



# Living Smaller, Slower & Closer.

*Studying ecovillages from a Degrowth perspective*

*By Lucas van Mierlo.*

## Colophon

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# Abstract

Due to the stabilizing role growth has played over the last decades for many modern societies, the ideas of Degrowth remain marginalized within mainstream politics. However, due to the undeniable reality of global warming, many of the ideas proposed by Degrowth advocates are reinforced. The western way of relating to the natural environment has brought extreme pressure on earth's ecological boundaries. This thesis aims to bring new life to the widely critiqued practical application of Degrowth by examining the concept of an ecovillage.

By analyzing a variety of both national and international ecovillages, this qualitative research intends to deepen the understanding of an ecovillage, its residents and ultimately the extent to which fundamental criteria of Degrowth have been incorporated by this movement.

The analyses of literature review, online interviews and ethnographic fieldwork has analyzed a growing social and environmental movement. Rather than a list of conditions that must be met, an ecovillage is characterized by fluidity. Its residents come together through a shared purpose to live together, work cooperatively and to create a lifestyle that reflects their core values. Skills, knowledge, and resources are shared across the community and beyond. Rather than a closed community, the ecovillager actively seeks for interaction with its social surrounding through which the ecovillage model spreads.

Although the movement is arguably still in its pioneer phase, this study states that the contribution ecovillages make based on three fundamental conditions of Degrowth is tremendous. The ecovillage exemplifies that a small-scale environment in which multiple core facets of life are integrated can lead to an increased responsibility among both the individual and collective to take care of the direct environment. By applying a varietal of practical sustainability measures, such communities lead by example and manifest an alternative way for humanity which decreases ecological boundary stress.

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# List of abbreviations

- *GEN*                      *Global Ecovillage Network*
- *GDP*                      *Gross Domestic Product*
- *EF*                         *Ecological Footprint*

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The researcher's journey

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*Two years ago, I read the book *Factfulness: Ten reasons we're wrong about the world and why things are better than you think* by Hans Rosling (2019). Feeling sad of all the injustice and inequality that is being rooted in our society, I thought this book might give me some positive inspiration. Maybe I truly was trapped in – as Rosling would phrase it – a *negative instinct*<sup>1</sup>; brainwashed by the media and forgotten how the world was before. However, in fact, the world as we know it has never been as rich as nowadays (Raworth, 2018). Spectacular health and medical innovation have doubled our population in size over the last fifty years. We have placed humans on the moon and are able to grow food in the most deserted places. Growth and technology have been an unprecedentedly important factor for so many modern societies today. After finishing the book, I was left with the question: where does this linear growth end? Although it may seem abundantly clear that the current way in which we as society interact and live at the expense of our natural environment will not last long, politics and global market leaders continue to underline the importance of growth. Promising economic growth will positively impact all of our lives while evidence shows differently. Even though a change seems to be made as political conversations shift towards green growth, inclusive growth, and bounded growth the narrative still emphasizes economic wealth at the expense of ecological balance.*

*Last year, the world was confronted with the harsh consequences of our globalized and capitalized world system through a global pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic is yet another event that underlines how unsustainable the current western way of relating to our natural environment has become. The harmful bioindustry, pharmaceutical industry, and the polarization of our borders prioritizing countries with economic wealth over others in trying to stay healthy. The alarming issue is that the contemporary western view on the world positions humans as apart from or even above nature; humans and nature are often perceived as opposites. However, the pandemic again shows us that humanity does not stand above nature but instead is part of it: the damage we bring to the environment is currently rebounded. As a result of our actions, we cannot sustain ourselves for an indefinite period of time without running out of resources and experiencing setbacks like floods, droughts, and famine.*

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<sup>1</sup> *Forgetting how the world really was before. It is not because some things are bad today that they cannot be better than they were before! This is a theme often alluded to by the French philosopher Michel Serres. (Rosling, 2019)*

Recently, I read the book ‘*Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist*’ by Kate Raworth (2018). In her highly praised book, the economist skillfully argues how a transition from economic growth in order to stay within planetary boundaries, and therefore towards Degrowth, could significantly contribute to moving into the Doughnut: a metaphorical space in which both ecological and social boundaries - that ensure human existence - are not crossed (Raworth, 2018). The concept of Doughnut economics follows the ideas of Degrowth; a post-development<sup>2</sup> theory that focuses on the necessity of shifting societies’ comprehension of economic growth (Kallis, 2011). Once the book was finished, I started searching for examples that were already living according to Degrowth standards and found the concept of an ecovillage. In literature, ecovillages are described to harmoniously integrate human activity into the natural environment and are therefore seen as the best practical implementation of Degrowth into society (Xue, 2014; Kasper, 2008). Hence, this thesis will dive into the life of ecovillages and its residents; a community that unlike many others still seems to place itself as a part *of* nature instead of *apart* from it.

## 1.2 Research objective

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The thesis aims to understand the ecovillage’s contribution to a more sustainable world by examining to what extent such communities contribute to the ideology of Degrowth by researching three fundamental criteria inextricably linked to the theory: circularity, downscaling and inclusivity. By using the Global Ecovillage Network, an online platform that connects ecovillages globally, informants are gathered. A combination of multiple qualitative research methods such as semi-structured interviews, depth-interviews and ethnographic fieldwork will provide data to deepen the understanding of ecovillage movement. Ultimately, this study aims to answer the following research question: *To what extent does living in an ecovillage meet the Degrowth ideology?*

## 1.3 Relevance

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The earth will survive with or without human beings and what has become evident is that the current - particularly western - lifestyle will underwrite the latter (Latouche, 2007). Desertification of landscapes, rapidly declining rainforests, sea level rise and extreme droughts are threatening human existence on earth. An ever-growing group suffers the dire consequences of a linear growing world economy on a daily basis (Raworth, 2010). As the importance of a reduced ecological footprint has been clear for years, the lack of action at global scale is now increasingly being felt and it is simply painful to observe that those who have the least share are hit the hardest. A significant change in both lifestyle and mindset that pushes humanity into a sweet spot that meets the needs of all within the means of the planet has become essential (Raworth,

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<sup>2</sup> Will be explained under the 2.1 Degrowth section

2017). The post-development theory Degrowth proposes a change in our perception of growth. The discourse of Degrowth might be one of the most controversial development debates we have witnessed in recent years. The theory – which takes a radical stance in the development paradigm – argues that by equitable downscaling in both production and consumption human wellbeing and ecological conditions on both local and global scale will be increased (Büchs & Koch, 2019). Although the idea of Degrowth has over the years been growing, due to the stabilizing role growth has played over the last decades, it remains marginalized and even criticized within mainstream politics.

However, if humankind does not manage to achieve our set co2 reduction targets and next generations' indeed will be impacted in their ability to satisfy basic needs, a transition towards Degrowth could significantly contribute to moving into the required 'safe and just operating space' for humanity (Van den Bergh, 2011; Raworth, 2017). As stated by Escobar (2015), one of the most prominent post-development thinkers, the impact of climate change has revived the call for a Degrowing society, one that reinvents its measures and perception of growth. In an attempt to practicalize a rather abstract development debate by examining Degrowth's most practical implementation - the ecovillage - this study aims to provide realistic insight and answers to such immense pensive questions on how to maintain our future.

If the Degrowth paradigm is to gain the required momentum to turn its concepts and ideas into practice, it is of utmost importance to already shed light on communities that live in a balanced space between social and environmental boundaries. Therefore, this thesis will bring new life to the widely critiqued practical applicability of Degrowth by zooming into ecovillages. By focusing on ecovillages and examining their impact in terms of circularity, downscaling and inclusivity this study provides a practical and insightful contribution that is of value for global development discourses.

## 1.4 Research questions

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The overall research question that will be answered in this research is:

'To what extent does living in an ecovillage meet the Degrowth ideology?

*By researching inclusivity, downscaling and circularity among ecovillages'*

The answer to this overall research question will be constructed from different elements, by answering the following sub-questions:

*SQ1: What characterizes ecovillages?*

*1.1) Where are they located?*

*1.2) How did they originate?*

*1.3) What do they represent?*

*SQ2: What kind of people live in ecovillages?*

*2.1) What characterizes the ecovillager?*

*2.2) How is the every-day life of an ecovillager?*

*SQ3: To what extent do ecovillages contribute to Degrowth?*

*3.1) Downscaling*

*3.2) Inclusivity*

*3.3) Circularity*

## **1.5 Reading guide**

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This study starts by firstly discussing the underlying theoretical concepts and approaches fundamental to this research. The theoretical embedding separately discusses the theory of Degrowth, the concept of Doughnut economics and the ecovillage movement. The methodology chapter operationalizes concepts fundamental to this study and describes the research methods used for data collection. Chapters three and four provide contextual background information regards the Global Ecovillage Network and the involved ecovillages in this study. Thereafter, the three empirical chapters will be discussed. These include the ecovillage, its residents; the ecovillager, and ultimately the ecovillages' contribution towards the ideology of Degrowth. Finally, this study merges the conclusion and discussion. This last chapter answers the main research questions and opens the debate from a broader development perspective. Ultimately this chapter acknowledges study related limitations and provides suggestions for further research.

## 2. Theoretical embedding

This chapter sets out an examination of the theoretical and conceptual embedding of the research by exploring literature and data from former studies on Degrowth. Afterwards the concept of Doughnut economics is analyzed in order to discuss the three core conditions linked to the theory of Degrowth. Finally, the concept of an ecovillage is extensively explained.

### 2.1 Degrowth

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The theory of post-development argues that the whole concept and practice of development is a reflection of western hegemony and projected on the rest of the world. The concept of Degrowth took off in the early 1970s and is known as an ideology within post-development thinking (Escobar, 2015; Latouche, 2007). It started as a counter reaction to the dominant discourse within development debates but quickly developed into a social movement (Kallis, 2011; Schneider et al., 2010)

The theory critiques the capitalistic market system of pursuing growth at the expense of others causing human exploitation and environmental destruction (Schneider et al., 2010). Ziai (2014) - a prominent development thinker delineating the contemporary view on post-development - suggests that the theory is based on the principles of awareness of a finite world having limited resources. Hence, Degrowth is first a concern to the ecology that is perceived as having intrinsic values rather than instrumental values (Büchs & Koch, 2019; Xue, 2014). As defined by today's researchers, Degrowth is a proposal for rather radical change, an attempt to re-politicize the debate on the needed socio-ecological transformations rejecting the current world representations while searching for alternatives (Demaria et al., 2013). The change - fundamental to the theory - is the downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions (Barca, 2018; Sekulova et al., 2013).

Schneider et al. (2010) - a well-known Degrowth scholar - critique the current GDP<sup>3</sup> and propose to go beyond it by including well-being indicators to restore the balance between humanity and nature (p. 512). As stated by Kallis (2011) - a prominent proponent of Degrowth - including such indicators enhances the ecological footprint of 'The West' and contributes largely to downscaled consumerism (p. 876). The theory is also a response to the lack of democratic debates on economic growth. Hence, Degrowth stands for the increase of inclusivity within democratic decision-making (Xue, 2014). Such an increased inclusivity can be realized by decentralizing governance institutions to local scale ((Matthey, 2010). As

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<sup>3</sup> *The four components of gross domestic product are personal consumption, business investment, government spending, and net exports (Schneider et al., 2010).*

argued by Latouche (2007) localism is fundamentally linked to Degrowth as it allows for conditions which favor active participation for those who are involved (p. 3).

Even though the theory is a critique on the current development hegemony (Schneider et al. 2010), both the post-development theory and Degrowth have been widely criticized mostly for its practical implementations. As states by Ziai (2004) “post-development texts have been interpreted as a cynical legitimization of neoliberalism or a futile romanticization of premodern times; more sympathetic critics have at least acknowledged its potential to criticize the shortcomings of development theory and policy (p. 1045).” Schneider et al. (2010) argue that due to dominance of economic growth within global politics since ‘45, critics of Degrowth argue that slowing economic growth would lead to increased unemployment, poverty, and decreased income per capita (p. 515). Hence, despite ecological boundary stress mainly caused by western consumerism, the importance of economic growth remains immense within mainstream politics (Latouche, 2007).

