

Contents

Features

Listening to the Voice of Man and Nature, <i>Karen Svensson</i>	3
Cultivating Hope, <i>Mary Westfall</i>	4
Millennium Money: Sustainable Abundance, <i>Hildur Jackson</i>	5
Is There an Alternative to the WTO? <i>Ross Jackson</i>	6
From Global to Local, <i>Helena Norberg-Hodge</i>	7
On Ecovillages, <i>Ted Trainer</i>	7
One America, <i>Enrique Hidalgo</i>	8
Millennium Reflections, <i>Philip Snyder</i>	9
Spiritual Practice, from the Dalai Lama	10
It is all about Love, <i>Hildur Jackson</i>	10
Inspiration for the New Millennium, <i>Rashmi Mayur</i>	11

News from Europe

GEN Europe Moves to Italy, <i>Lucilla Borio</i>	12
GEN Europe Council in Turkey, <i>Lucilla Borio</i>	12
GEN's First Chairman Retires, <i>Declan Kennedy</i>	13
Women and Communities: Gentle Power, <i>Marti Mueller</i>	14
The Damanhur Federation, <i>Lepre Viola</i>	14
The Findhorn Foundation in Scotland, <i>May East</i>	16
Expo 2000 at Lebensgarten, <i>Declan Kennedy</i>	16
The Danish Association of Ecovillages (LØS), <i>Troels Dilling</i>	17
Kilden Ecovillage, Norway, <i>Hildur Jackson</i>	17
Letter from Nevo Ecoville, Russia, <i>Volodya Shestakov</i>	17

News From Asia and Oceania

Crystal Waters Permaculture Village, Australia, <i>Val Oliver</i>	18
Other News from Australia	19
GEN South Asia: New Node in Sri Lanka, <i>Vinya Ariyaratne</i>	19
The Sarvodaya Peace Movement, <i>Vinya Ariyaratne</i>	20

News From the Americas

Uniting North and South in Colorado, <i>Albert Bates</i>	22
Huehucoyotl Community in Mexico, <i>Giovanni Ciarlo</i>	24
New Ecovillage in Mexico, <i>Hildur Jackson</i>	24
Ecovillages in Bolivia, <i>Enrique Hidalgo</i>	25
Intentional Communities in Latin America, <i>André Soares</i>	25

GEN In the South

Introduction, <i>Hildur Jackson</i>	26
COLUFIFA, Sénégal, <i>Elise Guldagger</i>	27
Auroville, India, <i>Marti Mueller</i>	27
Kuthumba Ecovillage, South Africa, <i>Patti Ovenstone</i>	28
The Ladakh Project, ISEC, <i>Helena Norberg-Hodge</i>	28

Global News

Move of GEN International, <i>Hildur Jackson</i>	29
Website Moves Back to Denmark, <i>Rolf Jackson</i>	30
GEN Board Meeting in Sri Lanka, A Vision Keeper's View, <i>Marti Mueller</i>	31
GEN: Future Directions, <i>Philip Snyder</i>	31
Global Services and Partnerships, <i>Editorial Staff</i>	32
Global Cooperation: UN, CRLE and others, <i>Editorial Staff</i>	35

Calendar, Books, Videos and Addresses

Welcome!

To the Ecovillage Millennium issue of the Global Ecovillage Network's International newsletter. We have gathered news about ecovillages and related projects from all over the world, giving you a glimpse of how people everywhere are joining forces to create a sustainable future.

The Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) is an International network of ecovillages and related projects. These ecovillages are human settlements where people already live the life which we may hopefully all be able to share in the new millennium. They offer solutions to some of the most disturbing social, spiritual and environmental problems of our time. The object of the association is "to coordinate the activities of a number of regional ecovillage networks around the world; to promote information exchange and international initiatives of various kinds, including global services and partnerships, dialogue with legislators, public policy formulation, conferences, meetings, educational programs, joint fundraising, allocation of funds and development of guidelines for ecovillages."

