Staying in the game

From 'intentional' to 'eco': Transforming community in the Italian ecovillage Damanhur

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Acknowledgements

It is here that I am to acknowledge the various people that have helped me through this long journey. First I must thank Damanhur, and all the people who allowed me into their world, who shared with me their stories. To Wapiti the coordinator of the new life program thank you for organizing and planning, making sure we saw as much of Damanhur as we could. To the Porta della Luna family and the Dendera family, thank you for allowing me to stay in your homes and into your lives with such open arms. My time in Damanhur is an experience I wont forget, I am grateful to you all for that.

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Introduction

It's Monday night in Damjl, Damanhur's oldest community. Myself and the other guests and visitors have begun to gather to watch the February full moon ritual, or as it is also known, the ritual of the Oracle, which takes place every month in the amphitheater of the open temple. This is an event that had been talked about with much excitement in the days leading up to it. Many Damanhurians attend this gathering of the community, and it is also an event that is open to visitors who wish to attend. Everyone, except the visitors have arrived in their ritual robes which bring a colorful burst to the evening. At 8pm most of those wearing robes have begun to enter the open temple. The guests and visitors are lined up after them. We are informed that once the ritual has begun we are not to leave, and there is no photography allowed. There are drums playing, and the first few rows have been filled with people. The visitors are lead up to a row at the very top where we sit and to face the stage.

In the center of the stage there is a fire and behind it there is a row of women all dressed in dark blue robes. The backdrop to this scene is a large stone alter and placed on top of the alter there is a large crystal that has been lit up with a blue light. On either side of the stage there are two large pillars. Once everyone is seated, the scene is set and the drumming stops. One of the women walks up to stand behind the alter and begins to read from a page into a micro phone, it is in Italian but once she is finished, a second woman reads the same passage in English. It is an explanation of the ritual, which is described as a moment of connection with divine forces; it is also described as a moment of great joy, a gift.

After another reminder that no photography is allowed, the drums starts to louden and the ritual begins.

The federation of Damanhur is made up of 26 communities, usually consisting of between 9 and 20 people that live communally. These communities are spread over the area of Canavese, located near Turin in the north of Italy. Turin was the home of Oberto Airaudi the man who initiated the idea of Damanhur in 1975, it was also here where for many years, he had been practicing spiritual healing and over the years, himself and a number of his clients had began meeting regularly. It was together with a group of his clientele that an institution formed in which the specific ideology of Damanhur took shape. In 1977, with the suggestion from Airaudi, the first Damanhur community, Damjl, was formed. During this beginning phase, Damanhur had organized a group who managed communal resources and were elected every 18 months. Over the years the number of communities continued to grow and by the late 1980's they were grouped together to form the Federation of Damanhur. This growth in size also meant the development of what has become a complex social structure.

In 1992 the secret whereabouts of the community's main project 'the temples of humankind', that was begun in 1978, was unveiled to the Italian authorities. It was this event that began the gradual opening up of the federation to the world as people began to visit this construction. Many visitors began to also show an interest in participating in Damanhur. It was during this time that globally, there was an increasing prevalence of intentional communities, culminating in the emergence of a global movement; the ecovillage movement.

The ecovillage movement began in 1995 after an annual conference held by the Findhorn community in Scotland. The topic that year was "Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities" and it seemed to attract many eager listeners. It was after this conference that the term 'ecovillage' began to be used as a label for many intentional communities, old and new, across the globe. Shortly after this meeting, a group of about 25 people got together to form the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) as a medium through which the many projects that had emerged around the world with a common aim could connect and share with one another. Today GEN has thousands of members (Jackson, 2004), including not only communities but other projects such as permaculture, cooperatives, ecotourism, co-neighborhood projects, to name a few.

Damanhur is an intentional community that has developed with a focus on the aspect of spirituality, producing its very unique ideology and social structure. The community self-identifies as an 'eco-spiritual' community. It is an intentional community in which play and games have come to hold an important social function. Damanhur is a member of Conacreis (National Coodination of Associations and Communitites of Ethical Spiritual Research), which is an organization that connects Italian groups that advocate secular and ethical spiritual research. As well as this, Damanhur is a member of the Italian Ecovillage Network (Rive), a group that aims to address environmental impact, resilience, renewable energy and ecological communication (Damanhur, n.d.g). Damanhur is also a member of GEN and thus, although started long before the ecovillage movement, is part of this global movement.

Intentional communities, such as Damanhur, occupy a liminal space within the societies that they exist, as within these communities' social structures, rules and roles are being tweaked and challenged. In order to understand Damanhur as an alternative and intentional community in which play holds an important social function I have used the theoretical framework that includes both Huizinga's theory of play and Turner's theories of liminality and communitas. Using this theoretical frame as a lens, this thesis looks at how play functions in creating and maintaining liminality and communitas in the alternative world of Damanhur, and what the rules of inclusion and exclusion within this world are. For a period of three months, I lived in Damanhur as part of a program called the 'new life' program, which I will explain further in the methodology chapter of this thesis. During this time my main method of research was participant observation. My

participation in the above mentioned program also meant that I occupied a curious double liminal position; the first as a researcher, and the second as part of the program.

Using these methods, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the community in a number of areas that helped me to address my research question. Firstly, what 'playfulness' means to the inhabitants of Damanhur and how this is incorporated into everyday practices. Secondly, what community means to the inhabitants and what rituals are part of creating and maintaining it. Thirdly, how inhabitants of Damanhur perceive their alternative world of Damanhur and how different they felt it to be from the world outside Damanhur, and lastly how their alternative world is created, what rituals and everyday practices are involved, and who gets to be involved. In this thesis I present a description of the alternative world that has been created by the inhabitants of Damanhur, focusing on the social structure of this community.

There are six chapters in this thesis. In the first chapter I deal with the broader social and academic debate that my research is part of. I begin with the ecovillage movement, focusing in on the history of the movement. This highlights that communities like Damanhur have been formed out of a growing distrust and dissatisfaction with the nation-state. I then address the notions of play, liminality and communitas, showing that without the interplay of all three, the continuation of the community with such a complex social structure wouldn't be possible. The second chapter is where my methodology and research settings have been outlined and I reflect on my position as an anthropologist, as a 'sojourner of the between'. In the third chapter I look at the creation of community, outlining the complex structure of Damanhur. The fourth chapter is about connection. This chapter looks at participation in this community, linking it with society on a broader scale and looking at the frictions that can be found. The fifth chapter is the concluding chapter where I reflect on my main findings and look ahead to the idea of 'continuing community'.

Chapter 1. Concepts of 'community'

The renewed interest in communitarianism, and the creation of community amongst the public, which is highlighted by the 1995 conference held in Findhorn, that preceded the emergence of ecovillages around the world and the formation of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), also sparked renewed interest in this topic amongst anthropologists (Brown, 2002). As an anthropologist, and as an advocate of the movement, my own starting point and interest in this topic of community came from the criticism that the ecovillage movement has come up against.

Takis Fotopoulos, Greek political philosopher, economist and founder of the inclusive democracy movement, describes the movement as one of escapism and of having contributed very little to real social change. Ted Trainer (2000) although a strong advocate of the movement, also has doubts about how far the movement can go in responding to the problems currently facing the world and argues that the movement needs to become more energetic and enthusiastic about building viable alternatives, and further more needs to become more political in connecting with radical critiques of capitalist society. Fotopoulos (2000) also argues that the focus on spiritual beliefs that are the basis for older communities like Damanhur (Tamm, 2009) is incompatible with democratic society.

The question that this criticism highlighted for me is, what are people escaping from, and what are they running to, what do these 'alternatives' look like? This question also highlighted the fact that this movement is about social change through the use of community. Damanhur is an example of this movement. It is a particular example for a number of reasons. One is that it is an intentional community that started long before the ecovillage movement. It *joined* the movement with an already well-formed social structure. This history leads me to the second reason that makes this a particular example; Damanhur started around a version of New Age spiritualism, which continues to be at the center of this community. The third characteristic that makes this community a particular example of the ecovillage movement, is the function that games have in the community. I must add however, that although it is a particular example, it is not unique.

Damanhur is part of a larger phenomenon, the global ecovillage movement. The ecovillage movement itself falls under the umbrella of the 'new social movements' paradigm. When looking at Damanhur as an alternative it is important first to understand both of these, as it places my research into a particular social debate. This chapter will begin by doing just this. I will then go onto looking at the concepts that are found within this debate; 'intentional community' and 'community'. In order to understand Damanhur as an intentional community is important to focus in on the concept of community. I will then discuss the theories of play, liminality and communitas that make up the theoretical frame that I have used to understand and analyze Damanhur.

1.1 The ecovillage movement; 'renewing' community

Kamau (2002) states that, lives in 'normal' society are marked by routine; it is predictable, and mostly stable. This stability comes from the fact that mental and social categories, as well as institutions are fixed and change very little during the course of our lives. 'Normal' society is being used here to describe life within the modern nation-state. Distinctions are used to set boundaries around certain aspects of social life and it is these distinctions provide the means for creating a society, and a set of social relations that are relatively stable and predictable. These create a sense of order that is key for 'normal' life to persist. Such situations that are characteristic of a structured society can create situations of constriction, feelings of being limited by social regulations and status (Kamau, 2002). Gledhill (2000) and Beuchlar (1995) argue that this tension has meant a shift, a transformation of society.