## 2.2 Doughnut economics

One of the most widely discussed theories that elaborates on the ideology of Degrowth is the recently published book ‘Doughnut Economics’ by Kate Raworth (2018). With this book Raworth addresses the needs of both human and nature by conceptualizing a doughnut that symbolizes a ‘safe and just operating space’ in which humanity can thrive (Raworth, 2018). See figure one for clarification. Living in the doughnut - as Raworth (2018) refers to - means no shortfall or overshoot in any of the aspects represented in the model. The doughnut economy builds on the conceptual model of the planetary boundaries that was put together in 2009 at the Stockholm Resilience Center by twenty-nine leading Earth-system scientists (Rockström et al., 2009). Following the *limits to growth*<sup>4</sup> report by the club of Rome in 1972 and the *Brundtland report*<sup>5</sup> in 1987, the planetary boundary model forms the latest influential benchmark and has significantly influenced the international discourse on global sustainability (Barca, 2018). In short, the model proposes nine interlinked earth-system processes at planetary scale with ‘tipping points’ (Raworth, 2012). According to Dearing et al. (2014), crossing such thresholds could potentially lead to irreversible and, in some cases, abrupt environmental change (p. 227). The conception of a safe and just operating space represented in the doughnut shape, adds social concerns to the planetary boundaries’ framework which is referred to as the social foundation. The social foundation builds upon the human rights declaration (1948)

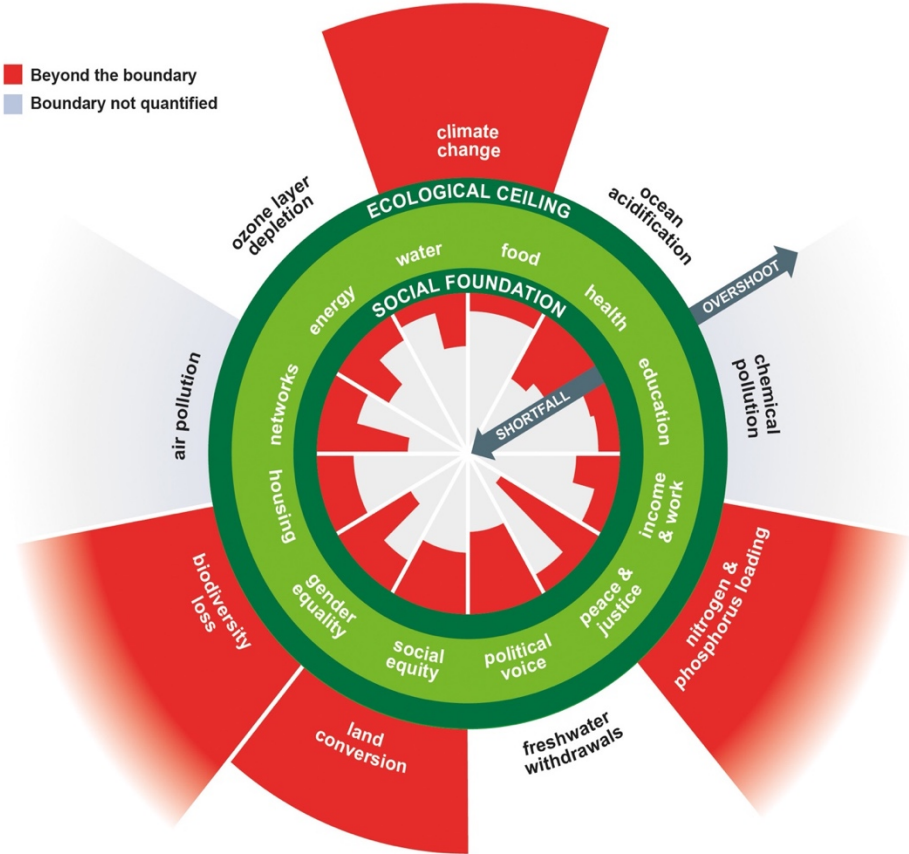
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<sup>4</sup> *Studies by computer simulation, the limits to grow was a report on the exponential economic and population growth with a finite supply of resources.*

<sup>5</sup> *The Brundtland report stated that critical global environmental problems were mainly the result of the enormous poverty of the South and the non-sustainable patterns of consumption and production in the North.*

and Millennium Development Goals<sup>6</sup> (2000) to provide rights for all people to lead lives of dignity and opportunity (Raworth, 2010)

Figure 1 Conceptual model Doughnut



Source: Doughnut Economics (Raworth, 2018).

However, in the 21st century, absolute poverty still exists, clean drinking water and electricity are not available for everyone and inequalities between men and women are rooted deeply in society. On the other hand - as visible in figure one, currently three ecological tipping points have been crossed resulting in global warming and biodiversity loss (Röckstrom, 2009). For this variety of reasons Raworth (2018) argues that humanity currently operates outside both sets of boundaries. The biggest source of planetary boundary stress today is the excessive consumption levels of roughly the wealthiest ten percent of people in the world,

<sup>6</sup> The MDGs are eight goals that UN member States agreed to try achieving by the year 2015. These goals aimed to combat poverty, hunger, diseases etc.



and the production patterns of the companies producing the goods and services that they buy (Raworth, 2010). Hence, Kallis (2019) concludes, a significant change in both lifestyle and mindset willing to degrowth in both consumption and production is required for humanity to move into the safe and just operating space.

## 2.3 How to get there?

In order for society to allow this transition towards Degrowth which pushes humanity in between both sets of boundaries, three core principles that are inextricably linked to Degrowth are, according to this study, fundamental to apply. These three criteria will now theoretically be embedded in the context of this research.

### 2.3.1 *Circularity*

A first step that will decrease planetary boundary stress - as it significantly lowers the annual amount of waste - is the transition from linear to a circular economy (Raworth, 2017). As Degrowth critics argue that economic growth cannot be decoupled from the use of resources (Demaria et al., 2013), the theory of Degrowth advocates to extend the use of already existing resources within economies (Ziai, 2014). Because of the awareness of having a finite world that has limited resources, a shift from linear to circular will significantly increase resource efficiency.

Circular economy policies aim to improve waste management and induce responsible production and consumption cultures. Scientists agree on the significant impact such a transition could have on global production and the annual amount of waste (Ajwani-Ramchandani et al., 2021). The importance of shifting towards a circular economy has in recent years become abundantly clear, however a recent study shows that in 2019 only 12% of all material inputs including fossil fuels, biomass, metals, and nonmetallic minerals across European countries was recycled (Strand et al., 2021). In a search for inspiring and hopeful examples, conversations concerning the circular economy often point to a range of religious, spiritual, and secular communities that are less materialistic, consume less and seek lifestyles simpler than that of mainstream society (D'Alessandro, 2020; Strand et al., 2021).

### 2.3.2 *Downscaling*

Secondly, downscaling in consumption is fundamental to the ideology of Degrowth (Kallis, 2019). In the context of this study, downscaling is defined twofold. As previously discussed, Degrowth is at its core a concern for the ecology as it accuses the growth paradigm to cause environmental disruption. Hence, a

fundamental step that significantly decreases environmental pressure, is downscaling in consumption patterns (Escobar, 2015). The unprecedented degree of western prosperity has over the years resulted in production patterns paired with co2 emissions which simply have become unbearable for the earth's capacity. If we would fairly distribute all available global hectares (gha) across the current world population of almost eight billion people, each individual would only have 1.8 gha to produce everything this person consumes. Today, the average person uses over 2.7 gha annually (EF, 2021). While Degrowth stresses the importance of using one earth per year, in 2021 the earth overshoot day was on July 29th. Meaning that humanity has exhausted nature's annual 'budget' in just seven months. Hence, Degrowth fundamentally argues for a downshift in consumption patterns.

### **2.3.3 Inklusivity**

Lastly, as countries, populations, and cultures get more and more intertwined as a result of globalization, a variety of scholars suggest that this trend negatively impacts the degree of inclusiveness within society (Raworth, 2017; Xue, 2014; Kallis, 2019). As just mentioned, Degrowth is a counter reaction to the lack of inclusive decision-making. In order to reclaim the right to make choices and to create empowered decision-making processes, decentralizing governance to lower scales will therefore increase inclusivity (Kallis, 2019). Local environments allow for direct control in the decision-making process, where this decreases considerably at larger scale as a result of interdependence (Xue, 2014; Bonaiuti, 2012). Besides increasing democracy within society through relocalization, it is believed that regaining citizens' power in decision making is of importance to escape from the growth imperative and is therefore an essential element within the idea of Degrowth (Kallis, 2019).

## **2.4 Ecovillage**

Debates centered around encouraging examples who fall in line with the ideas of both Degrowth and Doughnut economics often point to small-scale communities (Strand et al., 2021). One of the most promising initiatives might be the concept of an ecovillage. By aiming to incorporate Degrowth's three core criteria, this relocalized human-scale settlement is often described as the perfect embodiment of a Degrowth society (Xue, 2014; Kallis, 2011; van den Bergh, 2011).

As Ergas (2010) - who extensively researched ecovillages within the context of environmental sociology - explains, ecovillages challenge institutional, organizational, and cultural authority and therefore constitute social movements (p. 35). During the 1990s individuals started to develop environmental consciousness and movements against consumerism and materialism arose (Schor 1998; Ergas, 2010).

Among many scholars, Schor (1998) studied these individuals and phrased their movement as “downshifting” their lifestyles. Downshifting and Degrowth are very much correlated as Schor (1998) referred to earning less money, working less hours, and buying less while instead growing and making their own goods.

The environmental movement of the 1990s resulted in a growing number of formed communities. Intentional communities are widely studied and Kozeny (1995, p. 18) defined them as: “a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values”. Individuals of a community share “ideology, skills, knowledge, and resources” (Ergas, 2010, p. 34), intentional communities are specifically chosen communities that can range from religious to functional linkages. The ecovillage is one type of intentional community in which individuals share an environmental goal, an intent towards sustainable living. Schehr (1997) argued that intentional communities such as ecovillages are social movements as they attempt to change the social order into more communal and collaborative relationships.

The ecovillage is a construct that came into common usage in the early 1990s and is most frequently defined as a human-scale settlement - usually between 50 and 500 members though there are exceptions - that is intended to be full-featured — providing food, manufacturing, leisure, social opportunities, and commerce (Kasper, 2008, p. 13). As discussed in several studies, creating sustainability is often seen as the ultimate goal that drives ecovillages’ actions (Ergas, 2010; Sherry, 2019, Barani et al., 2018). Ecovillages aim to harmlessly integrate human activities into the environment and therefore to diminish interference with natural processes by maximizing efficiency of consumption and waste (Kasper, 2008; Ergas 2010).

The concept of sustainability has many definitions among both scholars and practitioners. Similarly, the ecovillagers’ understanding of the term depends on circumstances and includes everything from protecting the environment, to internal mental processing to dealing with conflict in personal relationships, argues Ergas (2010, p. 40). Sperber (2003) stresses the problematic environmental conditions caused by humankind that ecovillagers seek to mitigate in his definition of the ecovillage. Likewise, Gilman (1991, p. 10) defines ecovillages as communities with human activity that are “harmlessly integrated into the natural world”. Both define the villages by their cause and origin. However, Ergas (2010, p. 35) combines the origin with its practical form in her definition as she defines the ecovillages as; part of the larger environmental movement, with an emphasis on living simply, sustainably, and symbiotically with their environment.

*“They chose to earn less, consume less, and socialize more”*

*(Ergas 2010, p. 36).*

Meijering (2012) - a Dutch professor who extensively researched different ecovillages within Europe - argues that ecovillages tend to practice such ideals in their everyday life (p. 38). Examples of practices are workdays in which the community works together on a project, and various social activities, such as communal dinners, parties, meditation, music, sports, theater, and gardening. Meijering (2012) argues that ecovillages increasingly become more part of mainstream society as countercultural values such as protecting the environment, authenticity, communal living, and personal growth have become more accepted in the mainstream (p. 39). Ecovillages strive to become organic places which refers to a commitment to protect the environment and to transform the communities into self-contained places where all aspects of life can take place (Xue, 2014). They are not meant to be an isolated or gated community, rather ecovillages are intended to be linked in networks of social, economic, and political ties, and the ecovillage movement has been steadily working toward that goal (Kasper, 2008, p. 13). Cooperation underlies all these activities and creates a sense of togetherness among members. The sharing of values and materials around environmental sustainability also maintains the commitment of the ecovillager to its community (Meijering, 2012, p. 35).

*“The joint ownership of the soil should be unifying, ... everybody should contribute to [the community’s] continuity.”*

*(Meijering, 2012, p. 38).*

## 2. Methodology

This section discusses the methodology applied in this research. It explains the research design and provides a transparent rationale for the operationalizations of concepts that are central to this research.

### 2.1 Operationalization

To measure the extent to which ecovillages contribute to the ideology of Degrowth, its three core elements are analyzed. This concerns circularity, inclusivity, and downscaling. This research will merely focus on these three aspects with the risk of overseeing certain nuances. However, these main aspects are carefully chosen as extensively discussed in the theoretical framework. The operationalization of the relevant concepts will now be discussed. In table one a short overview of the core elements and research techniques is displayed.

