communities that are connected to the Earth in a way that ensures the well-being of all life-forms into the indefinite future.

Ecovillages are one solution to the major problems of our time - the planet is experiencing the limits to growth, and our lives are often lacking meaningful content. According to increasing numbers of scientists, we have to learn to live sustainably if we are to survive as a species. The United Nations launched its Global Environment Outlook 2000 report, based on reports from UN agencies, 850 individuals and over 30 environmental institutes, concluding that "the present course is unsustainable and postponing action is no longer an option."

Ecovillages, by endeavoring for lifestyles which are "successfully continuable into the indefinite future", are living models of sustainability, and examples of how action can be taken immediately. They represent an effective, accessible way for individuals, families, neighborhoods and whole communities to combat the degradation of our social, ecological and spiritual environments. They show us how we can move toward sustainability in the 21st century (Agenda 21).

In 1998, ecovillages were first officially named among the United Nations' top 100 listing of Best Practices, as excellent models of sustainable living.

2 GEN Activities 2007-2008

GEN's activities can be grouped into four broad categories of engagement:

- information dissemination
- networking
- education
- advocacy and representation

Activities in each of these areas for the year 2007/8 will be described in turn below.

2.1 Information Dissemination

Publications

Through its many partnerships, the year 2007-08 saw GEN involved in a number of important publications. Among them, the Worldwatch Institute's prestigious *State of the World* report for 2008, which contained a full chapter on sustainable communities, with many references to ecovillages. In addition, the German book *Oasen in der globalisierten Welt (Oases in the Globalised World)* by Eduard Gugenberger was a collection of case studies on models of sustainability, including many from ecovillages; *The Ecologist* magazine (UK) ran a feature on ecovillages ("Ecovillages: A Model of Life?")

GEN President, Jonathan Dawson, contributed to a weekly blog in ecovillage living to the prestigious UK publication, *New Statesman*. GEN's long-running alliance with the UK magazine, *Permaculture*, continued during the year, and this enabled the publication of a large number of stories related to ecovillages (see box below). Through *Permaculture* and GEN's other eight partner publications, *these stories were read by more than 250,000* in nine different languages in Europe alone, demonstrating GEN's commitment to communicating the messages of practical, sustainable, and vibrant low-carbon living to the broader public.

Ecovillage News Stories in Permaculture Magazine

- Tamera's solar energy project
- Damanhur's solar energy project
- Damanhur – safeguarding local edible plants
- Svanholm's 30th birthday
- Torri Superiore launches Transition initiative
- First US urban ecovillage gathering
- Canadian ecovillage network re-launches
- Findhorn's Positive Energy Conference presentations on YouTube
- Zambia's first ecovillage launches
- CONACREIS – legal code for communities (Italy)
- Gaia University ties in with Positive Energy
- Campaign to save Los Angeles Ecovillage

- Eco-twinning between schools in Damanhur and Nicaragua
- Tamera's permaculture lake
- Tamera's peace pilgrimage in Colombia
- New Tamera peace village, 'Tent of Nations' in Bethlehem
- EDE on Turkish radio
- Findhorn printing business wins green award
- CIFAL Findhorn completes successful first year
- New ecovillage initiative in Transylvania
- Damanhur houses win green awards
- Co-housing film launched (GEN-E co-financed)
- Land trust created for new Portuguese ecovillage
- Tamera peace pilgrimage in Israel/Palestine
- Tamera launches two new films
- Second annual Japanese ecovillage conference

Other significant articles published this year as a result of the facilitation of GEN were:

- "Ecovillages – Studying in Sustainable Communities" by Sarah Kessler, *Abroad View* magazine
- "From Eco-Kooks to Eco-Consultants" by Jonathan Dawson, *Communities* magazine
- "The Power of Community – the Path to Surviving Peak Oil" by Jonathan Dawson *Permaculture Magazine*
- "Cohousing: Why cohousing can radically reduce your carbon footprint – and make you happy" by Alan Heeks, *Permaculture* magazine.

GEN associated authors provide ongoing articles and columns to a variety of their journals and magazine, such as *Communities Magazine*, *Permaculture Activist* and *Resurgence*, reaching broad audiences around the globe. Media contact is increasing, as the interest of "common" people turns to how they and their community can live a more sustainable life.