This shift, and this paradox, within modern society, has led to an emergence of the 'new social movements' (NSMs) paradigm that has marked a change in the character of collective action (Gledhill, 2000; Bleuchar, 1995). It is no longer a case of ethnicity, race, or gender, or social identity that is bringing groups of people together for change but rather people from a diverse number of social backgrounds are joining together around a common cause (Gledhill, 2000). The NSMs also mark a new kind of politics, which Jurgen Habermas states is concerned with quality of life and projects of self-realization, with aims of participation and identity formation (Beuchlar, 1995). The ecovillage movement is part of the NSMs paradigm, and is a movement in which the value of community has come to be realized through liberal practices, and solidarity within these communities is being created and achieved in response to the dominant neoliberal and capitalist ideology that has come to be seen as a serious and unwanted threat both to the lifeworld as well as to the sustainability of the planet (Beuchlar, 1995; Gledhill, 2000).

Opposing Fotopoulos and Trainer (2000), Kunze (2012), Metcalf (2012) and Liftin (2012), state that ecovillages have a great deal of potential in contributing to solutions to overcome the many ecological, social and economic problems that we as a human race currently face. The ecovillage movement is more of an affirmative movement than a protest movement, as rather than resisting what they oppose, ecovillages are building an alternative from the ground up creating parallel structures for self-governance in the midst of the current structures and societies within which they exist, experimenting in radical democracy (Metcalf, 2012; Kunze, 2012; Liftin, 2012). It is the belief of many that those living in these communities are living more empowered, equitable, interesting, secure lives that are ecologically friendly (Metcalf, 2012; Kunze, 2012).

Macaco Tamerice, a resident of Damanhur for over 20 years, has been heavily involved in GEN since around 2007. She describes the ecovillage movement as a 'creature' of which Damanhur is apart. This 'new culture' that is forming around the ecovillage movement, she

explains, will continue to grow more and more with more and more ecovillages and "alternative situations" popping up everywhere, even in cities. This she explains is because "there is a new consciousness arising, people realize that they can't make it on their own. That they really need to do things together with others," this collaboration she feels is stronger with younger generations.

Metcalf (2012) states that ecovillages, although a recent development are in fact the most recent version of a much older phenomenon; intentional community (Metcalf, 2012). Intentional communities can be identified by a deliberate attempt to realize a common, alternative way of life outside of mainstream society, with the goal of 'setting things right' in a more intimate setting (Meijering et al, 2007; Kunze, 2012; Metcalf, 2012). Members of these communities are usually attempting to distance themselves from norms and values associated with neoliberal ideology such as individualism, materialism, and a lack of spirituality or religion, and so they move to communities of 'like-minded people' where they can feel comfortable and accepted (Kunze, 2012).

There was, with the older groups like Damanhur, that were started in the 1960s and 1970s, an aspect of severe withdrawal from the societies surrounding them that was largely due to the lack of acceptance received from these societies which labeled these groups as deviants, a challenge to the status quo, to order and social structure (Metcalf, 2012). The growth in numbers of intentional communities that has taken the form of a global ecovillage movement, highlights that within Western society more and more people are searching for a space within which they can re-connect with one another and also with nature, a space in which the rules and structure can be played with, transformed, made and remade (Turner, 1969; Siegler, 2002).

To understand Damanhur as both an intentional community, with its own unique structure and ideology, and also as part of the ecovillage movement it is important to understand the notion of community. Community is an important concept as it forms the basis for all societal structures (Kunze, 2012; Brown, 2002). The study of community acknowledges that humans have an inherent need for connection with each other, and allows for the further understanding of how this basis is culturally constructed and reconstructed with other human requirements in the face of change (Brown, 2002). Damanhur thus emerges as a space of anti-structure that can only develop in contrast, or even hybridization to the structures within which it has develops (Turner, 1969); the nation-state.

Damanhur is therefore, a phenomenon of the Italian nation-state. Damanhur is an intentional community that has formed outside of normal society structure, on the borders of it. It is this that makes communities like Damanhur interesting because 'normal' social roles and classifications don't apply to those in liminal situations. Damanhur emerges as a community that has developed its own ideology, social structure and social roles and rules as an opposition to

those found outside of the community. With this, there has also been a development of a sense of 'nationalism' (Gellner, 2006). This structure however, has produced its own frictions and constraints.

1.2 Play, Liminality and Communitas

Play and games hold an important role in the creation and development of Damanhur's unique and complex social structure, and have been incorporated into ordinary life through one of the communities' main bodies; the 'game of life', which will be explained in the chapters to follow. This central function of play called for the use of Johan Huizinga's theory of play and Victor Turner's theory of liminality and communitas as the main pillars of my theoretical framework. Both Turner and Huizinga underline the aesthetic quality of 'the act' or 'the performance', highlighting that in giving expression to life, man is in fact creating a second, poetic world alongside the world of nature. This ludic space can be defined as liminal, a sacred transitional phase where communal and cultural practices take place outside the normal social structure and members within this communal liminal space are free to explore the ludic, sacred and profane in the form of rituals, myths and novelty, thus creating exceptional combinations of familiar elements. It is in these liminal, and play or 'ludic' spaces that a sense of communitas is created.

Liminality is a space likened to death or being in the womb, a dark space that is associated with transition. Within these liminal spaces myth, ritual, symbols, philosophical systems and works of art are produced (Turner, 1969). It is in the liminal space that playful behaviors thrive; it is the 'playground' (Kolb and Kolb, 2013). Huizinga (1958) describes play as existing before civilization, and in essence; play is culture. Play is an activity that can be found everywhere as a well-defined activity that is different from ordinary life, and an action that carries meaning. This meaning is important, as it is the very fact that it carries meaning which implies a non-materialistic quality in the nature of the action; there is something at stake in play itself but it is not a material result but rather the completion and success of it (Huizinga, 1958). Damanhur as a 'play society' (Huizinga, 1958), is a 'voluntary activity', it is representative of what lies outside of ordinary life, it has a secluded and secretive character, order has been created, seen in its complex social structure, it carries with it an ethical value as a community on 'a mission to save humankind', and there are rules within this society.

Huizinga (1958) highlights that when and once a civilization begins to become more and more complex, more diverse, and as technology, production and social life become more fine tuned and organized 'the old cultural soil' is slowly overshadowed by a layer of ideas systems of thought and knowledge, doctrines, rules and regulations, moralities and conventions that have all lost touch with play (p:75). What is at stake then becomes the second ludic space that is created in

play. Damanhur as a play society still exists outside of ordinary life, ordinary being defined as the Italian society within which Damanhur exists, thus the game continues to represent that which is not ordinary life and there is a continued notion of stepping out of reality, being representative of a temporary sphere of activity. This is important as it highlights that liminality is essential for the continuation of a play society such as Damanhur, as this second world created in play exists within a liminal space. The playfulness with which Damanhurians relate to reality allows them to deem the contradictions of the natural 'real' world, and the 'unreal' world created in play to be acceptable.

A play society generally lasts long after the game is over (Huizinga, 1958). This new play world that has been created is an exceptional situation as it involves the feeling of being apart, and collectively withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the norm, yet together, sharing something important. This feeling of collectively being apart, collectively rejecting the norm and yet together sharing in something important, something 'meaningful' is what Turner (1969) describes as 'communitas'. Communitas is held to be sacred by those who experience it, as it moves beyond structured and institutionalized relationships and is usually associated with very potent and strong feelings. It has an existential character as it involves the whole man in his relation to other whole men (Turner, 1969), while as Kunze (2012) states, structure has a cognitive quality that allows for a set of classifications to be made about nature and culture.

It has something of a 'flow' quality which is experienced by the individual, an experience something like that of time being lost, it can be identified in dialogue, both non-verbal and the use of words, such as an understanding smile, a nod of the head, or other such signals of 'between us'. My research shows that communitas, is present in Damanhur and has been raised to a sacred level, it is important for the continuation of Damanhur, as is play. Damanhur's unique ideology and the importance placed on play is what allows for the liminal to continue within the central social process, thus maintaining an extreme sense of liminality that is essential for the continued sense of communitas and flow. This type of communitas is known as ideological communitas (Turner, 1969) in which the intentional maintenance of communitas allows for the group to survive despite becoming highly structured.

Chapter 2. Being in 'the between'

In this chapter I deal with the methodology I used in carry out my research and also how I approached and analyzed the data that I returned from the field with, and the problems I faced during this process. First it is important that I give a description of Damanhur as a place and focus in on its inhabitants, highlighting that both are particular to this place although not unique. I will then bring forward my own position in Damanhur, as both a researcher and as a 'temporary citizen' in a program offered by the community called the new life program. I will then show the research methods that I used in the field to collect my data and also those used to analyze it on my return from the field, including the struggles and problems I encountered. The last section of this chapter deals with my own reflections and analysis of my position as an anthropologist, as a 'sojourner of the between' and the use of ethnography as a 'bridge'.

2.1 Research settings and population

Damanhur is located in an area of Italy that has a long history of being home to different spiritual esoteric groups (Poggi, 1992). Turin is a city that has always been famous for being host to many alternative spiritual groups and is home to the Museo delle Antichita Egizie (Egyptian Museum), which is the only museum other than the Cairo Museum that is dedicated solely to Egyptian art and culture, Damanhur is also the name of a city in lower Egypt, and is derived from the ancient Egyptian Timinhor meaning 'City of Horus', highlighting the strong influence that Damanhur's specific geographic position and the history of this area has had on the development of Damanhur.

As has been highlighted in the previous chapter, Damanhur has developed with its own unique ideology, that some would argue belongs to New Age spiritualism (Introvigne, 1999a; Poggi, 1992). This ideology will be explained in the coming chapter, however, it is important now to highlight that this ideology, which has given Damanhur its identity as an 'eco-spiritual' community has also meant that Damanhur as my 'research field' had a particular nature. It is also this particular ideology has attracted Damanhur's 600 inhabitants, and the hundreds of visitors that come to Damanhur each year, highlighting that Damanhur attracts a very particular group of people.