Measurements	Operationalizations	Techniques
Circularity	Recycling Renewables (clean energy) Waste disposal	Semi-structured interviews Ethnographic fieldwork
Downscaling	Materialism Ecological Footprint (EF)	EF estimation Depth-interviews Participatory observation
Inclusivity	Decision-making Conflict resolution Cooperation	Semi-structured interviews Walking interviews Participatory observation

Table 1 Operationalization techniques

#### 2.1.1 Circularity

Circularity is defined as the process in which products or resources can be reused as a raw material after their usage (Ajwani-Ramchandani et al., 2021). Rather than linear ways with never ending growth, circularity aims to extend the use of already existing resources within the economy. The goal of circularity is to create an economy that optimizes resource efficiency while minimizing waste disposal. The concept is measurable at four different scales. Within the context of this research the concept is operationalized at macro scale which addresses 'regions and neighborhoods' and therefore fits the community scale.

Extending the use of products or resources can be realized through recycling and reusing products. This study seeks the extent to which ecovillages have incorporated the core aspects of circularity within their society. Therefore, circularity among ecovillages is measured by the following three aspects: recycling, renewables, and waste management. These criteria are measured by conducting online interviews and ethnographic fieldwork.

### **2.1.2 Downscaling**

Within the context of this study, the concept of downscaling is defined twofold. First, the concept is interpreted as downscaling in materialism. Materialism involves a lifestyle whereby happiness is achieved through the attainment of material objects, wealth, or status. Therefore, downscaling refers to a shift towards more spiritual, intellectual, or cultural values rather than the obtainment of materials in order to pursue happiness (Schlosberg, 2019). Because the ecovillage lifestyle is often described as ‘downsized’ (Ergas, 2010; Singh et al., 2019), this study analyzes to what extent this is truly the case. Measuring downscaling in this ideological sense will be done, by applying qualitative methods such as online-interviews, depth-interviews, and participatory observations.

#### *Ecological Footprint*

Secondly, downscaling is interpreted in absolute numbers by assessing a person’s consumption pattern. A widely accepted method to analyze whether a settlement or person downsizes in terms of material behavior is by assessing the Ecological Footprint (EF) (Carragher & Peters, 2018). As stated by Daly (2017), measuring the ecological footprint of settlements has grown in popularity as a policy and practice tool in the transition towards a low-carbon society. This measurement is centered around questions regarding housing, food, waste, energy, and transportation. The EF is expressed in a biologically productive area in global hectares (gha) that is needed to provide everything a person consumes. It is important to recognize that EF methods do not attempt to measure the social or economic dimensions of sustainability – but solely tend to focus on environmental or ecological aspects (Carragher & Peters, 2018). This study attempts to compare the EF of an ecovillager with the national average of a particular country to analyze to what extent downscaling in material behavior is actually the case.

Necessary questions in order to assess the EF<sup>7</sup> have been incorporated during interviews and ethnographic fieldwork. Due to significant differences regarding specific subjects throughout the year, the ecological footprints elaborated in this study will remain estimates. This quantitative research method only

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<sup>7</sup> The calculation itself has been executed by means of [footprintcalculator.org](http://footprintcalculator.org)

aims to illustrate whether or not the ecovillage movement downscales in terms of consumption patterns compared to the national average.

### **2.1.3 Inlusivity**

As defined by the United Nations (UN), Social inclusion is a multi-dimensional process that aims to set up conditions which enable full and active participation of every member of the society in all aspects of life, including civic, social, economic, and political activities, as well as participation in decision-making processes (UN, 2009). As addressed in the theoretical framework, The ideology of Degrowth is besides environmental concerns also a response to the lack of democratic debates on economic growth. Therefore, Degrowth advocates for the increase of inclusivity and democratic decision-making within society (Xue, 2014; Matthey, 2010). Xue (2014) states that such an increase in democratic decision-making can be established by decentralizing governance to lower scales. As ecovillages have completely embedded this relocalization, this study analyzes to what extent this influences inclusivity within ecovillages. Inclusivity is measured by analyzing decision-making, conflict resolution and cooperation among ecovillages. The following three criteria will be measured by conducting both online and offline interviews and participatory observation.

## **2.2 Research methods**

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As this research aims to understand ways in which Ecovillages contribute to or meet the Degrowth ideology, a set of different qualitative methods will be presented and applied. By systematically applying multiple qualitative research methods the validity and reliability of the research will be enlarged and the quality will be strengthened. The following section elaborates on the to be used set of qualitative methods and the way in which these methods contribute to gathering the required data.

### *1) Ethnographic fieldwork*

To conduct qualitative data the researcher has visited five different Dutch ecovillages with its campervan. The campervan is able to be off grid for a couple of days without energy supply needed. Therefore, the possibility arises to live with the research population for multiple days and be part of their community. Because I was able to spend several days at an ecovillage, this created a deeper connection with my participants which resulted in more personal and in-depth data.

## *2) Participant observation*

Participant observation is not only a research method in which the researcher observes its participants to collect data. It also requires the researcher to engage in activities of the research participants (Cohen & Crabtree, 2016). Participant observation aims to gain a deeper understanding of the research population and therefore contributes to other research methods. Participant observation has been the main research method applied during ethnographic fieldwork. It offered me the possibility to participate in daily practicalities such as cooking, dining, gardening, and construction. Because the participation within such examples allows you to become part of the research population, this often makes room for formal or walking interviews.

## *3) Semi-structured (online) interviews*

A semi-structured interview is a formal interview in which an ‘interview guide’ is used to provide structure by outlining the interview questions. Although the topics are posed in a thoughtful order, the interviewer has the possibility to follow topical trajectories in the conversation that differ from the guide when the interviewer thinks this is appropriate (Cohen & Crabtree, 2016). On one hand, semi-structured interviews provide data gathering on a clear set of topics and/or questions which can provide comparable data out of different interviews (Cohen & Crabtree 2016). On the other hand, it guides researchers in conducting an interview which is relevant for answering the research questions. Since the researcher is not an experienced interviewer, semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity to prepare the interviews ahead of time. This allows the interviewer to be prepared and appear competent during the interview (Cohen & Crabtree 2016).

## *4) Focus groups*

Focus groups are defined as qualitative interviews in which multiple interviewees participate while focusing on a specific topic (Jones et al., 2008). The group discussion is guided under the guidance of a moderator. Focus groups are a valuable research method to gather data in a relatively short time period while identifying a variety of perspectives and experiences deriving from different people related to the same topic.

## *5) Walking interviews*

Walking interviews could be interesting as an addition to the participant observation. Interviewing while walking can generate data on the meaning and experiences related to the understanding of place and the environment (Jones et al., 2008). In the context of this research, the walking interview would be an informal interview that leaves room for the interviewee to share their story and thoughtfully ask follow-up questions once topics in relation to the research arise.



### 6) *Depth-interviews*

Depth interviews are a useful qualitative data collection technique that can be used for situations in which the researchers want to ask open-ended questions that elicit depth of information. This study has applied depth interviews because different parts of the research questions contained personal information. To be able to conduct such data, it was firstly necessary to create a connection with my participants. Therefore, the first set of online semi-structured interviews mostly maintained general questions and practicalities related to SQ1 and SQ2. Finally, a second round consisting of four participants has been performed. Because these were all follow-up interviews, an increased bond between participant and researcher is experienced. This had offered me the possibility to conduct depth-interviews and ask open questions that were more personal, and more opinion related.

## 2.3 Research population

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All ecovillages the researcher engaged with were found at the GEN, the Global Ecovillage Network. The GEN appears to be a diverse platform that attracts initiatives who vary greatly in both vision and practicalities. Some of my participants emphasized on the natural environment like Kuthumba, South Africa through the maintenance of natural forest, while others have outlined the educational aspect like the Green Village community in India. Instead of a network consisting of ecovillages, the GEN perhaps more aims to set up a social movement that relies on environmental justice and social awareness rather than specifically involving ecovillages that meet a certain definition. By using the GEN as a database, I have been able to connect with eight ecovillages located outside of the Netherlands in different continents. For the fieldwork period, I have contacted Dutch ecovillages only and visited five different communities.

## 2.4 Research activities

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From February 2021 till May 2021, I have extensively analyzed a variety of national and international ecovillages. The first ten weeks were mostly spent online. Firstly, I aimed to get a better understanding of the ecovillage movement in general. Therefore, I decided to demark my research population to all ecovillages affiliated with the GEN. I have contacted over twenty-five communities via e-mail and ended up interviewing eight participants from different communities all over the world. My eight interviewees were all adults. Although the ecovillage population is constantly changing, it is consistently a multigenerational community. My interviewees' ages ranged from 25 to 70 years with a mean age between 30 and 40 years. Only one interviewee was female, seven were male. Every interviewee was white, mostly

western European ethnics, one North American, and two Africans. Of the eight people I spoke with, seven had lived at their respective ecovillage at least for one year.

At first, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each person which aimed to broaden my understanding of the ecovillage and ecovillager by discussing everyday life and practicalities. In May I connected again with 4 of my participants to conduct depth interviews. Because this was the second time I spoke to them, an increased bond of trust was palpable. This allowed me to talk more specifically on personal topics. I also conducted one Focus group with two Dutch women from the Ecovillage IEWAN. It was planned to speak to three women, but one could not make the interview. The focus group did give me valuable data however it turned out to be more like a regular interview. If I do a focus group again, I will go in with a more demarcated question and have a more specific focus. My interviews lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to 1.5 hour. All interviews were recorded and at a later stage transcribed.

Besides applying online research methods, I have conducted valuable data by means of ethnographic fieldwork. Between April and June, I spent slightly more than 1,5 months visiting five different ecovillages within the Netherlands. On average I stayed in an ecovillage for three days. During this period, I stayed in a campervan and was accompanied by my girlfriend. I conducted walking-interviews, observations, participated in community activities and engaged in communal discussions.

In many cases, in exchange for overnight stay I was involved in work trade which included gardening, cooking, composting, and building. field observations were jotted down in a field notebook and typed up at the end of each day by means of a topic list I created in advance of my fieldwork.

Despite the uncertain and limited circumstances due to the pandemic, the opportunity to participate in such a qualitative way has been proven valuable and has brought me a 'lived-experience' of the life my research participants live.

### ***Semi-structured interviews***

22/2 Small footprint ecovillage, Estonia male 50s

16/3 Eco Caminhos, Brazil male 20s

17/3 Green Village Raipur, India male 30s

22/3 Kuthumba, South Africa male 40s

23/3 Kumaon Maati, India male 30s

26/3 Oude Molen, South Africa male 60s

28/3 Balenbouche Estate, St. Lucia female 40s

30/3 Toustrup Mark, Denmark male 40s

### ***Focus group***

12/3 IEWAN, Dutch women 20s and 50s

### ***Ethnographic fieldwork***

7/4 - 11/4 Hof van Moeder Aarde, Neede

29/4 - 02/5 Ppauw, Wageningen

14/5 - 16/5 Land van Een, Surhuizum

18/5 - 20/5 Ecodorp Bergen, Bergen aan zee

28/5 - 31/5 de Hobbitstee, Wapserveen

### ***Depth-interviews***

16/5 Oude Molen, South Africa male 60s

17/5 Toustrup Mark, Denmark male 40s

18/5 Eco Caminhos, Brazil male 20s

28/5 Kuthumba, South Africa male 40s

## **2.5 Positionality as researcher**

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Regularly reflecting on the impact of one's own viewpoint and own position in the research environment, helps in reflecting on the gathered data and therefore making the research more reliable. During fieldwork the researcher is the main research instrument, not just for data collection but also for the analysis (Ruby 1980). It is therefore of importance to acknowledge my position as white European male scholar to improve my role as observer and analyzer. To be reflexive it is important that the researcher systematically and truly reveals their methods and themselves as an instrument of data generation (Ruby 1980, 153). During my time in the field, I have kept a diary to remind myself of my own perspective and the possible influences on the data collection and analysis. When reflecting on my role as researcher I think that because of my assertive and open attitude, I have been able to connect with a lot of people affiliated with ecovillages. Besides, I think my positionality as a 'researcher' slightly decreased as a result of the 'lived-experience' during fieldwork. Because we were able to stay with the campervan at ecovillages for multiple days, it felt like we directly became part of the community. Therefore, I sometimes had to explicitly remind myself of my role when engaging in conversations or social activities.

### 3. Institutional framework

As this study only includes ecovillages that are part of the GEN, it is important to deepen the understanding of this global network. Therefore, this third chapter will provide contextual and background information related to this platform.

#### 3.1 Global Ecovillage Network

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*Map 1 Ecovillage movement across the globe*



*Source: GEN (2018)*

As described in chapter three methodology, this study has used the Global Ecovillage network as a source to connect with ecovillages. From its pioneer phase in the 90s until this moment, the model of community living combined with ecological design has rapidly been growing. Today, as visible in map one, the ecovillage movement has gained a foothold on every continent. As a result of this increased interest the Global Ecovillage Network has been created. An online global network for ecovillages to join and connect with others. Having such a platform that represents over almost thousands of different initiatives also empowers the message of social awareness and environmental justice that is proactively being conveyed by ecovillages.