In the first part of this newsletter, you will find general articles on ecovillage life and thoughts concerning desirable global changes in the new millennium. Following this, you will find the good news gathered from all over the world: Articles about GEN in various areas and countries, as well as about individual ecovillages and related sustainability initiatives in Europe, the Americas, Oceania, Asia and Africa. In the International section, we will also discuss some of GEN's global initiatives, such as Global Services and Partnerships, and Future Directions for the Global Ecovillage Network. You can also find this newsletter on our website (www.gaia.org).

This Millennium issue is planned as the first of a semi-annual Global Newsletter for GEN. We have received wonderful contributions from many of you pioneers out there, who are building a loving and sustainable culture. Please keep sending articles and pictures. (Note: uncredited pictures in this issue are from the GEN files). This newsletter will be based on such regular contributions from the people who have rolled up their sleeves and are paving the way. Please let us hear your stories, good news, problems, analyses, criticism, opinions, and ideas.

The news gathering and editing for the next issue will be carried out by: Hildur Jackson, Karen Svensson, and Agnieszka Komoch.

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Happy New Millennium!

Hildur Jackson and Karen Svensson

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To many of us, especially in the North, the ecovillage concept still seems a relatively new experience. Yet it is by no means a novelty. For centuries, people all over the world have lived in villages that can be termed "ecological". Before industrialization set its marks on the Northern hemisphere, villagers were living in traditional communities, with many of the elements of today's intentional ecovillages: most of their daily needs were met by local production, they supported each other, and individuals had a say in what was happening in their immediate environment. Spirituality, in many different forms, was a part of everyday life. In the South, these types of villages still house a large part of the population. This is changing, though, as villagers are forced toward monocultures on the land, or a life in the city slums. Among the deafening noise of the market-driven industrial and political giants, the softer voices of man and nature are not being heard. In an ecovillage, these voices are loud and clear.

Across the North, thousands of people have in the past decades joined together to create the ecovillage movement.

They have abandoned the lonesome rat race of modern society, and are rebuilding traditional communities using newer methods and knowledge.

They are doing so to regain control over their daily lives, to live in harmony with nature and with fellow human beings, and to create a future which, contrary to the depleting energies of the "mechanical" world, can be sustained indefinitely into the future.

In many cases, these intentional communities, or ecovillages have been inspired by ways of living still in existence in the South. In the South, traditional "eco"villages are the people's capital, their insurance against the fate suffered by the North. Today, there is an emerging Southern grassroots movement for the encouragement and preservation of the "ecovillage" lifestyle, and against the loss of sustainable indigenous culture caused by globalization.

Seen in this light, we cannot view ourselves as two hemispheres each with our own problems, but rather as partners living related crises, in different ways. For these crises, the ecovillage offers answers which we, together, can turn into a global solution for a sustainable future.

What is an Ecovillage?

Ecovillages embody a way of living. They are grounded in the deep understanding that all things and creatures are interconnected. Based on this philosophy, ecovillages build on varying combinations of three basic principles:

Ecology, Community and Spirituality.

Ecology denotes the respect of nature which entails that one does not take from the Earth more than one gives back, and that one respects every creature in our world while providing for our daily needs. Ecovillages ideally integrate green technologies (water treatment, alternative energy systems), ecological building (strawbale houses, wooden structures, cob houses, etc.) and ecological food production (permaculture, biological agriculture, etc).

Community is the social element of an ecovillage, whereby people live in harmony with each other, respecting themselves and others in a mutually supportive way. In the course of the years, many experiences have been recorded, and methods gleaned all over the world are being implemented within ecovillages to create harmony between people, allowing individuals to feel empowered and supported by their environment.

Spirituality is, in many ways, the acceptance of the mystery of the universe, the knowledge that all beings are interconnected and that a higher purpose lies beyond our individual endeavors. Some ecovillages are inspired by particular spiritual practices. Other spiritual communities use varying ways of finding spiritual inspiration, such as meditation, yoga, dance and artistic creation.