The population of Damanhur is now, an international one, although in the past this was not the case. It wasn't until the revealing of the communities 'temples of humankind' that the community started to receive interest, firstly from within Europe, and later from countries around the world. The population of Damanhur now has residents from Germany, France, Spain, Croatia,

Switzerland, Sweden, Iceland, the United States of America, Japan. The age of residents is between 0 and 78. There are many residents whom have children that live together with them in Damanhur, and it is an option for these children when they reach the age of 14 to move to a community called 'casa ragazzi' that is occupied by only the younger portion of the population aged 14 to 24. All other communities consist of people from all age groups.

The social community of Damanhur is not limited to just those living in Damanhur, there are also those who are considered 'non-resident' citizens and who are part of the People of Damanhur, or the 'popolo spirituale'. There are also a number of centers found around the world, which goes towards this sense of a community connected through spirit (Brown, 2002). This will be explained further in the following chapter. Damanhur, as has been highlighted in the previous chapter, doesn't exist independently of the area in which it exists, and is still very reliant on the system within which it exists. This means that having a job is important. Most residents of Damanhur work in the surrounding towns, with some working for a Damanhurian own business.

The Crea, a Damanhurian owned building in the town of Vidracco is where the numerous Damanhurian businesses can be found, such as shops that sell a number of Damanhurian products, as well as a grocery shop. Vidracco is also the town in which Damanhur's 'temples of humankind' are being constructed, and the area known as the 'sacred woods', which is the land that is directly above the underground construction, the 'temples of humankind'. In the next town, of Baldissero Canavese is Damjl, the federation's oldest community, also known as the 'capital' of Damanhur. This is also where the welcome center, guest house and a small medical center has been established. It is where the open temple is found, as I highlighted in the introduction and therefore is also the hosting place for many rituals, such as the ritual of the oracle, solstice and the equinox, and therefore receives many visitors. Both of these two establishments are where many of Damanhur's social events and gatherings take place.

For the first week of my stay in Damanhur I stayed in a community called Porta della Luna, after which, and for the remainder of my stay I lived in the community called Dendera, a 20 minute car ride away from Vidracco and another 5 after that to get to Damjl. Although I did visit a number of the communities, most of my time was spent in Dendera, the Crea and Damjl, and the area known as the sacred woods. I was in Damanhur as a researcher but I was also taking part in the program, mentioned earlier, called the new life program, which offers people a chance to live as a resident of Damanhur for three months.

My weeks were filled with various activities that were part of this program, and a typical week consisted of a number of activities such as an Italian lesson, a visit to one of the regions of Damanhur, a visit to the scared woods, a weekly meeting called 'inner harmonization' with one of the founders of Damanhur, Condor Girasole. There was also a day in which we did what is called

'campus', which can be equated to community service work, and once a week we had a turn to do 'turno' in the house that we were living in, which again is equated to community work. Both of these terms will be explained in more detail in the following chapter. This particular position that I held in Damanhur, my 'field' of research, as well as the particularity of my field had an effect on the way in which I carried out my research, and also the process that came after, of analyzing and eventually writing this thesis. I will address and expand on these however first I will give a description of the methods I used for the collection, analysis and writing up of my data.

2.2 Methodology

As a fieldwork 'guide' I used the concept of naturalistic inquiry (Beuving and de Vries, 2015). Naturalistic inquiry is about participating in people's lives, about experiencing what it is like to share these lives; observing what people are doing; and exposing yourself to the full in all aspects of their lives. Naturalistic enquiry can be seen essentially as an 'embodied practice' (Beuving and de Vries, 2015). It is these characteristics that made it, I feel the best method for me to use, given the explanation of my position in the field that I described above. I made use of various qualitative methods, using participant observation as a means to gain an insight into life in Damanhur. In addition to this I conducted informal interviews and some semi-structured interviews, small-talk, and just 'hanging around' (Slukka and Robben, 2007).

During my time in the field, as part of the 'naturalistic inquiry' method, I was already evaluating and looking into the data that I had collected. This process meant that I was asking questions about my collected material. After the first month of being in Damanhur, looking at the material I had collected, I had begun to ask the question 'why do people stay in Damanhur?' This question led my research in a particular way. I was asking new questions I was looking at things differently. This question had not been one that I had originally gone into Damanhur with but by incorporating this into my research I was able to gain further insight on the motivations of people to live in Damanhur. This ultimately gave me a deeper understanding of the alternative that is being created in Damanhur and how it is perceived as different. This integral analysis forms part of the naturalistic inquiry method, one observation in the field led me to another, which brings me forward to another, with each one helping me to increase focus on the 'how' and 'why' of Damanhur.

As part of this method Beuving and Vries (2015) suggest six steps for the analysis of the data that the researcher returns from the field with. Before this begins however, the great task of transcribing interviews must begin and after this, you can begin with these steps. Step one, what they call the 'unitization' of data, to split it up, so as to find what is useful and what is not. The second is to make categories, or 'code' the material into meaningful categories and labeling them.

The third, is to begin comparing within and between categories, the fourth step is to begin integrating categories. The fifth, 'delimiting the theory' is a phase in which a distilled theory should be making itself clear. The last step is then to write theory, an art that asks that the research be presented in a naturalistic way, which would be to tell a story. In my own work to analyze the data I returned with, I attempted to follow these steps as best I could. However, no steps can prepare the researcher for the soup, to put it plainly, of data that you must slowly sift through trying not to get lost. After this is achieved, I found that it was not so much about what was important and what was not, but rather which 'thread' I wished to follow.

2.3 Reflections on 'the between'

"Anthropologists are the sojourners of 'the between'. We go there and absorb a different language, culture, and way of being and return here, where we can never fully resume the lives we previously led." (Stoller, 2009. p:4)

I myself was a 'sojourner of the between', as a researcher and an anthropologist in Damanhur. Emerged in the social lives of those whom I was researching, I myself experienced my field and all its sensory and sensuous dimensions and was being confronted with locally unquestioned truths such as magic, shamanism, mysticism, interspecies communication and time travel. Living in the between, Stoller (2009) states, can mean that we are pulled in two directions to a point where we cease to know our front from our back, our bottom from our top, a state that can lead us to confusion and indecision, lost between two or more apprehensions of reality. In my own research I found that not only was I occupying a liminal space as a researcher; between 'being-here and being-there', of 'being neither this nor that', but I also found myself in a liminal role within the Damanhurian community as part of the new life program, being a 'temporary citizen' of the community. This curious double liminal position, and the nature of my field that I have highlighted above, accentuated the problems associated with being an occupant of 'the between'. One problem is involvement.

As sojourners we are constantly encountering new people and places. However, for academic purposes it is suggested that some kind of distance be maintained between the researcher and the 'field'. My attempt to grasp the 'otherness' of the lifeworlds I was encountering, while at the same time occupying my own habitus is a dilemma that has challenged many a researcher. Mattjis van de Port in *Ecstatic Encounters* (2011), a study of Bahian Candomble, a religion mainly practiced in Brazil, outlines this very dilemma. His was also in a field in which he was being presented with versions of a different reality. This essential distance, according to him means the world that as a researcher you seek to understand, will always remain

out of reach. My participation in the community, as an anthropologist and part of the new life program, meant that I was constantly confronted with the question of how much participation is too much participation. I was constantly trying to find a level of participation that is neither impersonal nor only personal, while also trying to understand as best I could the lifeworlds of those I was studying.

However, it is not enough to have meaning for oneself, as an experience is never truly complete until it has been expressed and communicated to others (Turner, 1969). It is through ethnography that the anthropologist communicates the meanings and understanding that they return from their fields, 'the between', with. "Ethnography can sometimes be a bridge that connects two worlds, binding two universes of meaning."(Stoller, 2009. p:159) This thesis I hope, will be a bridge between Damanhur and you, the reader.

Ethnography as 'thick description' (Geertz, 1993), is not about providing as much information as possible but rather, it is important to share with the reader what is relevant in order to understand people's lives and to build a social theory (Beuving and Vries, 2015), in order to tell a story. In order to find my way out of the abundance of data that I collected while in Damanhur, I had to first choose which story I wished to tell, which thread I was going to follow. This highlights ethnography as an interpretative activity. The story I present here of Damanhur is my interpretation of this community. The story I have told focuses on the social structure of Damanhur, so as to understand and analyze it as an alternative to the society within which it exists and as a part of the global ecovillage movement.

Chapter 3. Creating Community

Describing Damanhur to people has been interesting. Watching people's facial expression as they try to grasp some kind of understanding, while words like 'ritual' and 'magic', 'temples' and 'spiritual' led them to a particular conclusion. My efforts usually resulting with the response 'so it's a cult then'. My aim in highlighting this is not to enter myself into this debate, as I hope that the preceding pages have already shown. Rather it is to highlight that in describing a place like Damanhur one can easily get lost in its particular version of New Age spirituality, as I very often did. To understand Damanhur within the broader context of the global ecovillage movement, and as a process of demystification of this phenomenon, it is important to understand its equally particular social structure.

Dawson (2006) offers some defining characteristics of an ecovillage as; "private citizens' initiatives; in which the communitarian impulse is of central importance; that are seeking to win back some measure of control over community resources; that have a strong shared values base, often referred to as 'spirituality'; and that act as centers of research, demonstration and in most cases training."(p:219) Each community aims at making their own contributions to different areas of 'sustainable culture' such as ecological living, radical democracy, and alternative economies (Dawson, 2006 and Litfin, 2012). By this definition Damanhur can certainly be called an ecovillage, contributing in its own way to areas of building a 'sustainable culture'.

More contemporary eco-villages and intentional communities, the core belief, or ideology is that of environmental conservation (Brumann, 2007). However Damanhur is part of an older generation of intentional communities that emerged in the countercultural period of the 1960s and 1970s, as an alternative in the way of values and in terms of spiritual beliefs (Tamm, 2009). Being one of a small number of communities from this time that survived and indeed grew, some others are Auroville in India, the farm in the United States, Findhorn in Scotland. Damanhur, now part of this global movement, can be seen as an extreme almost radical version of this phenomenon.