The foundation of the GEN dates back to the early 90s and falls completely in line with the growing environmentalism movement. In 1991 - at the request of the Gaia trust foundation - Robert Gilman published a study on sustainable communities. Despite the presence of many interesting sustainable projects, he concluded that the full-scale ideal ecovillage did not exist yet. The Gaia trust foundation - formed by Ross and Hilder Jackson - organized a conference that brought together twenty-five ecovillage representatives from almost as many countries to formalize the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) and link the hundreds of small projects that had sprung up around the world sharing a common motivation but without having the knowledge of one another (Jackson, 2004). The conference was held in one of the oldest and well-known communities located in Europe; Findhorn (1962) Scotland. Today, this community is still considered an important place for organizing events and conferences. The Gaia Trust foundation - based in Denmark - committed on the spot to fund the Global Ecovillage Network for the first five years and from that moment, the movement has grown rapidly, and many initiatives are nowadays linked up by the GEN (Jackson, 2004).

### 3.2 Definition

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In order to outline the participating ecovillages within this study, it is first important to address the definition of an ecovillage according to the GEN. As argued by this online platform, all initiatives that are part of the GEN share the following three core practices. Being rooted in local participatory processes, the integration of social, cultural, economic, and ecological dimensions of sustainability in a whole system approach and actively restoring and regenerating the social and natural environments (GEN, 2020).

The network defines ecovillages as an ongoing process rather than a particular finished concept. Hence, this makes room for a variety of initiatives to fit within the ecovillage framework.

Moreover, this study argues that the GEN is more likely to create a social movement that relies on environmental justice and social awareness rather than specifically involving ecovillages that meet certain criteria. When approaching a variety of initiatives connected to the GEN, the differences in both implementation and vision among such ecovillages highly differentiated. When asking participants about how they engaged with the network, it became clear that guidelines for this were fairly flexible. A member from Kumaon Maati in India described the seemingly ease in which their initiatives was able to join the GEN”

*“The lady [who’s an associate of the GEN and visited my campsite] mentioned this is a wonderful concept and you should register yourself to our network, so I did”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 23/03/2021, Kumaon Maati).*

Thus, this shows that there might not be one single way to define an ecovillage. A second highly important part of the GEN’s definition is that ecovillages are not designed by outside developers, architects, or experts, but rather bottom-up, by the communities themselves. A common misunderstanding about ecovillages is that they would be solely focused on ecology. Even though many ecovillages start with strong environmental concerns, the social dimension is just as important. As stated on the GEN website: “preservation and restoration of nature can only succeed when the social fabric is strong, cultural heritage is celebrated and people find ways to marry their love for the planet with their need to make a living.” (2021). Moreover, Multiple studies that focus on the integration of sustainability within ecovillages argue that, when given enough time, all four dimensions of sustainability - society, environment, culture, and economy - will eventually naturally be developed (Sherry, 2019; Daly, 2017).

### 3.3 Mapping the movement

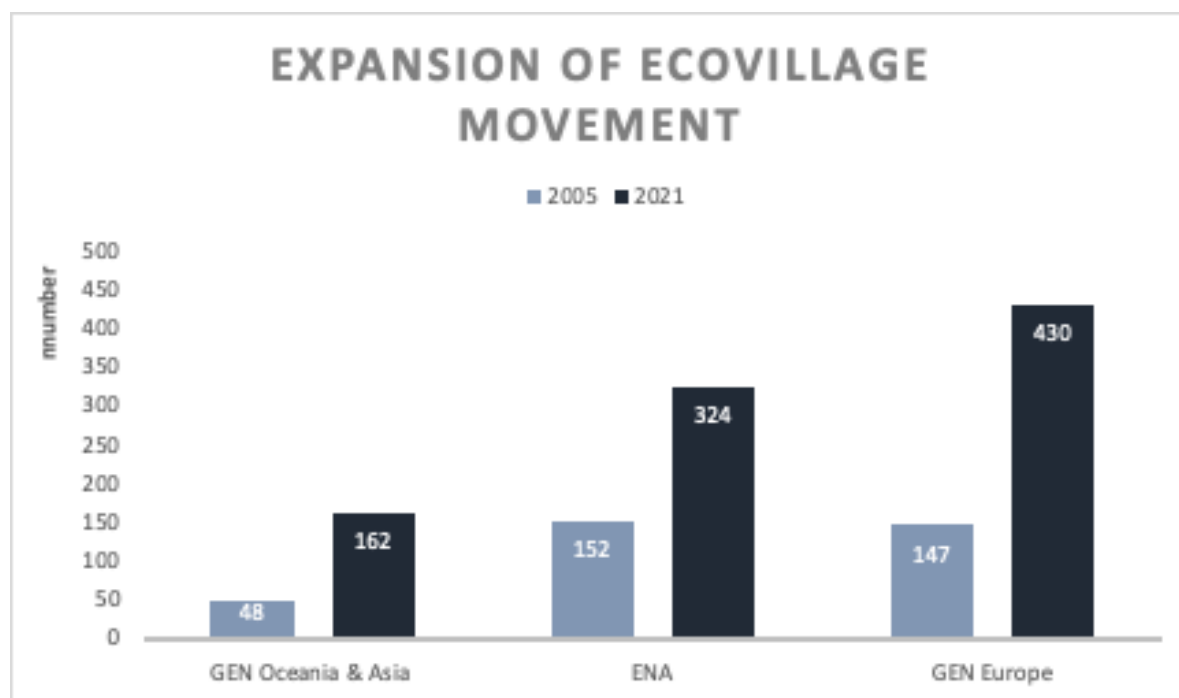
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The Global Ecovillage Network includes three major regions: GEN Oceania and Asia (including Asia, Australia, and the Pacific Islands), ENA (Ecovillage Network of the Americas, including North, Central, and South America), and GEN Europe (including Europe, Africa, and the Middle East).

As mentioned before, it is not possible to have a thorough and consistent record of all ecovillages as the model is spreading around the world, most initiatives start small scale and not every village is online active or connected to the GEN (Jackson, 2004; Kasper, 2008; Ergas, 2020). Meijering (2012) argues that the most secluded communities are mostly not included in databases as they prefer to remain unknown to outsiders (p. 31). Also, Smith (2002) - who researched intentional communities between 1990 and 2000 - states that many communities he encountered refused the inclusion in online databases which again emphasizes the difficulty of completely mapping such a movement.

Nevertheless, scholars widely agree that the ecovillage ideology is spreading (Jackson, 2004; Meijering et al., 2007). Smith (2002) states that from all intentional communities, ecovillages grow the fastest. The growing number of initiatives registered at the GEN does suggest a strong replication of the ecovillage model. Kasper (2008) stated that in 2005 globally there were only 347 ecovillages officially registered with the GEN of which none were from the African continent (p. 13). In 2021, the GEN is approximately linked to over thousand ecovillages. Nowadays, eighty-two villages are linked to the GEN in African countries. See figure two and three for clarification and ratio between the three regions.

Table 2 GEN regions expansion between 2005 and 2021



Source: Kasper (2018); van Mierlo (2021)

### 3.4 Practical contribution

Ecovillages are often praised for their significant contribution to sustainable development. As stated by Meijering (2012), ecovillages are guided by the desire to contribute to a “better world” by functioning as examples for mainstream society (p. 16). To provide context related to the sustainable contribution, this section concisely addresses ways in which this contribution is expressed.

Annually an ecovillage receives the Hilder Jackson Award for the best initiative. Examples of previously awarded initiatives are an alternative childbirth center in Kenya, a project in Mexico that rebuilt areas affected by earthquakes and an initiative to build accessible homes with scrap materials in rural areas of India (GEN, 2018). Moreover, based on a recent study published by Iberdrola (2017) 90% of ecovillages act determinedly to isolate carbon in the soil and in biomass. They recycle, reuse and repair more than half of their consumer goods and 85% transform all their organic waste into compost. In addition, the GEN states that 97% of communities work actively to restore damaged ecosystems. 96% educate in resolving disputes peacefully and 86% appear to have created their own protocols for doing so. 95% are involved in human rights and environmental campaigns on an ongoing basis while they simultaneously teach and offer

learning opportunities in sustainability matters. Of all ecovillages 97% restores and replaces water sources and cycles. Finally, female participation in decision-making is over 40% in nine out of ten ecovillages (p. 17). Sherry (2019) states that Ecovillagers generally want to exemplify how to live sustainably and can therefore be seen as eco-role models. For this variety of achievements, ecovillages set an example of how to make progress without endangering the future of the planet.

### ***Concluding remarks***

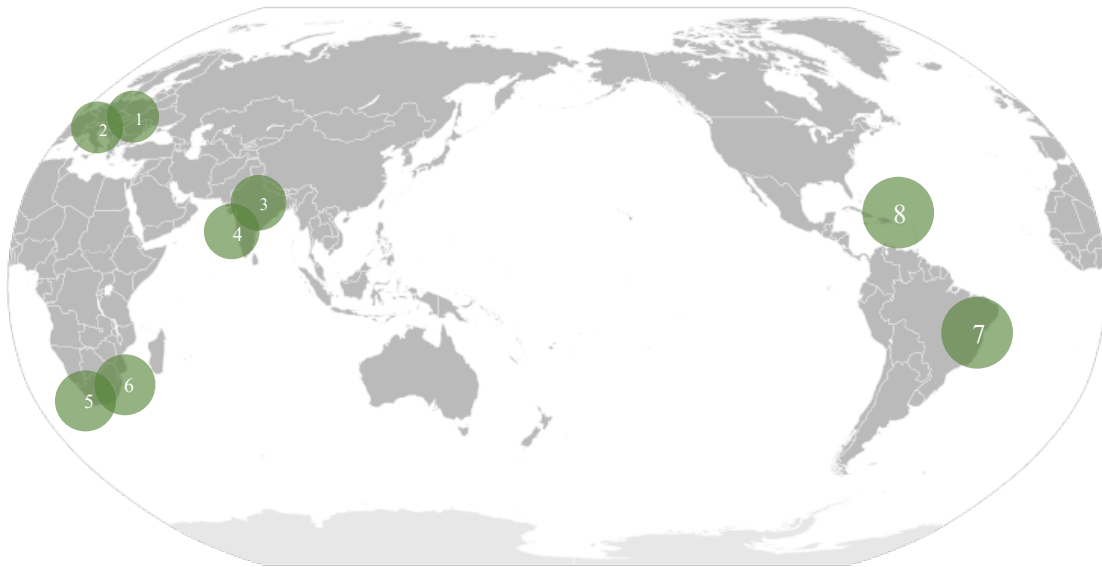
The environmentalism movement between 1960 and 1990 - that aimed to reduce the impact of human activities on the earth and its various inhabitants - has brought many sustainable communities forward. Due to the emergence of the GEN this multitude of initiatives which vary greatly in performance but are connected because of their common intentions, have been given a platform through which their social and environmental message can be disseminated more strongly. The GEN not only creates connection, but it also enables communities to share their experiences mutually.



## 4. Involved ecovillages

Before entering the empirical chapters of this study, a short sketch of all ecovillages involved will be provided. A distinction is made by first providing a general picture of the ecovillages that solely participated with online interviews followed by a more in-depth picture of the villages that have been part of the ethnographic fieldwork in the Netherlands.

*Map 2 Mapping international involved ecovillages*



*Source: van Mierlo (2021)*

### 4.1 International context

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#### 1. *Small Footprint, Estonia*

The founders came together in 2013 to live in a community with an appropriate ecological footprint that also functions as an inspiration and training center for sustainable lifestyles. Small Footprint is located in the countryside nearby village Mõisamaa with about thirty hectares of farmland. The community hosts a permaculture garden at the ecovillage, a primary school, training center for various workshops related to their practices, raw chocolate bar production and cider production. Today the community counts fourteen full time residents of which eight children and has the intention to grow in numbers in coming years.

## **2. *Toustrup Mark, Denmark***

Founded by a group of hippies in the early 70s, Toustrup Mark initially originated as a counterreaction to the rising housing prices in many Danish cities. To offer people an alternative society paired with affordable housing the ecovillage has attracted a lot of people over the years. Today Toustrup Mark counts over sixty full-time residents including children, elderly, and young adults. The community is located in Denmark's countryside twenty kilometers outside of Aarhus. The ecovillage is a residential community in particular meaning that most of its residents travel elsewhere for their employment. Residents live in close contact and organize communal activities on a daily basis.

## **3. *Green Village, India***

The Green Village is an ecovillage built using natural and traditional building methods that respect the environment and aim at a circular economy. The Green village is part of the Life Projects for Youth (LP4Y) which is an NGO that offers pedagogy that is specially tailored for youth living in rural communities. In periods of three months youth between 18 and 25 is trained in professional competence and social awareness at ecovillages located in different countries across South-East Asia. In this way, the LP4Y aims to contribute youth developments and offer children social competences as an addition to their regular education. During the interview with a manager of the Green village, a total of sixty children were present.