In the North, intentional ecovillages often tend to start with a focus on one of the three core elements. However, it would seem that respect for nature, respect for all living beings and respect for the mystery of the universe go hand in hand. So even when an ecovillage starts with a particular focus on one element, it often, though not always, ends up integrating all three elements in some measure or other.

In the South, you will not find a traditional (eco)village lacking in any of the three elements. Ecology, community and spirituality are integrated naturally, and have been for ages.

Grethe, an elderly Danish lady, visited a traditional village in Senegal last year. A few days after her arrival, she felt ill and asked to stay in her hut. All day, people thronged to her bedside, bringing her fresh food from their own crops, and herbal teas. They kept her company, talked to her, and prayed. She was not used to this way of doing things, and in the afternoon she asked to be alone.

She got better a day later, and was invited to sit with the village wise woman for a chat. The old woman looked at her and asked: "What strange customs you keep in Denmark. How do you get better when you fall ill? Over here, everybody comes to you with good food and healing herbs from the land around us; they keep you company, they help you, and they pray for your recovery. That is how we get better." Ecology, community and spirituality, all in one, the wise woman's recipe for health.



Child in a play, Sarvodaya, Sri Lanka



Children dancing in the open air Temple, Damanhur, Italy. Photo: Agnieszka Komoch

Cultivating Hope: An Ecovillage Immersion Experience

The Rev. Mary Westfall

Mary Westfall is a Pastor and teaches at the University of New Hampshire, USA.

When my family and I spent four months traveling throughout Western Europe for my doctoral research in 1998, none of us had any idea how profoundly the experience would effect us. My studies in Environmental Ethics had led me further and further into the connections between science, spirituality and sustainable living. It became increasingly clear to me that despite all kinds of scientific data about the state of the environment and strong spiritual traditions that view nature as sacred, change seemed slow in coming. Perhaps what was needed most within a culture of despair and fear were educational models grounded in hope and dedicated to the renewal of humans and Earth, places that could be looked to as "living laboratories" to help guide the shift to more holistic and compassionate ways of living. That is what led me to focus my research on ecovillages in Scotland, Denmark and Germany and it

was spending time within a variety of amazing communities that provided not only the basis for my research, but also proved to be transformative and inspiring for my entire family.

As we danced and meditated, gardened and sang, shared meals and conversation with community members from all over the world, we experienced the beauty and power of ecovillage life.

Our hearts soared as we gathered with people from 17 different countries at Lebensgarten to plant the Peace Pole on a sunny April morning, as we joined with others in song, dance and games at Findhorn Foundation, as we worked in the orchards and potato fields of Svanholm. Time and again we experienced education at its best - the full engagement of body, mind and spirit. Not the detached, objective approach to learning that so dominates Western culture, but relationally-based learning that takes one deeper into contact with oneself, others, Earth, Spirit and Mystery.

Such models of living and learning provide some of the basic vision and skills needed as we learn to live more sustainably on Earth.

Our Ecovillage immersion experience reaffirmed our hope in the future and in the capacity of human beings to truly find new patterns of living that are holistic and joyful. For me, it also reaffirmed my commitment to models of sustainable education that are about engagement of the whole person, connecting thought and feeling, vision and doing, body and soul in a joyful dance of discovery and creativity.

Next month I will present my doctoral dissertation to my academic community and share with them the profound learnings that came from living, even briefly, among people who believe in the future and even now are cultivating gardens of hope within a landscape of despair. What ecovillages and more relationally-based learning models offer will make all the difference as we seek to learn new ways of being whole.



Dancing at the Education Meeting at Fjordvang, Thy, Denmark, 1998.

Is there an Alternative to the WTO?

Ross Jackson

The Seattle demonstrations against the WTO summit meeting have focused world wide attention on this powerful but poorly understood institution. Why all the fuss about a trade treaty, ask some observers? Why all the criticism? And perhaps most importantly, what alternative is there to this institution?