2.2 Networking

GEN is about developing strong partnerships, working not just within ecovillage communities but also engaging with the wider public in promoting the viability of solutions to climate change, demonstrating that alternatives to unsustainable ways of life don't have to be difficult or uncomfortable.

GEN's Information Service (GEN IS)

GEN IS makes resources accessible both within the network and to the wider public and provides practical information for sustainable development in all corners of the world. GEN IS is a potent tool, supporting the expansion and unity of the entire sustainability and ecovillage movement. It is made available through email lists, databases, and through its regional websites – accessed by over 200,000 people per month – with free publications, GEN leaflets and brochures (published in 13 languages in Europe alone),

contact information for local eco-pioneers, and other resources. The GEN IS database catalogs individual, organizational and community contacts around the world; a calendar for a wide ranging array Ecovillage and sustainability events; and a Resource Directory of informational and human resources. This provides an ideal framework for collaborative projects with partners, and is currently working on various scales to develop integrated Ecovillage Information Services (EVIS) that can grow with the need of the movement.

Meanwhile NextGEN, the recently created youth branch of GEN, launched its new website (www.nexgen.cc), which is linked into an internal communication system. This provides a communication platform for all NextGEN members and NextGEN regional circles, acting on both a local and global scale; translations have already begun to link disparate regions of the globe together. NextGEN has been active in partnering with internet radio stations and social networking mechanisms, and has been working closely with GEN IS on the development of a database for its mentoring program and people finder.

GEN IS Goals

- To capture, organize and disseminate vast amounts of diverse, regionally and locally specific information
- To cultivate, support and expand the implementation of sustainable living principles and practices through the flow of information and interactive connections
- To strengthen GEN's global identity and presentation, while allowing for regional autonomy and creativity to be expressed in an integrated manner in the GEN and regional web site and database.
- To provide universal access for information input and retrieval through an open source PHP relational database via any web browser on any platform from anywhere in the world
- To manage and develop systems for GEN's dedicated server, website, email accounts and Listserves, and other internet features and services

Over the past two years, GEN participated in, organised, or funded a range of events:

- GENOA, the regional hub for GEN in Oceania and Asia, held its first Annual General Meeting outside Australia, choosing Bangkok as the most central Asian location and strategically increasing the accessibility of GEN to developing countries in their transitions to sustainability. This meeting saw GEN taking a more prominent position in Asia, where the GENOA regional hub is beginning its relocation from Australia to Sri Lanka. Other meetings were also held in Thailand, India, and Cambodia, where food security is a big issue – participants noticed a general lack of knowledge to get even simple infrastructures and food systems going in many of these regions, where so many places import food despite an opportunity to grow locally. Support in the establishment of sustainable food production in many areas and education at a grass roots level

- via practical workshops would be a step towards greater food security, greenhouse gas reduction and sustainability. GEN aims to increase its activities in these directions:
- GEN was represented at the international Collective Wisdom conference in Berlin in June 2008 by Jonathan Dawson and Ina Meyer-Stoll, Secretaries of GEN-Europe:
 - GEN was co-sponsor of a prestigious international conference, 'Positive Energy: Creative Community Responses to Peak Oil and Climate Change', in the Findhorn ecovillage in Scotland:
 - GEN also took part in the Angsbacka Summit in Sweden, a gathering of ecovillage and permacultural initiatives from across Scandinavia, in May 2008:
 - GEN-Europe's Annual General Assembly in June 2008 in Sieben Linden ecovillage in Germany, drew 92 representatives from 24 countries across Europe:
 - Connections were built between ENA and NextGEN at the Lost Valley Ecovillage in Oregon where progress was made in NextGEN's organizational structure and finance, following NextGEN's inaugural conference in Mexico. NextGEN youth at The Farm in Tennessee, are involved in the coordination of the 2009 Bioregional Congress, with plans to create a youth congress in conjunction;
 - NextGEN, GEN's youth council, launched its Willing EcoVillage Energizers (WEVE), a program to create opportunities to work and learn in ecovillages, supported by the European Voluntary Service (EVS).