3.1 Structure

As part of the new life program, there were two lessons given on the social structure of Damanhur. Panda, an Italian resident of Damanhur, gave these to us over two weeks. Turin, who is part of 'the school of meditation' but not a resident in a Damanhur, translated these lessons for us. These lessons were held in' Café D'Arte' in Damjl. This room is a space where the weekly meeting between visitors and Airaudi, also known as Falco Tarassaco (this will be explained below), would

take place. These still happen, but now it is one of the founders who are available for an hour once a week to answer any questions that visitors and guests may have. During the two lessons given by Panda she gave us an outline of the complex social structure that has been developed in Damanhur. The following paragraphs are my attempt at presenting this structure from the information gained in the lessons given to the new life group by Panda, and also from conversations and observations that I made throughout my time in Damanhur.

Damanhur became a federation in 1983, which saw the grouping together of all the communities of Damanhur. The 26 communities, or 'nucleos' of Damanhur have been divided into different regions that consist of 2 to 3 'nucleos', in which between 9 and 20 people live. The 'nucleo' is the term used in Damanhur for a household, or 'family' whom live communally in one house (although some nucleos also have additional rooms and houses on the property which are used for members of the nucleo, and for guests). This federation has developed into a complex system that involves a number of institutions.

There is a 'constitution' of Damanhur that outlines the 'rules' of the federation. These 'rules' were developed by the community and is a document that is open for alteration. I use the word rules as this is how they were referred to in the talks given by Panda but also in other conversations in which the constitution was brought up.

There are many different 'resource pools' existing in Damanhur; the personal, the nucleo, the region and the general. These are used for the various projects that are underway at each level of the community. The general fund is used for projects such as the federations main project the 'temples of humankind', the projects of 'the ways', these will be explained in the paragraphs to come, and the agricultural project of the nucleo Prima Stalla. Each region has a project, for example the region of Tentyris, the region in which the Dendera nucleo is, were undergoing the construction of a building that will be used for conferences and courses. Each nucleo also has a project which they use their funds to finance. In the nucleo of Dendera they are constructing a low-carbon footprint, straw bail house, which is funded by the nucleo's communal fund.

The 'temples of humankind' are Damanhur's most important project. Started in 1987 this construction goes 30ft deep. Corridors link the seven rooms, or 'chambers' as they are known in Damanhur, that make up this 'temple'. The rooms are connected by a series of corridors and the entire construction spans an area of about 8,500 cubic meters. The temple as well as being a space used for rituals, has become a big tourist attraction. Tourism has become a good source of income for the community. As well as the 'temples' many visitors come to take part in the various courses that are taught by residents, such as 'past life research', 'astro-travel', and 'alchemy'. These are linked with the teachings of the 'school of meditation', which will be explained in the coming paragraphs.

A governing entity has been formed to oversee the federations overall administrative processes. The governing entity consists of two or three 'king guides', at this present moment there are three king guides, two of which are women. Each king guide is dedicated to running and overseeing one section of the broader governing body; 'international relations'; meaning the Italian nation-state, as well as other nations around the globe, internal community relations, and general resources. The king guides are elected every 6 months and the position can be held for 6 consecutive 'terms'. This short period is attributed to the demanding nature of this 'full time job'. The king guides help to find the finances to fund new projects but they don't have anything to do with the family and regional finances. The general finances are used to compensate the king guides.

The 'sages' or 'wise men' are the spiritual leaders of Damanhur. This role is relatively new role as they have taken up the role that Oberto Airaudi held before his death in 2012, which is to ensure the smooth running of the community, keeping to its 'spiritual path'. There are six, two groups of three. Each of the Sages were chosen by Airaudi. The first group is made up of three women and one man, the second group is all men and aids the first in their task of being the 'spiritual guides' of Damanhur. Instructions have been left by Oberto Airaudi as to how the next sages should be chosen. The role of sage is also a 'full time job'. The sages have taken over the job that Airaudi once held before his death in 2013. His guidance however continues through a series of letters, the number is unknown, which he left with a resident named Piovra. She has been left with instructions as to which letters should be opened and when. The opening of letters also seems to revolve around the residents of the federation 'asking the right questions'. If a certain topic had not been approached or question has not been asked by a specific date, then these letters are to be burnt rather than opened.

Every region has a 'captain' of the region is elected each year, this can be a man or a woman. Those who wish to do so produce a written document declaring their ideas for developing the region. Each nucleo has an elected head called the 'regent'. The regent can be a man or a woman. An election is held for this position every year and those wishing to out themselves, like the 'captain' of the region, present a written document that outlines how they will improve the nucleo. At the end of the year there is also a feedback process, whereby the members of the nucleo give feed back to the 'regent' on their leadership of the past year. Each region and nucleo carries out these elections in a different way. So some regions may work on more of a consensus bases while others work on a 'majority vote wins' basis.

Within the nucleo there are other roles. These are not voted but rather members offer themselves for these roles. The 'economist' who is in charge of managing all the nucleos communal finances, there is someone who is in charge of grocery shopping, someone in charge of

work. This is in regards to the four hours of work, 'campus', that each member of the nucleo must do every week, for example on the nucleo's particular project. It must be noted again that the descriptions that I give of the nucleo roles and rules, although for the most part can be used as a basic outline is based on the observations made in the Dendera nucleo, and each nucleo has altered these to suit those who live in them. These roles are, from what I understood not elected and a person can choose to leave it when they choose. Another system that is utilized in all nucleos is called 'turno'. Each member of the nucleo does 'turno' at least three times a month. This can be in the morning, from 9 to 14 during which time the common areas of the house are cleaned and lunch prepared, in the afternoon from 15 to 19 when dinner is prepared, or in the evening after dinner to tidy the kitchen ready for the next day. To be part of the nucleo you must carry out these communal duties.

The nucleos shared finances finance children living in the nucleos. At the age of around 14 they are allowed the option of living in 'casa ragazzi', the youth house of Damanhur. Their staying depends on how well they do in school. This youth house has the same roles and rules as the other nucleos and occupants are aged from 14 to 24. Up to age 14 children are educated by Damanhur residents after which they move to a school in the surrounding area. The members of the entire nucleo are part of making the decision of where.

There are four institutions that hold an important function within this social structure, forming a sort of base. They are the 'the college of justice', 'the technacarto', 'the school of meditation' and the 'game of life'. The 'college of justice' consists of three people who are elected once a year. The college of justice has the ability to put a 'veto' on the decisions of the king guides. They can exercise their veto if they believe that the decisions of the king guides aren't going according to the constitution. This institution also acts as a 'peace judge' acting as a mediator for disagreements that may take place in the nucleo or region. If their intervention is utilized, then their decision is binding.

Decision-making in Damanhur works through a majority vote democracy. In the nucleos, there is more of a consensus system at work as this is a smaller group. Delegation forms an important part of this decision-making system, by which the elected king guides make decisions. The communities, who give their opinion through the regents or captains who meet with the king guides weekly means that again there is a continued communication between the king guides and the inhabitants of each nucleo. This also takes place at the weekly 'serata'. The serata, which translated from Italian means evening, is held every Thursday evening in a hall in the crea. This meeting is open to all who wish to attend, and each week there is an English translator present. This was the case for other languages; for example, there was often the need for a German translator. The serata is divided into two 'parts', the first dealing with social topics such as the

'weekly news', this moment of sharing was open to anyone who wished to make use of it. The second part is dedicated to 'spiritual physics', and was 45 minutes dedicated to a topic within this field. This usually consisted of a lot of general physics. This is a meeting in which both the king guides and the sages can discuss community issues and happenings. There is also a weekly newsletter called the QDq, usually four or five pages that serves as a way that the community shares news and information.

The 'technacrato' is another important part of the structure found in Damanhur. This is a system whereby every resident of Damanhur keeps their 'personal laws'. These are said to be in aid of 'personal transformation'. These personal laws are written down by each member of the community and kept in the college of justice. For example, if an individual felt that they were someone who tended to overreact then they would write this down along with what they felt the consequences of breaking their own law would be. This could be hours of 'community service' or a 'contribution' of money to the temple. They would also choose someone who helps them to uphold their law.

The 'school of meditation' is, as I highlighted in Chapter 2, the institution out of which the federation of Damanhur was started. It is out of this institution that Damanhur's ideology and 'life philosophy' has grown, and is taught to 'initiates'. This life philosophy consists of eight 'quesitos' or 'principles'. These are lessons that lead the initiate to 'enlightenment'. These quesitos were formed under the guidance of Oberto Airaudi. The school of meditation is an institution that remains very secret to those who aren't initiates. Damanhur as I have previously mentioned has a number of centers around the world; Japan, Croatia, the Netherlands, Germany, Norway and Spain. These centers make the school of meditation available to people not living in Damanhur, it is also a space where various courses, some of which I mentioned earlier are held. Each initiate is put into a group that is dedicated to carrying out research in a specific topic; this could be something like education or music. There exists within the school a hierarchy of 'levels'. The sages for example are those who are at high levels within the school. Monday night is when meditation groups meet. 'Terrazaturra' is also something that is carried out by initiates, in which they volunteer their time and service to the community. This can be any work, however in the past, all terrazaturra involved working on the construction of 'temples of humankind'.

Each intitiate of the school of meditation is required to choose 'a way' or 'via' as it is said in Italian. There are seven 'ways'; work, art and technology, knights, monks, oracle, word, esoteric couples. Each way has a leader who is responsible for guiding the other people in their particular way. Each way entails certain activities and responsibilities. For example the 'way of work' are dedicated to working with the economic aspects of Damanhur. During one serata the way of work gave a presentation on how to start a business. The 'way of the word' is in charge of the newsletter the QDq.