Firstly, the WTO is not just about trade. It is about power and money. It is about which philosophy should be organising the economic relationships among nations in the future. In my book "And we ARE doing it" I warned that if we are not careful, the WTO may well evolve into the first de facto world government under the control of gigantic transnational corporations (TNC's) that dwarf most nation states. Is this what we want? We owe it to ourselves to scrutinise its foundations very carefully. If we do this, we find that it is not structured to serve the beneficial interests of the people of this planet at all, but rather a very small group of investors who control the TNC's, and whose only interest is to maximise their own financial gain at the expense of everyone and everything else, including the environment, human culture, local tradition, social structure - in short, all the things that give real meaning to our existence.

The philosophical rationale for the WTO is the concept of combating "protectionism" - the economic expression for the use of tariffs to protect local, inefficient industry against foreign competition. While there is some truth in the claim that such local industries have been inefficiently managed historically, the WTO regime throws the baby out

with the bathwater, ignoring the fact that the protection of local interests, including culture, the environment, food security, employment, tradition, etc. are legitimate concerns of any nation.

The WTO considers any such considerations to be hindrances to so-called "free trade", thus limiting the profit opportunities of foreign corporations. Furthermore, the design of the WTO is fundamentally flawed in that it offers direct incentives to destroy local

"The WTO regime throws the baby out with the bathwater, ignoring the fact that the protection of local interests, including culture, the environment, food security, employment, tradition, etc. are legitimate concerns of any nation."

culture and the environment. It is disagreement with this basic philosophy and an understanding of where it is leading us that is at the root of the Seattle demonstrations.

Personally, I do not believe that the WTO can survive for any long period: the resistance to it will grow exponentially as the citizens of the world begin to feel the consequences. The Seattle meeting is a watershed event in the education of the citizens of the world. One of the most dangerous conse-

quences of the WTO philosophy is the rapid widening of the gap between rich and poor, within nations and among nations. Such gaps are not sustainable, and always lead eventually to revolution or war. What I would like to sketch out here is an example of an alternative way of structuring economic relationships that is far more equitable, one which offers incentives to the TNC's to protect the environment, and at the same time protects local interests without reintroducing inefficiencies in local production

As a working title, I call it the GTO, or Gaian Trade Organisation, the term I used in the last chapter of my book, "And We Are Doing It!", a fantasy trip which takes the reader to the year 2064 after an economic collapse and a rebuilding period based on sustainability, what I call "The Era of Ecovillage". The basic concept is that sovereign nations decide unilaterally which companies (domestic or foreign) will be licensed to sell their products into their domestic market. For example, each corporation would have to pass a suitability test, which would include an environmental audit of all its activities from resource extraction to destroying the final product, and everything in between. The concept of licensing in this way has a precedent in the field in which I have worked for the last fifteen years, professional investment management. The concept of an "audit" also has a precedent in the field of "ethical investment" where a rather simple analysis is used as a screening requirement for some mutual funds.

The table below offers a comparison of the two different models. This model is just a principle sketch, but enough to show what Seattle is all about. There are many issues to be considered in moving to a Gaian Trade Organisation model, not least the relationship to developing countries (e.g. "trade, not aid"), methods to avoid a return to local inefficient monopolies (always have at least two major competitors in each key industry), and issues of competitiveness of local producers. This is only meant to be an introduction to the debate which hopefully will be inspired by Seattle.

WTO (World Trade Organization)	GTO (Gaian Trade Organization)
1. Commercial companies have rights	1. Sovereign nations have rights
2. To avoid penalties, nations have obligations to companies	2. To enter a market, companies have obligations to nations
3. Protectionism for TNC investors	3. Protectionism for national interests, (e.g. environment, culture, health)
4. Companies can force Nations to change their laws	4. Nations can withdraw permission for companies to operate
5. Uniform domestic and foreign standards	5. Standards can be different
6. Nation has little or no control over balance of trade	6. Nation has full control over balance of trade (bilateral negotiations)
7. Conflict resolution by 3-man panel	7. No conflict resolution necessary, only bilateral negotiations