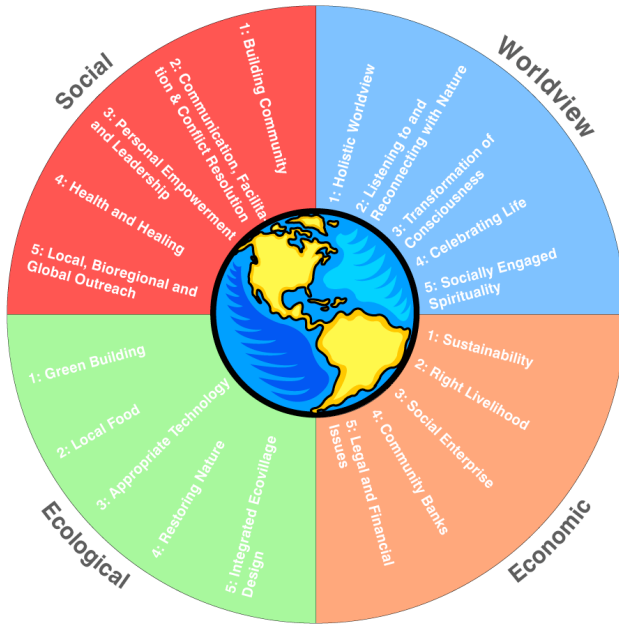
2.3 Education

Education lies at the heart of most ecovillages' raison d'être, as they seek to share the various innovative sustainability models that they develop. At the heart of GEN's educational activities over the last year are two initiatives in association with the UN:

* **Gaia Education** is a GEN project to create educational curricula derived from good practice in ecovillages worldwide. It has now created a core curriculum, Ecovillage Design Education (EDE), that has been endorsed by UNITAR and adopted by UNESCO as a valuable contribution to the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (www.gaiaeducation.org).

This curriculum is based on the four dimensions of sustainability: social, economic, ecological and worldviews (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: The Gaia Educational educational mandala



Over the last year, 25 EDEs have been taught at 20 locations (ecovillages, universities and community centres) on every continent, with many more new courses in preparation.

Central, South and North America			
ASOCIACIÓN GAIA	Argentina	1 programme preparation	Certification
ECOALDEA HUEHUECOYOTL	Mexico	1 programme	Certification
INSTITUTO OAXACA	Mexico	1 programme	Certification
ELPONCHO ECOCENTRO	Bolivia	1 programme	Certification
UMAPAZ	Sao Paulo Brazil	1 programmes preparation	Certification
INTERNATIONAL HOLISTIC UNIVERSITY	Brasilia Brazil	preparation	Certification
THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO	Albuquerque USA	1 programme preparation	Certification
ECOVILLAGE AT ITHACA	NY state USA	1 programmes	Supporting
CLIFTON NEIGHBORHOOD	Louisville USA	On going	Supporting

LOST VALLEY	USA	1 programme	Certification
INSTITUTO ROERICH	Bahia Brazil	preparation	Supporting
NEW YORK	USA	preparation	
FOE, RIO GRANDE DO SUL FEDERAL UNIVERSITY, BODISATVA	Porto Alegre Brazil	preparation	Certification
12 Programmes 7 in Preparation 1 Ongoing urban design exercise			
South & South East Asia			
AUROVILLE	India	1 programme	Certification
SARVODAYA	Sri Lanka	1 programme	Supporting
LIVING ROUTES	India	1 programme	Certification
WONGSANIT ASHRAM	Thailand	1 programme	Certification
KONOHAMA JEPP	Japan	1 programme	Certification
CABIOKID PERMACULTURE FARM, CELL, CASITA YSABEL	Philippines	preparation	Certification
5 Programmes 1 in Preparation			
Europe			
LIVING ROUTES	Scotland	1 programme	Certification
ZEGG SIEBEN LINDEN	Germany	1 programme preparation	Certification
TAMERA	Portugal	1 programmes preparation	Certification
FINDHORN FOUNDATION	Scotland	1 programmes preparation	Certification
KEURUUN EKOKYLÄ	Finland	preparation	Certification

UOC	Spain	3 programmes	Certification
OEKORDORF	Austria	Cancelled	Certification
11 Programmes 4 in Preparation			
Australia			
CRYSTAL WATERS	Australia	1 programme preparation	Certification
1 Programme 1 in Preparation			

Middle East			
LOTAN	Israel	3 programmes preparation	Certification
METU	Turkey	1 pilots preparation	Supporting
9 Programmes 2 in Preparation 2 Pilots			

During the year, the first of four proposed textbooks associated with the EDE course, has been published. Work is progressing on the remaining three.