## **4. *Kumaon Maati, India***

Kumaon Maati is a community of like-minded individuals with many years of experience in the sectors of conservation, ecotourism, and business development. The initiative focuses on rural development and creating social awareness about the uniqueness of the surroundings among local communities. Kumaon Maati is involved in community development programs like women self-help groups, promoting organic agricultural practices and encouraging 'homestay' tourism. Moreover, due to conflicting interaction between humans and wild nature within the region, the community aims to start mitigation programs and adaptive management to deal with the conflict. Lastly, the northern rainforest of India is home to the world's largest Hornbill population. Their function as seed dispersers makes them invaluable to forest ecology. The community aims to study hornbills and other birds to contribute to their conservation. The ecovillage was established in 2010 and houses over 250 residents.

### **5. *Kuthumba, South Africa***

Founded in 1993 on the ethics of care for the nature that surrounds it, Kuthumba encompasses a vision of a healthy lifestyle and the opportunity for people to co-create an environment that allows each individual to harbor a sense of peace and growth. The ecovillage sits on 160 hectares of which the majority consists of indigenous forest. The homes of which Kuthumba comprises are built using green principles to ensure the inclusion of sustainable practices. By doing so, the community hopes to serve as a model for how others can contribute to the protection of the environment and foster environmental wisdom. In 2021 Kuthumba houses 60 full time residents. Its residents have a diverse range of passions, which include spiritual exploration and personal growth, permaculture, self-directed education, 'alternative' health, and a form of eco-tourism that is educational.

### **6. *Oude Molen, South Africa***

The Oude Molen Eco Village was initiated in 1997 by a small group of proactive social entrepreneurs who, in collaboration with the local community and international volunteers, transformed an abandoned and vandalized hospital complex in Cape town's inner city into a micro-enterprise village. The motivation was to alleviate poverty by pioneering a new and innovative way of maximizing the potential of an underutilized public asset by providing affordable space to emerging small enterprises to create employment opportunities, empower youth, promote urban agriculture, and offer a variety of social and recreational activities to surrounding communities and local and international visitors. Today, Oude Molen has transformed into a vibrant and diverse eco-friendly community that provides jobs, food security and youth development to the local, neighboring, and outlying communities in the region. The ecovillage houses over fifty-five micro enterprises and accommodates over three hundred full time residents. The community was founded in 1997.

### **7. *Eco Caminhos, Brazil***

Eco Caminhos was founded in 2014 to seek a simpler and more committed lifestyle in finding and sharing sustainable solutions. The ecovillage strives for autonomous and communal living in terms of food, energy and building materials, exchange of knowledge, skills and experiences among people and intends to become a self-sustaining community producing its own food, energy and building materials, creating a healthy and active living environment. Today, the ecovillage counts over twenty full time residents. Throughout the year the community is often visited by volunteers or temporary members. Eco Caminhos focusses in particular on permaculture and has created a food forest that largely sustains the community. They are very engaged with their social and natural surroundings and often invite tourists, organize courses for students,

welcome people with depression for rehabilitation, and offer quality, free training for low-income adolescents.

#### **8. *Balenbouche, St. Lucia***

Balenbouche - at St Lucia a small island in the Caribbean - and surrounding property encompasses over 60 hectares of natural vegetation, pastures, rivers and beaches, fruit orchards, tropical gardens, and trails. A mission centered around sustainability, authenticity, and community. The ecovillage offers tours, yoga and massage, meals, retreats and workshops, weddings, volunteering, private events, and photography. The community involves local communities by offering special arrangements with individuals to plant gardens, graze cattle, produce charcoal, and harvest crops at little or no cost. Balenbouche aims to buy locally produced food, participate in community service, and host many local and charitable events. The community keeps free range cattle and has many tree crops on the estate. Besides, they grow some vegetables and herbs such as locally grown tropical fruits that include coconut, star fruit, mango, breadfruit, coconut, papaya, soursop, plantain, and banana. Waste is composted, reused, or recycled whenever possible. All buildings are cooled through natural ventilation. Hot water is heated with solar, and laundry is line dried. Most of the transportation needs are met by bus and car pooling. In the future, the ecovillage hopes to grow in numbers and aspires to add two more cottages using green construction practices.

## 4.2 National context

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*Map 3 Mapping national involved ecovillages*



*Source: van Mierlo (2021)*

In an aging society, sustainability and community building become increasingly more important in Dutch urban planning policies. Municipalities start to ecologically renovate neighborhoods and give more space to bottom-up citizen initiatives. Although this trend allows for more ‘ecovillage-like’ initiatives to arise, this certainly has not always been the case. Most ecovillages involved in this study have been founded in this last ten years and all have experiences serious setbacks to get to the point where they are today. The Dutch institutional framework simply does not lend itself to alternative housing structures, collective mortgages and dwelling shared by a multifold of people. Because of land scarcity, municipalities often prefer more profit-orientated developments. No other European countries has as many terraced houses as the Netherlands (Mijering et al., 2007). However, like in most alternative trends, pioneers pave the way for

those who follow. Due to perseverance and continuation, the process for futuristic ecovillage becomes easier as knowledge and experiences are extensively shared across the Dutch ecovillage movement.

The Netherlands currently has 13 ecovillages affiliated with the GEN-NL. Six are currently under construction and another 15 are pending approval. Besides, there are dozens of similar initiatives which are not connected to the GEN-NL. Out of all existing initiatives, five have been visited. This is their story.

### 1. *Hof van Moeder Aarde, Neede*

The community was founded in 2016 by four people. 'Hof van Moeder Aarde sits on 3,5 hectares with a large farm that functions as the main dwelling. During fieldwork, the community counted twelve full time adult residents accompanied by six children. The youngest person being five years old and the oldest in his 60s. The ecovillage has created a mini campsite. This facilitated the possibility to allow for a diversity of accommodations. Throughout the year, the community attracts a lot of volunteers and temporary residents. They offer outsiders the possibility to contribute to maintenance of the property in exchange for food, shelter, and social activities. During the fieldwork period, this group consisted of at least ten people. The community organizes two weekly working days that are also open for interested outsiders. Prior to such a working day, one of the community members emails a to-do list and simultaneously reflects on the previous working day by sharing a variety of pictures. All people that have engaged are all

*image 2 Communal diner at 'het Hof'*



*Source: van Mierlo (2021)*

incorporated in this email, in this way the community remains in close contact with everyone who contributed. Spirituality, cultural and musical social activities play a central role within the ecovillage. There are weekly organized dance parties, concerts, yoga, and retreat sessions. ‘Hof van Moeder Aarde’ has a vegetable garden and a biological supermarket from which its members buy products to use. There are ponies, goats, chickens, and dogs across the property.

## 2. *Ppauw, Wageningen*

*image 3 Ecovillage Ppauw*

The ecovillage Ppauw is located just on the edge of Wageningen. The squatted property was founded almost ten years ago and currently has around ten residents. The squatter-like character of the village has attracted more people from the squatter- and artist-scene and has resulted in a mix of people who are motivated to live as sustainably as possible and people who are attracted to the free-living at Ppauw. The community lives completely off-grid which creates challenges in



*Source: van Mierlo (2021)*

order to realize clean drinking water and electricity. The community organizes multiple events for outsiders to join such as working days, permaculture courses and primary education programs for children to learn about the concept of an ecovillage. Because of the squat status the ecovillage is likely to find new property within the coming years. Due to this uncertainty, it is difficult to attract new members or to expand in dwellings.

### 3. *Ecodorp Bergen, Bergen aan zee*

The eco community of Bergen was founded in 2013 by five people. Prior to the ecovillage destination the area was a military aircraft terrain used for practices. During the early 2000s the Ministry of Defence decided to give back parts of their territory as many of them were underused. However, the large property of fifteen hectares at Bergen aan zee was due to its physical location close to sea and Amsterdam aimed for housing purposes. When the financial crisis in 2008 hit Dutch housing market, project developers were not interested anymore to invest. The property became vacant in 2013 for a bit over a ton the entire piece of land was bought, and the ecovillage was established. Nowadays the community consists of seventeen residents with the aim to grow in numbers in coming years. In order to do so, the rightful destination plan should first be obtained in order to be structurally built. Hence, during the time of fieldwork housing accommodations were mostly temporary such as tiny houses on trailers, yurts, tents, and vans.

*image 4 Former aircraft shed reused as bar*



*Source: van Mierlo (2021)*



Three times a week the community comes together for meetings and every Thursday they organize a working day that attracts a lot of interested people from outside. The community is setting up a food forest, and a vegetable garden aims to filter water from the lake which is part of the property to irrigate the surrounding land.

At the property VOVIE - an alternative primary school - can also be found. This education is not initiated by the ecovillage. However, both visions complement each other. Children are schooled in courses like permaculture, cooking and body language and the environment created by the ecovillage forms a perfect learning environment for them. Because of the presence of this primary school, the community attracts a lot of parents and other interested people. This creates a strong connection with the outside world which has a positive impact on the ecovillages' image.

#### 4. *Land van Een, Surhuizum*

The ecovillage 'Land van Een' consists of only six full-time residents and was founded in 2015. By means of a mortgage the community was able to purchase three hectares of land which include a small lake and a forest edge for separation of the yard.

*image 5 Ecovillage Land van Een*



*Source: van Mierlo (2021)*

From all community members only one person is still employed while the others enjoy retirement. The community organizes monthly activities for both community members and interested outsiders such as a zweethut ceremony, labyrinth, drum circle and gardening courses. The property entails a large farm which is shared by the residents. Furthermore, they maintain a large vegetable garden, and have goats and chicken. 'Land van Een' aims to have a minimal ecological footprint by reusing rainwater for toilets, draining energy from multiple solar panels, and heating the farm by means of fire chips.

## 5. *De Hobbitstee, Wapserveen*

Located in the Dutch countryside, 'de Hobbitstee' is the oldest ecovillage within the Netherlands. The community was founded in 1968 and currently counts nineteen full-time residents of which nine children. Today, one of the original founders still lives in the community. De Hobbitstee owns eight hectare of land and around seven dwellings. Moreover, the community runs their own bakery which supplies its residents

but also sells to outsiders. At the property a diversity of animals can be found accompanied by both a vegetable garden and a so-called 'pluktuin'. People pay a fixed price and in return have the possibility to put together their own naturally grown flower bouquet.

*image 6 Accommodation 'de Deel' at de Hobbitstee*



*Source: van Mierlo (2021)*

## 6. *IEWAN, Nijmegen*

The IEWAN community was founded in 2014. The ecovillage currently counts 44 adults and nine children who all live together in the self-designed complex made of adobe, straw, and wood. The common garden is based on permaculture principles and aims to largely supply the community members with fresh produce. Moreover, the ecovillage rents out workplaces and offers courses on sustainability topics in their guest house. The community has been realized by means of the ‘plant je vlag’ initiative which was initiated by the municipality of Nijmegen in an attempt to find developments for the vacant property at Lend located in north of the city. IEWAN has set an example for many others and their openness towards outsiders has inspired the municipality to allow for more like-minded initiatives. Shortly after the IEWAN establishment, eco community ‘Zuiderveld’ was founded.

*image 7 IEWAN, Nijmegen*



*Source: IEWAN (2017)*

## 5. The Ecovillage

The first empirical chapter aims to broaden and deepen the understanding of an ecovillage. This will be done by discussing its origin, location, property, community size and representation.

### 5.1 Origin

All ecovillages this study engaged with have quite recently been established and are all founded over the last fifty years. The majority of all these foundations fall in line in what different scholars observe as a broader environmental conscious development that took place between the 1990s and early 2000s (Schehr, 1997; Ergas, 2010). Based on all fourteen participating ecovillages, ‘de Hobbitstee’ in the Netherland is the oldest with its establishment in 1968. During fieldwork, one of the original founders was still living in the community. ‘Het Hof van Moeder Aarde,’ founded in 2016, is the most recently established ecovillage.

With the exception of Oude Molen located in Cape towns’ inner city that repurposed an old psychiatric hospital, all ecovillages have obtained a piece of land that was either unused or vacant prior to its foundation. The way in which land is obtained differs greatly. For example, the property of Ppauw in Wageningen is squatted and is still not officially recognized by the municipality to this day. The ecovillage of Kuthumba in South Africa is privately owned in exchange for the maintenance of indigenous forest that is part of the property. Thus, ownership is granted under certain conditions. Whereas all ecovillages within the Netherlands are obtained by means of purchase. The process of purchasing has encountered significant resistance in many cases which is especially true for all ecovillages within the Netherlands. Kasper (2008) also underlines the challenges ecovillages face in both formation and maintenance. The biggest initial challenges are finding the land, money, and people, to realize the idea once it is hatched. It is not uncommon for groups to spend years looking for their final location. Christian (2003) even states that nine of ten ecovillages attempt to fail in their aim to set up a community. Legislation regarding financing often does in many European countries not allow for a collective mortgage. Moreover, housing regulations often restrict a limited number of non-family related people bound to a single dwelling. Hence, building a second accommodation seems a logical addition but also this is often paired with difficulties. Without having the rightful destination plan, owning a large property does still not guarantee community establishment.