The 'game of life' is the institution of Damanhur that is dedicated to maintaining that the community continues to change and alter. It often involves 'battles' that served as a way of instigating 'change connection and learning' within the community. There is usually one or two residents of Damanhur that 'represent' the game. At present there is one. It is this person that decides that change needs to happen in an area of the community that has become stagnant and in response come up with a 'game' in order to achieve this. The opportunity to take part in the 'game of life' is not limited to only residents and is also open to participants of the new life program, however it had to be entered as a group of no less than 4 people. Those wishing to do so needed to write a letter to the 'master of the game'. One of the members of the new life program, Austin wrote asking to be part but because it was only him asking he never became part of the game. The game of life also involves what is known as the 'viaggio', which means travel or journey in English. These journeys could take a group anywhere, from the 'sacred wood' to other areas within Italy and even outside of Italy. The aim of these journeys and there whereabouts stays secret. The game of life has played a significant role in the development of this particular social structure. In fact, it is out of games that it has been developed.

Sitting in the crea with Celastrina. Celastrina is from Sweden; she came to Damanhur almost exactly a year ago to do the new life program. She had decided with a friend that they were going to go around the world visiting ecovillages. Their first stop was Damanhur and after three months in the new life program they both decided Damanhur was the place for them. She tells me the story of a 'famous episode' that took place in Damanhur, in which she explains that the game of life is often used to create union between inhabitants of the community.

"The founders of Damanhur had become very static, and they needed in the beginning to be very responsible, very rigid in a way but then that became to rigid and Falco went away to this, on one of the first viaggios and he collected like 30 or 40 people from all around Italy. They were young people and really artistic and just like, they came back and he started living with them"

Celestrina tells me that there was a certain amount of tension surrounding this situation, with the founders not really being very accepting of this 'new group'. It was out of this situation that Falco (Oberto Airaudi) announced that there was to be a battle between the two groups. This 'battle' took place in the sacred woods and involved water pistols. The battle, according to Celastrina was part of Airaudi's strategy to bring the groups together, 'they needed to face each other' and this happened during the battle.

"Through this battle they mixed up all their energies and in the end Falco declared that Damanhur had won. So they unified through that war."

3.2 A 'new' society

Now. As this description shows, Damanhur has developed into an intricate web of rules and roles that have come together in a very regimented system. This military style is explained by Panda as;

"In the beginning the structure and roles were very military, as Falco didn't want Damanhur to be seen as a hippy community, you come here to work on the community and yourself, and to build a new society that is different from the other."

Here Panda suggests that there is the idea that these roles and structures have somehow become less military. However, the description that I have outlined still paints a picture of a structure that remains particularly regimented. The rules in this system act as a marker for what behavior is, and isn't acceptable. These, Panda says, have also changed. She tells us that 'in the beginning' there were more rules however over the years these have been removed as many have been embedded in tradition. However, this highlights not that the rules have changed or reduced but rather that they have been placed under the heading 'traditions'. The word 'tradition' highlights something that has been carried out over many years, unchanged. Panda also brings to the fore that the intention of the community, or rather the intention of one man; Falco, was to build a new society. Falco was Oberto Airaudi's 'animal name'. Let me explain.

In Damanhur, every resident and intitiate of the school of meditation is invited to take and animal and plant name. Falco's plant name was Tarassaco (dandelion). As you have probably by know guessed, Panda is her animal name. The taking of these names is part if the game of life and 'spiritual path' that each initiate is on. These names are 'conquered' through particular process. This process entails that they 'collect' required amount of money and hours, this number was described by one resident as 150 hours and 150 euros, while another resident said it was 300 hours. The person seeking to conquer their name approaches people with the proposed name, if people agree that this is the name for you they will 'offer' either a number of voluntary work hours or money to this name, which is said to give 'energy' to the name. When this person has collected the required number of hours and money, they present themselves and their chosen name to the community. This can be at the serata or another social gathering. The group then gives their opinion, this is either approval through cheers, or booing mixed with alternative names being shouted out. The person can then walk away having not conquered the name or they can choose to take the name the other inhabitants of the federation have chosen. This is ultimately a name given by the residents of Damanhur.

Puzzola (skunk), one of the founders of Damanhur describes how it felt 41 years ago to be part of the group that started this 'new' society;

"It was very difficult. We in the beginning with Falco, we knew that we were creating something completely new, so it was an adventure where we launched, and in the beginning there was nothing. Now there is Damanhur that is with many different places, territories, houses and activities but in the beginning there was nothing. So we, the founders with Falco we had this terrain, this territory where we launched the seed, the first Damanhur which is Damjl right now and in the years other people arrived that together with us amplified this project."

These roles and structures that exist within this 'new' society have come to function in two ways. Firstly, as a way of creating order so that as a social unit the community can function in a particular way not as a 'hippy community' but as a 'new society' with a particular ideology, and secondly as a means through which one can gain steps along a 'spiritual path'. Living in the nucleo is also used as a mechanism through which one moves forward on a spiritual path, with each member of the nucleo acting as a 'mirror' for the other. Damanhur's intricate system of roles rules and institutions along with its mission to begin a 'new society' has created something much like that of a small nation-state. It has developed as I have shown, in a very hierarchal and regimented way. Although in the nucleo a consensus system seemed to be a possibility, as the stage at which the decision needed to be made, this system was shown to be no longer possible. Decisions made within the region and within the federation as a whole were shifted onto a system of a majority vote wins.

What I also found was that there seemed to be a slump in participation. Many residents were not interested in some parts of decision making, despite being given the space to take part. During my time in Damanhur, the region of Tenyris and Baita were joining together, this meant that these two regions would share finances and projects. There were a number of meetings that took place as part of this merger of these two regions, and four nucleos. I attended one of these meetings, in which there was a discussion of what and how the joint resources would be used. The register that was taken at the beginning of this meeting showed that many people weren't present. This had been the case with the meeting that had come before. This situation highlighted that many people are not interested in this part of the community, a very important part, I believe in the making of a 'viable alternative'. During a casual conversation about this particular situation, a resident gave her opinion which I believe highlights a very important point; that people had made this leap, they have left everything behind to come and be part of this project but yet they don't want to be part of it because they think it's boring, it's too political.

Size seems to be an important factor in this. In terms of decision-making, consensus is replaced with majority democracy. With consensus just not being feasible in terms of time with a bigger group. Macaco, having been in Damanhur for twenty years now tells me during an informal

interview, that when she first arrived in Damanhur there were only around three hundred residents. I asked her if she felt the growth of the population had changed things, she replied that it has, in both a positive and a negative way;

"On the one hand its much more international, its much more open, has more things going on, it has many more perspectives, and on the other the feeling of community was much stronger when we were smaller and everything was much closer and more direct."

She tells me that she hopes that the effects of 'opening up' the community will continue to be positive. This opening up of the community describes Damanhur's increased population size and the increased interaction and contact with the areas and society around it. It has begun to 'exist with' rather than 'exist in'. This has meant that the extreme liminal position it once held has become less so. The big challenge Macaco says is to, on one hand;

"contemporarily open up and at the same time to keep the principles alive and I think the old Damanhurians, they have the principles of Damanhur like written down in their DNA. So absorbed that they are part of us and the new generations they need to have experiences that allow them to understand and re-absorb the principles of Damanhur."

This is difficult she says, with more and more situations and more people, there are not such strong and strict relations. Macaco highlights that the growth of the community has led to a certain loss of the feeling of closeness. This opening up is, she tells me a big challenge for Damanhur. A challenge that on the one hand she thinks is necessary, Damanhur needs to open up and on the other hand it's really a challenge to keep the principles alive.

This lack of interest in the social and political aspects of the community I believe come with the fact that in Damanhur there is a great deal of focus placed on the spiritual aspects of the community, unlike more contemporary ecovillages that are centered on environmentalism. Spirituality is part of the 'sustainable culture' (Dawson, 2006) that the ecovillage movement aims at developing, however this focus has meant that other areas of a sustainable culture, such as ecological farming and building, alternative economic systems. This is not to say that Damanhur hasn't made progress in these areas, it has. However, it is only some of the nucleos. This focus on spirituality has meant that those wishing to become part of Damanhur come for its particular focus on spirituality.

Teresa, who was also part of the new life program, had decided after 6 weeks into the program that she wished to become a permanent resident. Teresa had been to Damanhur twice previously, to take part in a spiritual healers course. She highlights during an interview, her

reasons for wanting to come to Damanhur as the focus that the community places on ritual and spirituality;

"I mean I cant speak for everybody, but typically you know, you're working, you're saving up for a house, you're doing this, you're doing that and your life, the rhythm of your life is kind of controlled by external things in a way, and material things more than anything. Where as here it seems your life is much more dominated by the rituals and the spirituality, even though people work and they earn money and everything, that's not their purpose in life, that's secondary. It's the spiritual stuff that's primary and I think that's, you know, its really turning things on their head. It's the opposite of what people, what most people do in the outside world."

As well as highlighting that rituals and spirituality are a main focus within Damanhur, Teresa also underlines the fact that within Damanhur there is the idea of the community having created another reality, another world that is different from 'the outside world'. Teresa has, as I have mentioned, decided to become part of the world that has been created in Damanhur. There are a number of ways in which one can do this. This brings us to another important system that exists within Damanhur's social structure, which pertains to the ways in which you can participate in Damanhur. The next chapter will explain this system, highlighting that Damanhur although having developed as its own social unit remains part of a larger system; the Italian state. This fact raises the question of how much of an alternative Damanhur offers, and for whom.