Most recently, the EDE programme has been converted to an online virtual format where students from all over the world can now participate via Gaia Education's partnership with the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Open University of Catalonia, UOC).

In 2008, Gaia Education in partnership with Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Open University of Catalonia, UOC) launched the virtual programme Gaia Education Design for Sustainability in Spanish and English. The open source curriculum has been translated from English into Spanish, Portuguese, Finnish and Japanese and can be downloaded for free from the Gaia Education website.

UOC leads in Europe the emergence of a new model of online education for the knowledge of society. The aim of the UOC is to facilitate the education of people and contribute to their progress and to that of society by promoting specialized research of the knowledge society. And by establishing alliances with other universities and

institutions around the world with shared goals and values, in order to build a global space of knowledge. Gaia Education's Design for Sustainability is located within the UOC Campus for Peace and Solidarity, which creates online courses in collaboration with NGOs and humanitarian institutions, in response to their educational needs.

* **CIFAL Findhorn** is a UNITAR training aimed primarily at the sustainability training needs of local governments and based at the Findhorn ecovillage in Scotland. It is a GEN project and a multi-stakeholder initiative with GEN as the sole NGO sponsor. During the course of the year, a total of 8 seminars and conferences were offered to 283 participants, as follows:

18 – 19 September 2007

Global Climate Change and the Sustainable Energy Revolution

in partnership with the Moray Council, Moray College, Highlands and Islands Community Energy Company

National Event (30 delegates)

24 September 2007

Carbon Emissions Reduction Strategies for Businesses

in partnership with UN Global Compact UK Network and Royal Bank of Scotland

National Event (27 delegates)

11 October 2007

Solar Energy and Heat Pumps- Responding to the Climate Change Challenge

in partnership with Cairngorms National Park Authority

Regional Event (32 delegates)

26 – 27 November 2007

Biofuels for Sustainable Transportation- Providing Mobility and Reducing Carbon Emissions

in partnership with Leonardo da Vinci European Training for the UK

European Event (33 delegates)

17 – 18 March 2008

Urban Planning and Regeneration: Key to Tackling Climate Change

in partnership with Dundee City Council and Sustainable Scotland Network

international Event (65 delegates)

6 May 2008

Solar Energy and Heat Pumps- Responding to the Climate Change Challenge

in partnership with Cairngorms National Park Authority

Regional Event (30 delegates)

27 May 2008

Eco-Industrial Parks

in partnership with HiE, Moray Council and EnviroCentre

Regional Event (16 delegates)

16 - 18 June 2008

Low and Zero Carbon Housing- Retrofitting and New Build Design

in partnership with the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, the Chartered Institute of Housing, the Chartered Institute of Building, Moray Council and WWF

National Event (50 delegates)

Another educational initiative during the summer of 2007 - NextGEN co-hosted a trip for US high school students to Las Canadas ecovillage, as well as a high school environmental leadership work program in Pennsylvania. A second trip to Las Canadas was held in the summer of 2008. NextGEN youth are currently working on creating two college environmental leadership workshops at Yale and Haverford Universities for the spring of 2009.

2.4 Advocacy

GEN has sponsored and participated in a range of advocacy-related events during the past year:

- GEN's principal representative at the United Nations, Albert Bates, participated in the COPs in Bonn, Accra and Poznan;
- GEN was a sponsor of the prestigious conference, Positive Energy: Creative Community Responses to Peak Oil and Climate Change, at the Findhorn ecovillage in Scotland. This brought together many of the world's leading experts on the subject for a week-long conference that drew 150 participants from across the world. Other presenters included the Scottish Minister of the Environment;
- the GEN President was a presenter at the conference, Ecovillages, Ecocities, and Transition Towns in Dublin, where he shared a platform with the Irish Minister of the Environment;
- the GEN President was a presenter at the Collective Wisdom conference in Berlin that explored community responses to Climate Change. The conference was attended by over 200 people from civil society and the NGO community.

3. Financial Report