Thus, in line with observations by scholars (Ergas, 2010; Christian, 2003), setting up an ecovillage has shown to be far from easy, which is unfortunate given its potential and growing popularity over the last decades.

## 5.2 Location

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While the concept ‘ecovillage’ suggests a predominant rural setting this study asks for a broader understanding of this statement. Ecovillages are indeed mostly located in rural areas however the reason behind this fact can use some more nuance. The majority of informants state being located in a rural area is out of necessity rather than preference. The unifying concept has always been one of vision, whether intentional or traditional, and whether rural or urban. Ecovillages are just as relevant in inner cities, though fewer examples exist because of the far greater difficulty of establishment (Jackson, 2008). The following quote by one of my participants clearly explains way:

*“Yes, I mean it is just very difficult to grow tomatoes when you have a ten square meter apartment.”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 22/2/2021, Small footprint)*

Another valid reason is land price, as land in general becomes cheaper when it is located in the countryside this is an explanation for the physically remote and rural location of many communities. Out of all ecovillages I have been in contact with, only IEWAN, Nijmegen and Oude Molen, Cape Town are located in an urban environment. This is in line with the estimation of the GEN stating a proportion 80/20 when it comes to rural/ urban location. However, four out of fourteen communities are still located close to a city. Eco Caminhos is only a two-and-a-half-hour drive away from the metropolis Rio de Janeiro and Toustrup Mark located in Denmark’s countryside is only forty-five minutes by car from Aarhus; the second largest city within the country.

*It's not so much about the countryside and isolating ourselves from the city but more about living with the land and trying to regenerate.”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 22/2/2021, Small footprint, Estonia)*

It is however not only out of necessity that ecovillages are mostly found in green environments instead of concrete cities. Living in an environment that is almost completely surrounded by nature also facilitates a deep connection with the natural environment. Something that has been brought up several times during conversations with participants. The awareness of us humans being a part *of* nature rather than living *apart* from is deeply rooted in Degrowth as well as ecovillage mindsets.

### 5.3 The plot

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The property owned by a community varies greatly in size. 'Land van Een', the Netherlands owns three hectares which include a small lake, whereas Kuthumba, South Africa sits on 160 hectares of land. Most of which is indigenous forest but only shared by sixty full time residents (online interview, 23/3/2021, Kuthumba). Oude Molen - which is the other ecovillage in South Africa - has a front garden of 25 hectares that is only used by 70 residents. (Semi-structured interview, 26/3/2021, Oude Molen). As almost all ecovillages aspire for differential and multiple accommodations, food cultivation and communal activities, my participants observe a large-scale property as a must have in order to realize such ideas.

Based on data collected during the fieldwork period and conducted online interviews, the following six aspects have been analyzed at all engaged ecovillages. First, a wide variety of housing structures. My participants have often underlined the importance of affordability in relation to housing. Yurts, vans, tiny houses, trailers, handcrafted cottages, farms, and regular houses can all be observed. Second, all ecovillages include shared facilities such as a guest house for visitors to use. This is paired with public toilets and showers. Third, as addressed in literature, ecovillages tend to integrate human activities into the natural environment (Meijering, 2012). Hence, untouched nature makes up for a significant proportion in many communities. Fourth, the cultivation of food is often realized by means of gardens and food forests. Fifth, although seldom used for personal use, animals are observed in all fourteen connected communities. Pigs, horses, ponies, cows, chicken, and fish are common in such ecovillages. Lastly, group facilities that allow for communal activities are typical for ecovillages. Hall (2015) praises ecovillages for their communal engagement which manifests itself in particular on a spiritual, cultural, and musical level. An open-air theatre, zweethut<sup>8</sup>, ceremonies and labyrinth are public spaces that can be observed in multiple communities.

### 5.4 Community size

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Although different scholars argue that an ecovillage is defined as a human-scale settlement with between 50 and 500 members (Meijering, 2012; Ergas, 2010, Kasper, 2008), the majority of communities this study engaged with do not even count fifty full time residents. This - according to my respondents - has multiple reasons. One of my participants noted during my time spent at 'Het hof van Moeder Aarde' that they consciously chose to allow only twelve full time residents in order to remain a completely horizontal and sociocratic way of governing. Meaning that each member has veto on every subject and can bring in anything they want to discuss. Another explanation for the small population size is that many ecovillages

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<sup>8</sup> Typical observed spiritual activity common at ecovillages. The ceremony is based on a shamanistic ceremony allows people to purify in physical, mental, and emotional terms.

have only been active for a few years and still aspire to grow. As literature shows, the combination of ecological design with community building as visible in ecovillages, is only coined since the early 1990s and therefore still growing.

When asking about any aspirations for the near future, many of my participants responded with the hope that the community will grow in size. As stated by my participant from Eco Caminhos, Brazil:

*“We have planned construction on a new residence for the ecovillage this year to attract a lot more people and long-term residents.”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 16/3/2021, Eco Caminhos)*

However, the aspiration to grow in numbers and actually having the capabilities to do so, turned out to be two different things. Besides communities that consciously choose to remain small-scaled out of preference like ‘het Land van Een’. Another reason mentioned to stay relatively small is the importance of community bonding in relation to size. One of my participants from IEWAN in the Netherlands noted the following:

*“To be fair I think 52 is a pleasant number because it really allows you to really get to know everyone. With a lot more people this will get difficult”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 12/3/2021, IEWAN)*

For those communities that do aspire to grow in numbers, many do not have the space or permission to expand. In the case of Balenbouche and Toustrup Mark the property has reached its maximum capacity.

Besides full-time members of the community, temporary members like volunteers are part of almost all researched ecovillages in some sort of way. Offering voluntary work is an often-observed tool to gain extra hands to maintain food production or for housing construction for example. In 2017 ‘de Hobbitstee’ designed what is called ‘de Deel’. An experimental housing construction made of adobe and straw with a greenhouse that functions as a natural heating system. By using Workaway, a global long-term volunteer platform, the ecovillage was able to attract over a hundred volunteers that all contributed to the realization of this extraordinary accommodation that currently houses two large families. Volunteers received shelter, food, and utilities in return for their work at ‘de Hobbitstee’. Most ecovillages offer voluntary training on permaculture, farming, and construction. Volunteers are able to develop skills and by practicing they contribute to the maintenance of the property. At ‘het hof van Moeder Aarde’ volunteers come and go and are always part of the community, without the help of volunteers they would not be able to run a campsite, maintain their property and have a functioning garden. The volunteers therefore often unofficially make the community larger than its official registered members.

Obtaining new members is organized differently in all ecovillages however all have some sort of application and introductory procedure. Typically, it starts with online conversations before a potential newcomer is temporarily invited to see if both parties can get along with one another. As all members of the community have some sort of say in who can join their community. This has been proven to possibly be a long and intense process for both the potential newcomer as the community members. Financially in most cases new full-time members can buy themselves in after a trial period which then offers them co-rights. Where typically in trial periods or in cases of short-term membership rental agreements are made. An example by one of my participants living in Estonia:

*“What happens when you join later is that the land is co-owned by everyone. So, it means that everyone puts euros in the box which then can be used for maintenance and innovation in different projects.”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 22/2/2021, Small Footprint)*

## 5.5 Representation

This section will describe the representation of ecovillages based on three dimensions; political, ecological, and social. Meijering (2012) - who researched a variety of ecovillages around Europe and focused in particular on their ideals and practices - used these same three dimensions and highlights that the combination of all three dimensions is typically embodied by ecovillages (p. 35). Ecovillages strive to live in a communal way that is often away from urban life with a desire to be ecological sustainable and express and share these ideals with the outside world.

### 5.5.1 Ecological dimension

Reduction of the pressure of human settlements on nature is the key to sustainability, argues Jackson (2004, p. 5) According to Ergas (2010) it is the western lifestyle in particular that puts extreme pressure on the natural environment. The separated structures of home, workplace and recreation is the culprit of the increasing energy consumption paired with co2 emissions. Ecovillages - which are often seen as a counterreaction towards globalization (Jackson, 2004) - aim to tackle this issue in particular. They create work where people live, produce fresh local foods, and allow for a diversity of recreational and creative activities, all within walking distance, resulting in a higher quality of life while using fewer resources, argues Meijering (2012). The ecovillages discussed in this study focus on sustaining the environment



through living simple, community-oriented lives in rural surroundings. They aim for ecological sustainability through practices such as generating solar energy, raising animals, and growing their own food. Applying permaculture principles is a widely used tool to sustain the natural environment. Permaculture is the development of agricultural ecosystems intended to be sustainable and self-sufficient. This organic technique is based on crop rotation and does not make use of fertilizers or pesticides. When both climate and soil fertility are in favor, permaculture can generate a significant amount of nutrition stock. One member of Small Footprint describes this as follows:

*“Permaculture is not like farming in the sense that you let a lot to nature. You try to achieve the most with the least afford. We are not trying to produce hectares of things which would require a lot of men and machine power.”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 22/2/2021, Small footprint)*

However, it mostly takes years for a community to turn a regular piece of forest into agroforestry. For this reason, some ecovillages have indicated that applying permaculture is something they aspire to but has not realized yet. “We don't do a lot of permaculture; we want to start it again. But that's something we haven't been able to do. We just don't have the people that are trained and motivated to do it. And it takes time to establish.” (Semi-structured interview, 28/3/2021, Balenbouche estate)

### **5.5.2 Social dimension**

Ecovillages create alternative social models to consumerism and institutionalization of social services, argues Jackson (2004 p. 4). They create an environment that offers children the possibility to experience the whole of society and nature within walking distance. In line with observations from Meijering (2012, p. 36), ecovillages are strongly committed to contributing to “a better world” and are active in creating lifestyles that present alternatives to mainstream society. The interest in such alternatives has increased as the values of ecovillages have become more accepted and appreciated in mainstream society (Singh et al., 2019). This rapidly growing tolerance is largely due to their attitude and openness towards the ‘outside world’. One of the IEWAN members described how they intent to interact with outsiders:

*“We have deliberately chosen to not be a gated community, but rather be open towards our surroundings. We use our guesthouse for public courses, workshops and theater.”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 12/3/2021, IEWAN)*

Though they are often located in remote areas, ecovillages remain involved in the wider society by organizing courses for interested outsiders (Meijering, 2012). for example, on organic farming, retreats, or through participating in the efforts of environmental organizations (2012, p. 33).

communal activities are as well on the agenda of every ecovillage. Communal activities with the residents like dining together, taking care of the garden and sometimes even running businesses and schools for the children. There are also communal activities for outsiders to participate in, often one or two days in the week visitors or friends of the community are welcome to help with various tasks.

### 5.5.3 *Political dimension*

In terms of governance at macro scale there is large concern among ecovillages about the current way humanity lives at the expense of the earth rather than *with* it (Sherry, 2019). These concerns translate into a political dimension expressed in the form of a strong sense of social awareness and environmental justice. Hence, taking care of the natural environment is something that is often being highlighted by my participants: “[...] what has been maintained is a strong sense of protecting the natural environment around us.” (Semi-structured, interview, 23/3/2021, Kuthumba, South Africa). Almost all communities are in some way involved and committed to create awareness and share it with their social environment, online, offline or both. Meijering (2012) – who previously got introduced- noted that though ecovillages are mostly located in remote areas they often remain involved in the wider society by organizing courses for interested outsiders (Meijering, 2012, p. 33). This is absolutely in line with the conducted data from this study. The educational element seems to be the connecting factor. Most ecovillages are absolutely open for connecting with their surroundings and often it is even their goal to do so. My participants talk about the need to ‘plant seeds in people’s minds’, to share their view on the way society *should* live and what this entails in terms of production and consumption. The willingness to create ‘change’ for the better is often included in the educational aspect. Green village Raipur – as part the LP4Y project - for instance recruits’ youth between 18 and 25 to offer education that focuses on professional competences and self-awareness.

*“We put seeds inside them [youth] and we activate them to be confident about themselves and we prove to them that they can do something. Even if they come from very excluded areas.”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 17/3/2021, Green Village)*

Moreover, the educational element does not limit itself to the next generations but also includes the spreading of the ecovillage model itself. My participant from Small Footprint, Estonia describes this as

follows: “It's to show that we can partly be more autonomous, advocate for it and have political impact for more of this to happen. For cities to transform and cultivate more, even inside its centers.” (Semi-structured, interview, 22/2/2021).