Chapter 4. Connecting Community

I wasn't the only 'new lifer' living in Dendera. For the first month it was Austin and myself. Austin is from the United States. In the second month Andrea, from Germany, joined us. One night at the dinner table, there was a small group of us left talking. All three of us new lifers were at the table. Macaco, speaks up. She asks that none of the new life group is to open the gate for anyone. All of Damanhur's communities are fenced and gated. Dendera is no exception and there is a small gate monitor at the front door. After inquiring as to why, she explains that it is because we may let someone in that shouldn't be allowed in. She continues to explain that it does occasionally happen that the Italian authorities arrive asking questions, wanting to look around. This kind of 'harassment' she says happens particularly in the Crea where Damanhur owned businesses are often asked to present their 'books'.

Damanhur has always been an area of interest for the Italian authorities. The example given by Macaco was not the only time that I heard stories of the relations between Damanhur and the Italian state; this included the Roman Catholic Church. Damanhur's communal living style, as well as the community's ideology meant that it received a great deal of criticism from the both the state and the church. The community has also received a great deal of news coverage. This has highlighted a number of controversial topics ranging from possible Satanism, to tax fraud. The community's criticism however doesn't only come from 'outsiders' as it were. With some of the community's ex-residents being its biggest critics. From the example of the man who revealed the whereabouts of the temples to the authorities to the current blog called 'Damanhur Inside Out', which aims to reveal Damanhur as a cult.

Damanhur's relations with the world outside its gates have changed over the years, although the fences and gates remain in place. As I have already shown in chapter 2 and chapter 3 the community has grown and become more international. There is also a certain amount of collaboration between Damanhur as a community and the communities of Baldissero Canvese and Vidracco. One Saturday morning the new life group joined the nucleo Damjl who had joined forces with the town of Baldissero Cavanesse to clean up the area. Afterwards we all went to the town council to eat lunch. This is an example of the collaboration that now exists between Damanhur and the surrounding area. We spent the morning walking the area picking up rubbish and trash that littered the side of the road. This was an event that had happened last year. We had all been separated into different groups and sent to different zones to begin our work.

There was a young woman in the same group as me. She was the daughter of a Damanhur resident and had lived in Damanhur all her life, and she lives in casa ragazzi. Now 23 she had just finished her studies, she was now a qualified midwife. We spoke about her plans for the future and we spoke about my research. I asked her if she was a Damanhurian and she replied that she

wasn't a citizen but she was part of the school of meditation. She tells me that she isn't ready yet, that she still wants to travel. She adds that becoming a 'citizen' is a big step.

There are many different ways you can participate in the community of Damanhur, which will be explored in this chapter. As with the social structures and roles that were explained in chapter three, these 'levels of citizenship' are said by residents of Damanhur to form part of the spiritual path. While at the same time seem to create a rift, or aspect of inequality within the federation. The requirements to participate as a 'citizen', even as a 'temporary citizen' which as part of the new life group I was, are very much the same as those of the Italian state. Living in community has shown to be beneficial for those living in Damanhur, however many of these are benefits only available to a particular sort of inhabitant; a 'citizen A'.

4.1 Participation

"So we are a spiritual community, we are not a community who are helping the drug addict or doing other kind of path, but spirituality is the path, this is our mission. And the one who comes here its to bring, to do and to be. And also because its Damanhur, have you seen how many things there is to do here? In the temples there are so many things to do and then we want to construct the houses. The schools, the park, the woods and the labrinths. Or rhythm here in Damanhur is very fast. So for us it is very important to leave a sign here in this époque."

(Husky)

In another talk given to the new life group, this time on the different way that you can participate in Damanhur. These were described to as 'citizenship' levels. This talk was once again given in the Café D'Arte however, this time Husky Vaniglia would be talking to us, with Turid once again translating. Husky has lived in Damanhur for 31 years. She has also been involved in handling all matters surrounding 'citizenship' in Damanhur for some time. She is the lady you go to if you are thinking about becoming a 'citizen'. The following is a description of these different 'levels' formulated from the information given at this talk, as well as what I learnt through interviews and small-talk and casual conversation.

There are many different ways that you can 'participate' in Damanhur; different levels of 'citizenship' and you don't have to live in Damanhur, or even Italy to participate. One way to 'be a part' of Damanhur is to be part of the 'popolo'. Popolo is a term that can be translated into peoples. This is a term used in Damanhur to represent the 'spiritual people'. Anybody can become part of the spiritual people. This involves the fee of 10 euros and a small ceremony. After which a thin white string is tied around your wrist. This is not just a symbol but holds a function, through which the connection with the popolo is 'charged'. The daily placing of the string to the top of the

head for a number of seconds does this. Another level at which you can participate in Damanhur is through the school of meditation. To be part of the school of meditation you must be part of the popolo.

There are ways to be part of Damanhur but not be a resident in one of the nucleos, there are three levels to this; non-resident B, C and D. Level D is the first level of 'non-resident citizenship' and in order to be part of this you first need to be part of the popolo and a 'contribution' of 30 euros a month which goes towards the continuation of the temples. The next level is non-resident C and for this you need to be part of both the popolo and the School of Meditation and a 'contribution' of 80 euros a month. With this you then receive discounts on products brought from Damanhur stores and also on courses offered by Damanhur. The next level, B non-resident asks that you are part of again, both the popolo and the school of meditation, but you also need to find a nucleo that will become your 'referral point' and the monthly 'contribution' for this level is 200 euros. The B 'non-resident' was highlighted to be one for people who want to take part in a project or to be part of something in Damanhur but don't want to live in the nucleo.

This 'contribution' acts much the same as a membership fee. This practice feeds into the argument made by Garden (2006) and Fotopoulos (2000) that describes the ecovillage movement as 'elitist clubs'. In another casual conversation with a new citizen, she referred to this contribution as a 'quota'. This was in reference to the resident 'citizenship levels' and can be seen as acting in much the same way as a taxation system, although this is based not on income levels is based on the level of 'citizenship' that you are. There are two 'resident' levels of citizenship; A and B.

"Choice, the fundamental difference is choice."
                                                        Husky

Here Husky is referring to the fundamental difference between becoming an 'resident A citizen' of a 'resident B citizen, which here after I will refer to as citizen A and citizen B. These two citizenships, A and B require that you live in one of the Damanhur nucleos. For each level of citizenship a written request is required by the king guides. In this request you provide your name, which level of citizenship you wish to take up and the motivation for your choice. Both of these citizenship 'levels' require an initial financial contribution to be made. For a citizen A the minimum of 1200 euros, and for a citizen B the minimum is 1800 euros. This Husky states, acts like a symbol of dedication to the project of Damanhur. For both levels A and B there is also a 'trial period' in which you take part in all aspects of life as a 'citizen' and last for a minimum of six months. This trial period also involves taking part in 'the formative course classes' in which all the

aspects of Damanhur are explored. The reason for this is, Husky states is because in order to know if you really want to become a citizen, 'to swear' you have to first make sure that you really know what Damanhur is, and its history. Here Husky is referring to the 'oath' that all those wishing to become a citizen A must take.

One Thursday evening, most people had taken their seats and the serata was about to begin. It is announced that this week, before the meeting would continue in its usual way, there is going to be someone taking the 'oath'. It was a lady. She went up onto the stage. The room had all begun to cheer. She stood, center stage and was handed a piece of paper. She began to read and as she did I receive it in English through the earphones as it is being translated. During this oath, the soon to be citizen A declares to obey and respect the laws of Damanhur and the other citizens of Damanhur. To give all they are to help the community and the other citizens to help the community to grow and develop.

A citizen A, as well as giving this oath, signs over all assets to the federation of Damanhur. For the first two years after becoming a citizen A you are also required to share their monthly salary. On arrival they are must 'declare' their salary. Part of this goes to the nucleo to pay rent, for food, and the bills. Part of it goes to the project of the nucleo, and part goes to the projects of Damanhur such as the school, the temples. A portion of what is left is given back for daily expenses, such as getting to work etc., and the rest is placed in a communal fund. This said to be part of progressing on the 'spiritual path'. After two years the 'quota' asked of your citizenship level is asked while the rest of what you earn remains your own personal finances. It is noted in this talk given by Husky that if someone arrives wishing to stay but have no assets they will not be turned away. They are still bringing their 'talents and energy' to the community she tells us. Choosing to leave the community after giving this oath, means leaving with nothing.

"the second part which is B, which is a step lower than citizen A, so its for those who don't feel really ready to go one hundred percent for Damanhur."

Husky

A 'citizen B' also lives in a nucleo. However, in choosing to become a citizen B you are not required to give all of your personal assets to the federation and you are not required to carry out the two-year process that is described above. It must be noted that when asked how many citizen B's there are living in Damanhur Husky replied that there were only about 5. There are also other differences between these two levels of citizenship. First is in the case of an election a citizen B's vote counts for only half of a citizen A. Citizen A's also get discounts on the courses offered, that have been mentioned earlier, and in Damanhur owned shops. Citizen B's also don't have access to

certain information and rituals. Which information and rituals is something I never learned. The fundamental difference then becomes more than 'choice'.

The fundamental difference becomes access to community resources, meaning that there exists a certain level of inequality within the federation. Is it really a choice if there is a certain aspect of the community that you are excluded from if you don't make that choice? The reason as to why there is still this need for two different 'levels' of citizenship is said to be because some people want to take part in the community but aren't ready to have 'the full experience of sharing'. It is also a mechanism through which equality is created between all those choosing to be a citizen A. All citizen A's enter the 'game', as it were, in the same position. Becoming part of Damanhur, entering the 'game' means that essentially you become one piece of a whole, to become a 'Damanhurian' is to become a small piece of a larger whole.

Before continuing I must highlight again that in order to become a citizen at any level above D you must be part of the school of meditation. This brings us back to the fact that it is a very particular worldview in Damanhur and this affects how and who participate in the community. Dennis is a 75-year-old man from Sweden but he had been living in Norway before he came to Damanhur. I had asked if I could interview him. He had accepted and we had met in the Crea for a coffee. He told me that he had come to Damanhur because he was looking for something 'new'. He had arrived in 2014 for the first time for an astro-travel course and had return again last year to take part in the new life program. He had returned to Norway after three months, packed up all of his things and returned with the intention of living here.

"I left Norway and packed my things and gave up everything there to be here and so, it's a very nice place to be you know."

Dennis points out that he is 'lucky enough' to have a pension so working is not essential for him to live. He had joined the school of meditation however had just recently left; he had not yet become an initiate. When I asked him why he replied quite quickly and frankly, "because I find it totally out of date". He went on;

"Damanhur has not become what it is because of the teaching in the school of meditation, its in spite of that, because the intention, all the love and power in the people and I came back here because this is the best place for me to be, it's the best people I can be with, it's the loveliest, the kindest people. So I feel more at home here"

Dennis spoke of how he had been very open and honest about the reasons he had chosen to leave the school and that people had been very understanding of this although they had questioned as to what it was he was going to 'do' in Damanhur, "what his project would be".

Dennis has moved to a small town near Vidracco and stays connected with Damanhur through the Prima Stalla nucleo. Dennis explains that his motivation to stay has been the people rather than the life philosophy. He goes on to say that the hierarchy that exists within Damanhur is something that in 2016 we shouldn't have. However, in his experience he tells me, everything today changes, and that in Damanhur it will absolutely change but the change has to come from within Damanhur. I asked him how he would change it, and he said he had no desire to do so but that there are a lot of young people coming to Damanhur with fresh ideas who have the desire to make a change.

Besides making this 'choice' of what citizenship level you wish to occupy, there are a number of other requirements that Husky highlights are necessary for someone who wishes to become a resident in Damanhur, a 'Damanhurian'. First is that you have a job that provides you with an income, this is so that you don't become a 'burden' on the community. Secondly, it is required that you undergo a number of health tests; again this is highlighted to be because someone not in good health would become a burden. Husky, goes onto highlight that these are also important because if someone is going to live in Damanhur and if they have serious health problems it is something the community needs to know about. The third requirement is that, if your nationality requires it, you have a visa to live and work in Italy. The last requirement is that you know a little bit of Italian.

These requirements highlight that Damanhur is a community that is wishing to remove itself, or rather 'fence itself off' from the broader society that is in however, it stays so entwined in it especially when it comes to economics. Now this continued connection to the global economic system is, I think partly due to the lack of innovation and development in other parts of sustainable culture that I highlighted in chapter 3. This is not just a problem for Damanhur. This is a problem encountered by the many ecovillages, of how to completely remove the community from the global economic system.

During an informal interview with Bertuccia this connection was discussed. Bertuccia is from Croatia and moved to Damanhur last year however she first visited in 2006 on work exchange. She stayed 'involved' through the Damanhur center in Croatia. It was here that she could participate as part of the school of mediation. It was a way for her to 'discover' Damanhur from Croatia. I asked her what made her decide to come and live in Damanhur. She explained that coming to live in Damanhur was a decision that took her five years to make; it was something that she thought 'intensely' about. Bertuccia also tells me that it was a scary decision because it's a huge life change to come and live in Damanhur. This was even more the case for her because it wasn't as if she had just gotten out of university and was 'searching for herself' as she put it. She points out that she had everything, 'everything was settled' she had a life in Croatia, she had been

working for fourteen or fifteen years, she had a group of friends, her family. All of this, she tells meant it wasn't an easy 'choice'.

We talked about the requirements that had been outlined to the new life group by Husky and I asked her if she thought that job security was something she felt deterred people from coming to live here in Damanhur. Because being able to support yourself financially was a 'requirement' for becoming a citizen. She explained to me that economic reasons could definitely be a reason why people would feel deterred from joining the community. However, she highlights that when she made the decision to live in Damanhur she didn't have a job she was coming to but once she got here she found many options opened up for her.

"But we are in a kind of stepping phase, or threshold or how ever you want to call it, but we are in a change period where the whole economic system is not working well. So this is something that at the end influences your basic needs so its important."

Here Bertuccia highlights that Damanhurians are affected by the same economic system that Italian citizens are effected by. For all intensive purposes living in Damanhur means living in Italy and thus inhabitants of Damanhur are left exposed to the same economic climate. Bertuccia hopes that the lack of jobs available in the area will change but she emphasizes that for people who really want to come here and who will 'contribute to the mission' this wont be a deterrent for them.

4.2 Contribution

The idea of contribution was continuously being highlighted as important. Contribution not only in the way of economics, but also in the way of energy and work. The importance of 'giving', as has been shown above, has a 'spiritual function'. There is the notion in Damanhur that you can't have the full 'experience' of Damanhur without making this fundamental 'choice'. The choice to give all that you are, and have to the community. Husky tells us that you can come to Damanhur and you can say 'yes I want to take part in the Damanhur', but putting your money into the community, "it has more value than just a few words". Taking the oath to become a citizen A has come to act as a symbol. This gesture of sharing, becoming a citizen A seems to have created a sense of trust within the community.

Speaking to Ada, another member of the new life group, although she had done the program once before. Ada is from Miami, and was coming to see if living here was a real option for her. This is the second time that I was speaking to Ada but the last time had been two months previously.

During that first informal interview with Ada she had explained that her reasons for coming to Damanhur had really been the esoteric and spiritual aspects of the community. She tells me she wasn't really into the idea of living in a community. Addressing the subject of citizenships levels and the gesture of becoming a citizen A, and also the need for being able to support oneself economically, she says the reasoning behind it is understandable. She believed it to be a way to protect the community from 'freeloaders', as a way to show you are dedicated to being here. She went onto highlight a point that had been made by Husky during the talk she gave on citizenship levels and also in other conversations that had been had regarding the subject of participation in the community. This was that if someone showed 'pure intentions', meaning that they really showed that they wanted to be part of the Damanhur then the community would do what it could to ensure that they could do so. Helping to find jobs, adjusting the 'rules' so as to accommodate such an example.

In our second interview Ada had recently become an initiate of the school of meditation. She speaks about her own 'resistance' to becoming a citizen A. She explains that she still 'isn't ready'. Her resistance, she explains to me is with the idea that in the beginning you have to share 'so much money', here she is referencing the two years after you become a citizen A. A process I explained in the preceding paragraphs. This she once again says she understands;

"Because you're in community and when you become a citizen you become owner of the community, part owner of the community. So it's like you bought a house. So you have to make mortgage payments and you have to pay for the maintenance and you have to pay for anything that goes wrong with the house. Here, if you become a citizen A and you join, you essentially become the owner of Damanhur, one of the owners, who have to be responsible for everything because you're one of the owners. So you have to invest and you have to be part of it. You can't be like 'oh I'll live here but I'm not gonna pay for that, my money is my money.' You can't do that, but I'm still learning to deal with that and you know, its. Living in a little room, having to share everything, I dunno. I'm still very westernized in that way."

Ada goes onto explain that being part of a community you are no longer an individual anymore, you are a group of people. This is something she thinks people in the West still don't understand, they understand the purpose of this idea but are still, she explains, working on the practice.

There is an interesting point to be found in Ada's understanding. This gesture, of sharing which citizen B does too, just not to the extent that a citizen A does, is seen to be moving the individual along a path to spiritual freedom, is thought of as setting Damanhur apart from 'the West' as Ada highlights, as it is this act that the West still don't put into practice. Once again, like Teresa did, there is this notion that Damanhur is a world apart from the world within it exists.

Living communally, Damanhur shows, has its benefits. Putting money together as a group has meant that they have been able to out it into the various projects that each nucleo has. Projects that individually would have taken many years of saving. This is an area of Damanhur's system that I think gives the most to the ecovillage movement. In a world system where people are finding it harder and harder to survive financially this model of living communally offers an alternative to 'trying to make it on your own'. Community is being utilized in Damanhur as a way of getting by in a particular political and economic setting; the Italian state.

4.3 Solidarity

What is interesting about Damanhur's current state is that it is has an aging population. Or rather it now has an elderly population. This is one of the reasons for which I chose to look at an intentional community, like Damanhur, that, having been established many years ago, now has 'second generation' inhabitants and it also has an elderly population. Unlike more contemporary ecovillages, which lack these characteristics. The heavy emphasis that is placed on contribution in Damanhur becomes an area of friction when you have a portion of the community that can no longer do so because their age won't allow it.

During the talk given by Husky this particular situation was addressed. She explains that over the years the federation has been starting up a 'system' to give the elderly inhabitants some sort of a pension. This was started ten years ago. Husky explains its formation;

"The last ten years they decided not to use this system anymore. So they didn't need to buy so many new houses and then they somehow were able to get money in other ways, not only from the bank. So during the last 20 years the loans from the bank were finished, were paid, so even if they didn't have to pay a loan back anymore they went on paying the same amount of money and put it somewhere and that became the pension fund. So in some years it could happen that a lot of Damanhurians will need this pension."

Husky went on to highlight that this system was important because it is 'guaranteeing' a certain quality of life to those inhabitants of Damanhur that cant work anymore. This pension system, Husky tells us is calculated in accordance with how many years someone has been a citizen A. Citizen B inhabitants are not entitled to this pension system. Husky uses herself as an example. She says that if in ten years she will go on the pension, maybe the Italian state will give her something, she doesn't know if they will. If they do, and they give her the sum of five hundred euros and Damanhur will give her nine hundred because she has been here for thirty-one years.

Someone who arrives next year will not get the same as Husky. How much you receive, she explains, depends on 'how much you bring and how long you have been here'.