The political engagement observed within this study is not necessarily about the politics of a country. A lot of ecovillagers are focused on education and social awareness in different ways but simultaneously completely estranged from *mainstream politics*. During fieldwork at ‘het Hof van Moeder Aarde’, Dutch informants were often unaware of the result of the national political election that took place a couple weeks prior to my visit. Another example: one of them was writing his second book on topics linked to social awareness to spread his (political) message but was also by choice not registered as a citizen in the Netherlands and therefore not even able to vote. The political engagement is therefore not necessarily linked to engaging in national politics.

### ***Concluding remarks***

Thus, most ecovillages engaged in this study have emerged over the last decades. Setting up an ecovillage appears to be very difficult as most initiatives fail in their attempt. Although ecovillages do occur both in urban and rural contexts, they are mostly located in remote areas surrounded by nature as this favors property prices. Because having a large piece of land is almost seen as a requirement in order to realize certain ideals. An ecovillage property is characterized by a variety of housing types, a vegetable garden, animals, and common areas used for cultural or spiritual activities. Ecovillages vary greatly in size but are in general smaller than literature states. Only three participating ecovillages have over fifty full-time residents. Finally, an ecovillage leads by example. It aims to translate its ideals into everyday practicalities which can be scaled under environmental, social, and political representations. An ecovillage aims to regenerate the natural environment, connect with its social surroundings by organizing courses on sustainability topics and is politically engaged by actively sharing its vision with the outside world.

## 6. The ecovillager

The second empirical chapter dives into the people involved in ecovillages; its residents. The ecovillager is analyzed by discussing the cooperative culture, the ubuntu philosophy and the everyday life within ecovillages.

### 6.1 A portrait

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*The 9<sup>th</sup> of April. It is Friday morning 07.45h when the alarm rings. Third night in our van and I am already getting used to the cold and the uncomfortable bed. Must have been the nerves supplemented with excitement. I open the sliding door of our campervan and start walking towards the toilets. Our van is located at the beginning of the large camping field so each person that goes for groceries or takes a shower automatically crosses our little house on wheels. No background noise from cars and no demand vehicles supplying supermarkets with new stock like I am used to back in my student room in Utrecht. Just birds whispering and the rooster pressing on and on. After my toilet visit, I walk back, stop at the animals, watch the ponies, some goats and a dog and inhale fresh air, a scent of trees mixed with compost enters my nose. Back in the van I turn on the gas and place the percolator on the fire for some fresh coffee. Mart, a self-willed man who has been living in his camper for over 30 years, greets me as he passes to walk the dog. Well, in his case the energetic dog seems to walk Mart.*

*Today is the ceremony and farewell of Marieke. One of the founders of the community and a highly beloved woman who has gone too early. Although Roos and I have not known her, we are both deeply touched by the palpable collective grief among all residents and the beauty of her organized ceremony. After breakfast I am observing the campsite. Yurts, gypsy wagons, tiny houses, tents, and caravans. There seems room for every individual here. Helmi, a gentle spiritual woman who is staying at 'het Hof'; for a month or so, walks by and invites us into the Yurt she is staying in of which I am highly fascinated about. Though I have not even spent 48 hours at this place it feels like I know these people for more than a month. Their pure openness, honesty and love moves me deeply. Why does this way of interacting with each other feel so far from what I am used to? And why is this bond of trust not the norm in our mainstream society, is what I am asking myself.*

*Marieke's ceremony was kept in private circles however everyone who knew her was welcome after the ceremony to form a supportive procession, from the ceremony to the vehicle in which she would be transported away. We are standing in this line of people forming an arch with branches, singing in some indigenous language, and feeling the light Marieke had represented. On an altar made of blossom trees, she is carried forward by a group consisting of relatives and close friends. Judith, a sweet caring woman*

*who lived in a village close by but comes here like it is her second home, wraps her arm around me as the crowd passes. No matter how difficult such losses are, life is also celebrated by the way the ceremony is carried forward. There is singing, tears that fall, and playing children in the background who are visibly too young to consciously experience this mournful moment.*

*(Diary, 9/04/2021, Hof van Moeder Aarde)*

As stated by Ergas (2010), ecovillagers are rich in cultural and human capital (p. 35). The vignette above tries to communicate the ways in which such human capital is experienced during ethnographic fieldwork. To provide a deeper understanding of the ecovillager it is utmost important to address core characteristics that can be observed around this group. In line with findings from other scholars, social reasons and environmental considerations are often explanations for ecovillagers to join a community (Kirby, 2003; Kasper, 2008). Ergas (2010) identifies ecovillagers as a voluntary simplicity movement in which individuals make lifestyle changes as a reaction to consumerism and materialism. In other words, ecovillagers ‘downshift’ their lifestyles by explicitly choosing to earn less money, work less hours, buy less consumer goods, and make their own needed goods (p. 35). However, these findings are mostly on a cultural level and do not discuss the ecovillager as an individual. One thing that has come to the fore during this study, is the diversity in personalities attracted by ecovillages. Therefore, this study follows the argument of Kirby (2003) who states generalizing norms and values would detract from the collective identity of the ecovillage. Therefore, instead of focusing on individual personality traits to describe the ecovillager and risk generalizing a diverse group of people, this research will attempt to describe cultural traits that give a deeper understanding of the ecovillagers as a whole. Based on online interviews and fieldwork, the ecovillager emphasizes community building and analyzes personal growth on an individual level as ultimate satisfaction. The different characteristics observed throughout this study all come together in what scholars define as the ‘cooperative culture’ (Mychajluk, 2017; Kirby, 2003).

## 6.2 Cooperative culture

As Mychajluk (2017) states, a cooperative culture is at the heart of an ecovillage approach. It is not just about sharing, but largely about a way of interacting that places relationships at the center. The three main elements which collectively shape the cooperative culture are: participatory decision-making that values all perspectives, the peaceful resolution of conflict, and a ‘we rather than me’ mentality (Mychajluk, 2017). A member from Kuthumba shared his view on the cooperative culture within his ecovillage.

*“I want to learn how to live together; what kind of social systems work, how we design our lives and I want to experience more intimate relationships. Not only with my family but also with people around us.”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 23/3/2021, Kuthumba)*

The importance of a thriving cooperative culture among ecovillagers becomes abundantly clear in the foundation of the ecovillage and its continuation in particular. In her book *‘practical tools to grow ecovillages and intentional communities’* Christian (2003) argues that nine of ten attempts fail in their aim to set up an ecovillage. The challenge is not in learning how to farm or to construct buildings for the first time but simply the lack of tools, experiences, and wisdom among individuals to coexist harmoniously, overcome conflicts and realize collaborative decision-making (Christian, 2003; Mychajluk 2017, p. 182). During conversations and online interviews about what *mainstream society* could learn from an intentional community like an ecovillage, many participants underlined the exact same aspects as argued by Mychajluk (2017). Social interaction, the ability to cooperate with each other and to overcome disagreements were without exception prioritized over sustainable implementations such as permaculture or CO2 neutral construction. A member from Toustrup Mark described his perception of their collective contribution as follows:

*“I Actually think that when you live here, the biggest contribution is you get educated in working and building with people. You get educated on personal stuff like how to forgive people, how to get along when you have a conflict. When it comes to sustainability of course we should save energy and minimize our waste, but I think the biggest driver for creating a sustainable future is that we need to be able to work together and agree on stuff. And here you get real life education on how to live and cooperate with people you sometimes don't agree with.*

*(Depth-interview, 17/05/2021, Toustrup Mark)*

Moreover, based on conducted interviews, the shift towards this ‘we rather than me’ mentality requires a significant amount of un/learning. Since for the majority of ecovillagers, life prior to the ecovillage took place in a fundamentally competitive and hyper-individualistic world of capitalism, to move into such an opposite cooperative culture is stated challenging. Highlighting this challenge, a resident from ‘Small Footprint’ addresses the importance of social structures within the community:

*“You need very good rules and let's say a circle of elders to help order that. You need different levels of social structures. You need people that are a bit wise and will try to navigate you. You need people that are energetic and try to revolutionize and you need people that are more family-like and try to keep the fire going.”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 22/2/2021, Small Footprint)*

The true difficulties that come along with founding a well-functioning ecovillage were strikingly not visible during the ethnographic fieldwork. The ecovillages that are completed and survived the extended period from idea to thriving reality have obviously overcome such difficulties and embodied a cooperative culture. Considering only one in ten ecovillages survives this period, it becomes prevalent how rare these realities are. Being able to share the workload on any subject across community members facilitated by a communal lifestyle, is an absolute benefit. But the effort and willingness it takes to get to this point are often overlooked, concludes Christian (2003). In line with this argument a member from ‘Small Footprint’ states:

*“It is simply not easy to live with so many people because it creates tension at different levels. It creates love, tension among kids and friction between adults. It teaches us how much we have forgotten to live with other human beings. because it was the norm a hundred years ago.”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 22/2/2021, Small Footprint).*

### 6.3 Everyday Ubuntu

In addition to the cooperative culture, this section aims to provide a slightly more individualistic conceptualization of the ecovillager by discussing the concept of *ubuntu*. This study suggests that the philosophy of *ubuntu* accurately defines the ecovillagers’ character. The concept originates from traditional southern African cultures and is based on the idea that one is truly human only in community with other people (Murove, 2012). It is best translated into English as humanness or being human and is expressed as a character trait for both individuals and groups. Example given, when we want to compliment or praise someone we say, ‘*he or she has ubuntu*’. Meaning that this particular person is generous, hospitable, friendly, caring, and compassionate. As stated by Lutz (2009), an essential part of the philosophy is that the individual does not pursue the common good instead of his or her own good, but rather pursues his or her own good through pursuing the common good.

*“People are not individuals, living in a state of independence, but part of a community, living in relationships and interdependence.”*

*(Turaki, 2006, p. 36).*

Murove (2012) analyzes ubuntu as a unifying factor that brings people together regardless of their background or access to wealth. Most participated ecovillages start from the realization that within a collective group, the success and well-being of an individual very much depends on the success and well-being of all community members. The ecovillager fully embraces the understanding that humans are naturally communal rather than individualistic and therefore accepts and respects any individual regardless his or her status. This openness and acceptance have multiple times been observed during fieldwork. Moreover, the ubuntu philosophy could likely be the explanation for the diversity of personalities observed in every ecovillage.

## 6.4 Everyday life

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*14 may, 14h. Only a few hours after our arrival Roos and I are invited to work - along with Lucie - in the vegetable garden. The rhubarb is ripe and can be pulled, says Lucie. She invites us into her kitchen to prepare a rhubarb apple crumble to serve during the ‘aanschuijftafel’ later that day. Along with some stems I bring in some fresh apples and start cooking on our dessert. Lucie shows us around in her tiny atmospheric house. While she is telling us that it is actually pretty hard to downsize in materials, I am noticing myself that I probably have never seen such an overcrowded house in my life. There is literally stuff everywhere. While preparing the crumble I feel like a young kid again who visits his grandma. The way Lucie interacts with us, shows interests and shares her personal belongings like she has known us for years reminds me of childhood. I put the crumble in the oven and make my way towards the guesthouse while the first friends have just arrived.*

*In honor of our visit, Sity has organized what they call the ‘aanschuijftafel’. A monthly activity that brings together a variety of people - mostly friends and people from nearby villages - to enjoy a communal diner. I step into the guesthouse and observe three long tables positioned in a triangle shape. The hearth fills the room with warmth and on my left, I observe a table full of Mexican delicacies. Once everyone has arrived Neeltje - one of the members and organizer of the ‘aanschuijftafel’ introduces me and Roos and invites everyone to take a seat. A few women immediately show interest in my research and are highly curious about my experiences so far in ecovillages. We talk, enjoy dinner, and get to know a lot of new people. It is heartwarming to see how much joy such a night brings to everyone. After finishing the apple-crumble -*



*which was well liked - the space is slowly emptying. People that hug each other goodbye and leave some euros in a box. No fixed prices. I think it is typical for an ecovillage. With a satisfied feeling we return to our van.*

*(Diary, 14/5/2021, Land van Een)*

“Ecovillages tend to practice their ideals in their everyday lives, which creates a sense of togetherness between its members, argues Meijering (2012, p. 38). The vignette above aims to describe ways in which this togetherness arises by exemplifying practices such as gardening and communal dining. In line with scientific literature, conducted data during this research suggest that social activities like meditation, music, sports, theater, cooking, dining, and parties play a significant role in the strong sense of togetherness observed at ecovillages (Mijering, 2012; Mychajluk, 2017; Ergas, 2010). As argued by Jackson (2004, p. 2), instead of a strong separation of home, work, and social activities - as observed in most *mainstream* western societies - it is the integration of these three core elements in one place that facilitates this sense of connection with both people and surrounding. One member of Eco Caminhos - who joined the community recently - described this contradiction as follows:

*“I think in developed nations work, exercise, and experience with nature are highly differentiated, they're separated. You go to work, can sit down in an office, and do whatever work you do. Then you go home and if you're not me, then you go to the gym and work out for one or two hours, in order to get your exercise. Here [at Eco Caminhos], I get my physical exercise during my work. I get that contact with nature during my work. I don't have to go on a hike on the weekend at a city park, to make eye contact with nature and then post about it on Instagram.”*

*(Depth- interview, 18/05/2021, Eco Caminhos)*

The following section will discuss the integration of such basic structures into the daily lives of ecovillagers.