Illness, Husky tells us, is handled differently. If you get sick, the other members of the 'family', the nucleo will help with this and it doesn't matter how long you have been here. This however is still an aspect that the nucleos and the community at large, are discovering. One morning I was invited over to the nucleo Porta Della Luna for lunch. I went early, to help Cavalluccio Marino (seahorse) who had the morning 'turno'. I walked down to the green house with her, where we cut some fresh salad greens. On our way back up to the house she tells me that one of the family members has become very ill with diabetes. She has just returned from hospital and now needs constant care. She tells me that the whole family is affected by the lifestyle changes particularly with regards to meals and that this is a learning process for the entire family. Cavalluccio points out that she thinks this is an interesting point for my thesis, this situation. I agreed and we continued to talk about what happens in the case of people aging or getting ill in the nucleo. She explains to me that each nucleo handles it in a different way. In this particular case the Porta della Luna family were going to eventually hire someone to look after the family member who had become ill and this would come out of the 'Damanhur solidarity fund'. This fund is the same one that Husky explained the pension would come from.

This 'solidarity fund' highlights again, that the gesture of becoming a citizen A has also created a sense of solidarity, of togetherness amongst inhabitants who have chosen to become a citizen A. The benefits of the communitarianism such as can be found in Damanhur has other benefits for those who have joined as citizen A's. As well as the benefits for inhabitants in way of land ownership, and development, and the above benefits for the elderly population there is also the benefits for children of citizen A inhabitants who, if they so choose are able to attend university or higher education which the federation pays for. These benefits of becoming part of Damanhur are although beneficial they are once again only available to an A citizen. So the benefits of becoming a 'Damanhurian' are clear but the benefits of community are more accessible to someone who becomes a citizen A.

Although there is a sense of inequality created through the separation of a citizen A and a citizen B. Damanhur as an example of an ecovillage has managed in taking back a certain amount of control over resources. Metcalf (2012) and Kunze (2012) state that those living in ecovillages are living more empowered, equitable, interesting, secure lives that are ecologically friendly. In Damanhur it is certainly the case that people are living more interesting lives, and communal living has meant that there is a certain amount of security felt despite being still heavily connected to the global economic system. However, there seems to be a contradiction between freedom of choice and the spiritual path that is embarked when you join the community.

The number of 'ifs' surrounding becoming a 'Damanhurian' means that this is an option only available to some, or rather that it is an option that is only attractive to some. However, this goes for the ecovillage movement as a whole. So, there is a certain amount of 'escapism' involved in one choosing to become part of a community like Damanhur, or any other ecovillage because the movement, like the umbrella under which it sits; the new social movements is about more and more people in society searching for something different from 'normal' society. Again I am using the word normal to describe societies outside of the ecovillage setting. Damanhur offers a sense of community to those who call it home, and as part of the ecovillage movement it offers many interesting and useful tools and models for living in community. However, the almost nationalistic ideals that have formed in Damanhur mean that the community seems to run the risk of being 'exclusive' rather than 'inclusive', to the extent of who can and cannot become a 'Damanhurian'.

Chapter 5. Continuing community

To conclude I would like to once again look at the question which lead me to want to carry out my research on the topic of the ecovillage movement. 'What are people escaping from and what are they running to?' The ecovillage movement, formed under the umbrella of the new social movements and is part of a shift in society, a new kind of resistance. This is largely in response to the growing distrust and dissatisfaction with the dominant neo-liberal capitalist system. People wanting to be part of this movement want to do so to escape this system, so the notion that this movement is one of escapism (Fotopoulos, 2000) is to a certain extent the case. However, this movement is also about these communities wishing to make something different. These are spaces where people are challenging rules and norms in favor of living 'differently'. I believe as an anthropologist these communities provide a great deal of insight into how we as human beings are making use of community to survive in the world today, what we are searching for and what we believe we are missing. Each ecovillage is different, and Damanhur is just one example of this movement and can by no means be used to illustrate the movement as a whole. However, I believe that the findings of my research can be used to some extent as an insight into some of the challenges the more contemporary ecovillages could encounter as they mature.

5.1 Creating and connecting

The writing of this thesis revealed one very important point to me. That in order to understand how something works, and then to describe it to someone so they too can try to understand it, you must first show them what it looks like. What are the building blocks, the underlying structures. Having formed well before many of the contemporary ecovillages, Damanhur has developed with an intricate and complex social structure. It was from this that I took my first step in presenting my findings. The first of which is;

- *Games in Damanhur hold an important function in creating union and change within the community.*

After 41 years Damanhur had developed into a very complex social unit. Going into the field I knew that play held a very important function within the community. This activity was a way through which the community could remain in a liminal space. This liminality as I showed in chapter 2 is important for the creation of a sense of communitas, of connection with one another,

a dazzling connection. This was highlighted to me in my research. Play in Damanhur is important to keep a certain amount of movement and change happening within the community. This change is in turn essential for ensuring that structures are justified in that they are there for a particular purpose. Play is thus necessary for a continued sense of liminality and communitas and thus it is incorporated into the structure of the community through the 'game of life'.

- *The intricate and complex social structure is shown to function in two ways; as a way through which order is made and maintained and also how the 'spiritual' world of Damanhur is created. Damanhur sees this world as a 'new society' (This is shown in chapter 3)*

Damanhur self-identifies as an 'eco-spiritual' community. Spirituality, or some kind of shared values system is part of what defines an ecovillage, it is part of the 'sustainable culture' that the movement is aimed at developing and refining. However, my time in Damanhur revealed to me that to some extent the very strong focus on spirituality in Damanhur has meant that other aspects of sustainable culture are not given the same focus. This spiritual world is also how Damanhur maintains a sense of liminality. Being an initiate in the school of meditation means you are part of something secret, the school of meditation is really were Damanhur as a play society is underlined and illustrated. This focus on the spiritual has meant that it is this that attracts people to Damanhur, thus it is a particular, but not unique group of people who wish to become part of the community.

- *Damanhur still exists within the Italian state. (This is covered in Chapter 4)*

A group like Damanhur, which had for many years of its existence been contested by the society within which it existed has meant that the community has developed, almost nationalistic sentiments. This although acting as a unifying mechanism has also meant that there is the same amount of separation, as nationalism comes to be as a way to unify a group while at the same time as a means of separating one from another. However, Damanhur still remains very much part of Italy. This is shown through the requirements to become part of the community, which are very much the same to those for someone wishing to become part of Italian state. This is something that the ecovillage as a whole can't separate itself from. So there will always be some kind of friction caused between these communities and the societies they exist in. The relations between Damanhur and the communities surrounding it have changed over the years. This can be attributed to the change in the global view of communities that label themselves as 'eco' communities.

- *Participation in Damanhur is dependent on contribution to Damanhur*

The notion of choice is highlighted in Damanhur to be the main difference between the various levels of 'citizenship' that exist within Damanhur. Citizen A requires that you give an oath on dedication to the community. This dedication includes, that if you possess any, all your assets should be signed over to the community, this is part of the spiritual path each inhabitant embarks on when joining the community. These different levels create a certain sense of equality, trust and solidarity between citizen A's. Yet at the same time a sense of inequality between the other levels. Living in this communal setting has meant that people can share ownership of land and resources that individually would not be possible. Many conversations with not only the family I was living with but other Damanhur residents revealed to me that living in this way, communally, meant that people felt a certain sense of safety of living in 'abundance'.

- T*his means it has become an 'exclusive' community (This is highlighted in chapter 4)*

Community is also a way through which people living in Damanhur feel a connection with one another. There is a strong sense of something shared, values, dreams and the desire to make Damanhur work. This was described by many as a deep, indescribable connection. This feeling is created through the spiritual path that every inhabitant takes on in joining the community, and reproduced through many mechanisms of the community, the use of games, the roles and structures that are in place. The feeling of what Turner (1969) describes as communitas is produced within situations of liminality. This liminality however also means that this community can only be home to those who share in the particular worldview that is created and learned on this spiritual path.

5.2 Maintaining the balance

Anna Tsing (2005) tells us that solidarity in the world today is something to be achieved, a goal and in order to achieve it we need to move past the assumption that it means homogeneity. If this is so then it is also true that we need to move away from the hegemonic planning mentality of the state and capitalism that turns away from informal processes and improvisation in the face of the unpredictability that is so inherent of our post-modern world (Scott, 1998). Solidarity in the world, as the new social movements shows, has come to be about more than traditional differences such as race or nationality. The 'us' is now very much about community, it is inclusive, a fluid process whereby connections are made, even briefly in order to make a change.

Damanhur, being an already well-formed example of an ecovillage makes it an interesting example to look at because it highlights that these community's face problems. It runs the risk of reproducing the very 'hegemonic planning mentality' that it hopes to move away from. If play is culture, and older than civilization itself then once a civilization begins to become more and more complex, as social life becomes more fine-tuned and organized, the 'play' with which it began becomes lost underneath a layer of ideas, systems of thought and knowledge, doctrines, rules and regulations, moralities and conventions. Underneath all this, play is lost (Huizinga, 1958). Damanhur, as a 'play society', has become very well organized and 'fine-tuned'. The same 'play' with which the community began is not as present as it used to be, or rather not in the same way. Macaco highlights this when she talks about maintaining 'the principles' of Damanhur.

How does a community, like Damanhur that has been built in a space of extreme liminality then become more and more entwined with the world around it without loosing the very structures and rules that make it what it is. And in its current state, what kind of an alternative does it offer in terms of being a model for a 'new society'. The hierarchies that exist within Damanhur are part of a paradigm that I believe has no place in our current world. However, Damanhur's 40 years of communal style living has meant that they have a great deal of knowledge and experience to contribute to the global ecovillage movement. As well as this, Damanhur shows the great force that is behind a group of people that desire the same thing. It will be interesting to see how Damanhur changes and transforms as the 'game' progresses into its next stages. And so I would like to end with Bertuccia's hopes for the future;

"Damanhur is like a matrix, in the sense that Damanhur is showing that there is the possibility of a social matrix which is different than usual, and hopefully this matrix will show up as a successful one. But we will only see by living."

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