#### **6.4.1 Work**

Secluded from children and elderly, the majority of ecovillagers is employed. Money generating activities sometimes take place outside the community, but often within the ecovillage. As stated by Schehr (1997), the rural location surrounded by nature offers relaxation, tranquility and stimulates creativity. Hence, this seems to correlate with the type of work performed by ecovillagers. Ethnographic fieldwork during this study has observed a variety of handcrafted labor. Artists, painters, sculptors, builders, potters, musicians

etc. The large property of ecovillages often facilitates an own workplace like a studio or warehouse that allows for construction and creation. Some ecovillages also generate money by selling produce from the vegetable garden or food forest. When ecovillagers have employment outside their ecovillage the type of work is often associated with sustainability in terms of nutrition, construction, or energy supply. A lot of ecovillagers within the Netherlands for instance work or worked at a biological supermarket.

*image 8 Construction Day at 'de Hobbitstee'*



*Source: van Mierlo (2021)*

#### **6.4.2 Nutrition**

As addressed by many other scholars that have researched ecovillages (Daly, 2017; Meijering, 2012), also this study has observed that many communities, particularly those with greater land area, produce a significant proportion of their food requirements from their own organic farms and gardens. Organically farming reduces the impact of packaging, distribution, and industrial farming practices which all contribute to lowering the Ecological Footprint (EF), argues Daly (2017). Participants within this study also address

the importance of seasonal and local food to avoid mass production and global distribution. One of my informants from 'Small Footprint' explains ways in which they sustain themselves throughout the year.

*“For spring, we live on our pumpkins and two big freezers that are full of stuff. We drink the apple juice which we froze, and we still have an entire room full of pumpkin. I mean, they are still very good, they mature slowly, and we still have some potatoes that we grew in the salon. So, there is no need to buy external and additional stuff”*

*(Online interview, 22/2/2021, Small Footprint)*

*image 9 Vegetable Garden at 'Land van Een'*



*Source: van Mierlo (2021)*

Whilst not all communities were strictly vegetarian, reduced levels of meat consumption were also common, and most shared community meals were vegetarian only. In the preparation of meals, ecovillagers predominantly use organic ingredients. Food-related practices, such as gardening, sharing farm produce, and sharing common meals, were seen as important builders of strengthening the social capital within the community, argues Sherry (2019).

*“Although it requires a bit more time and effort, eating your own grown food and share it with others brings so much satisfaction”*

*(Ethnographic fieldwork, 19/05/2021, Bergen)*

### **6.4.3 Social activities**

Social activities within ecovillages are a common analyzed aspect. During ethnographic fieldwork, the researcher has multiple times participated in ‘working days’ where the community works on certain projects. These can vary from restoration, construction, gardening, or cooking. Hence, such activities require social engagement among its members. Kirby (2003) suggests that due to the cooperative culture within ecovillages, a very strong sense of connection among its members can be analyzed that goes beyond neighbor or roommate relationships. A member of Small Footprint described this relationship as follows:

*“They are definitely much more than roommates because we have different practices together and share emotion and have a forum, so we share our trauma and try to go to collective therapy or healing. We cooperate ten times more than just roommates.”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 22/2/2021, Small Footprint)*

According to Mychajluk (2017), this deep connection is often what gravitates newcomers to such a place. One member of Kuthumba, South Africa describes this connection as:

*“I guess what we're also experiencing is a deeper level of connection and more intense relationships in a sense that they're kind of more intimate”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 22/3/2021, Kuthumba)*

Having a solid group dynamic is the foundation for social activities within a community. Although in some ecovillages there is strong social engagement observed, this is not the case for all communities. Example given Ecovillage Bergen only engages on a professional level by organizing weekly meetings to discuss practicalities. Whereas members from ‘het Hof van Moeder Aarde’ engage with one another on a daily basis. Although (2008) generalizes ecovillagers to be a highly social engaged group, this study argues that this is only occasionally true as an ecovillage attracts highly diverse personalities. A participant from Small Footprint describes this as follows:

*“It is not so easy to live with so many people; it creates tension at different levels. It creates love, tension around kids, it creates many problems, and it teaches us how*

*much we have forgotten to live with other human beings. because it was the norm one hundred years ago.” (Semi-structured interview, 22/2/2021, Small Footprint)*

*image 10 Relaxation*



*Source: van Mierlo (2021)*

### ***Concluding remarks***

Conclusively, because of strong diversity among ecovillages' residents, creating a social environment in which people learn how to cooperate with each other and deal with disagreements is a far bigger challenge than constructing a dwelling for the first time. The majority of communities fail in their attempt to set up an ecovillage as a result of a lack of tools, experiences, and wisdom among individuals to coexist harmoniously and overcome conflicts. Developing a cooperative culture that arises from the ubuntu philosophy is the social foundation for an ecovillage to thrive. If a group of different personalities which comes together based on shared ideas or vision is able to create this social layer, personal interest seems to organically follow as a result of this. The following chapter analyzes to what extent thriving ecovillages contribute to the idea of Degrowth.

## 7. Contribution

After extensively discussing what an ecovillage defines and who are the people affiliated with this type of life, the last result chapter analyzes the extent to which ecovillages contribute to the ideology of Degrowth. Scholars agree, there is a strong tendency that the visions and ideas of a degrowing society can be best embedded in the concept of an ecovillage (Xue, 2014; Singh et al., 2019). Some even state that an ecovillage is the ultimate practical implementation that embodies the ideology of Degrowth (Barca, 2018). This final chapter discusses the extent to which such statements can be followed. Assessing its contribution to Degrowth is done by incorporating three core principles which are inextricably linked to the ideology: circularity, inclusivity, and downscaling.

### 7.1 Circularity

*Friday night 22:30h I open the doors of the van. The kidney beans seem to have a strong effect on my digestion. There is nothing else to do than to make one final stop at the compost toilet. I turn on my headlamp and make my way through the trees. No lights and no traffic noise. just creaky branches and a light breeze. It is almost a full moon. I open the toilet cubicle and place my butt on the toilet seat made of Styrofoam. Though toilet seats made of plastic normally feel quite cold, the Styrofoam absorbs the heat within the cubicle pretty easily resulting in a relatively warm butt which feels quite pleasant. Once I am done, I open up the compost bin and cover my shit with two large scoops of wood chips. The toilet is completely self-designed and runs on compost instead of water. A, for me, strange but amusing idea that the created compost will be used to fertilize the land. I close the door and walk back towards the van.*

*(Diary, 30/04/2021, Ppauw)*

image 11 Compost toilet at 'Ppauw'



Source: van Mierlo (2021)

### 7.1.1 Recycling

*Purely because of the way we have created this place. The fact that we use rainwater to wash our clothes and purify our wastewater to reuse it, you do not notice such things because you just put your laundry in the machine and flush the toilet when you are done but it makes such an impact.*

*(Focus group, 12/3/2021, IEWAN)*

Recycling is at the heart of the ecovillage approach. Waste separation in order to reuse what is still usable is so deeply rooted into ecovillages' origin that, as exemplified by the quote above, most residents do not even notice it. Many communities are established because of environmental concerns. Hence, incorporating an approach that increases sustainability in physical and social terms is often an entry point. According to the GEN (2020) ecovillages recycle, reuse and repair more than half of their consumer goods. Such results also strongly emerged in this study.

Recycling firstly occurs through the composting of natural waste and secondly by the separation of remaining waste in order to reuse what is still usable. Most communities also prioritize reused construction materials such as brick, wood, loam, and clay over the purchase of new ones. Based on participatory observation at ecovillages in the Netherlands this study suggests that the ecovillager is also very creative in terms of recycling. For example, during ethnographic fieldwork at 'het Hof van Moeder Aarde' many trees had recently been cut down. By means of a shredder the community was able to transform large quantities of trees into tiny wood chips that functioned as natural filling for the pathways around the vegetable garden. Furthermore, ecovillage 'Bergen' managed to create a filter system that transports water from the lake - which is a part of the property - to the vegetable garden for the land to be irrigated. In addition, at 'het Land van Een' community members have built public toilets that run on rainwater. Rain is being stored in large water barrels and by using watering cans the urinal can be flushed. And lastly, as shortly described in the introduction, most ecovillages use natural compost toilets. These completely self-designed toilets run on compost instead of water. After a couple visits the collected compost is being stored and can be used for land irrigation.

*“Rather than regular concrete and cement, we have used mud, stone, clay and straw for our construction. These are local elements and most of it is repurposed.”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 23/3/2021, Kumaon Maati)*

### 7.1.2 Renewables

Due to a mixed method of energy provision all engaged ecovillages within this study are partly self-sufficient on energy. Such findings are in line with data from Kasper (2008, p. 13) and Meijering (2007, p. 361) who both researched the extent of self-sufficiency within two specific European communities.

The usage of renewable energy sources contributes greatly to this. The majority of ecovillages have applied clean energy sources. This includes the installation of solar panels and the storage and usage of rainwater. In addition to such renewables, all ecovillages - with the exception of Ppauw who runs completely off-grid - are in some way connected to the grid system to provide for utility services. Although an average amount of energy consumption is not possible to identify, all my informants address the importance of living with an appropriate ecological footprint and therefore aim to minimize their energy consumption. Remarkable is the fact that almost all Dutch ecovillages have installed solar panels, while in South-African and Indian ecovillages this is mainly an aspiration given the relatively high purchase costs.

Secondly, because of the communal aspect fundamental to ecovillages the majority of dwellings and services such as toilets, showers, washing machines and in some cases even cars are shared. This also leads to a low collective energy consumption. Besides, the previously discussed ways in which water is stored and reused for laundry and toilets also adds up to energy savings. Specific numbers on energy efficiency are discussed more in detail in the *downscaling* sector later in this chapter.

Lastly, renewables in a material sense are also central to ecovillages. The use of natural materials such as wood, clay, loam, and straw have been touched upon during every conversation on construction with each of my informants. As described by a member from Kumaon Maati in the previous section, ecovillages often use natural materials that are reused for constructions. For example, 'De Hobbitstee' and 'het Land van Een' have both built a co2 neutral dwelling that completely consists of natural materials. Moreover, just like argued by Sherry (2019) who researched energy consumption among a variety of ecovillages across the US - all engaged ecovillages heavily rely on wood-heating and therefore often do not have a central heating system that runs on electricity.

Thus, although all ecovillages are partly - or in case of Ppauw completely - self-sufficient on energy, most of my informants have stated that becoming completely self-sufficient is seen as the ultimate goal in the long run. Knowing that such a process simply requires time to realize, and many ecovillages have only been founded in recent years, a difference between certain intentions and realities has also come to the surface during interviews. Many respondents noticed that they aspire to depend more on clean energies but due to financial reasons or prioritization of other aspects within the community this has not been realized yet.



*image 13 co2 neutral dwelling de Deel at 'de Hobbitstee'*



*Source: van Mierlo (2021)*

*image 12 Pigs at 'de Hobbitstee'*



*Source: van Mierlo (2021)*

### **7.1.3 Waste disposal**

Making conscious choices on waste is one of the most generalizable topics as I dare to state all ecovillages engage in it. Both large-scale recycling and relatively low energy consumption, as treated above, play a role in conscious waste disposal. In addition, alternative views on consumerism, food and transportation have a contribution to waste as well. In a recent conducted study on waste disposal, Sherry (2019) even states that ecovillages dispose over 70% less waste than the national average. In line with Daly (2017) this study finds the huge reduction in waste is achieved by extensive reuse, recycling, and composting.

This study does not have absolute numbers of waste that participants dispose however it gathered a lot of data on the topic. For example, most informants state to consume mostly unpackaged food instead of plastic covered supermarket food. Due to the presence of a vegetable garden but also due to extended food purchase from local farmers. Moreover, most ecovillages have some special members to their community used as natural waste disposers, mostly chickens, pigs, and goats. Additionally, most consumer goods my informants purchase which cannot be repurposed are biodegradable products and therefore disposing of such items does not harm the natural environment. Basic goods like toothpaste, shampoo and laundry detergent were in all fieldwork cases biodegradable. A study published by Iberdrola (2017) argues that ecovillages recycle, reuse and repair more than half of their consumer goods and 85% transform their organic waste into compost.

### **Concluding remarks**

Even though ecovillages are not as self-sufficient as they inspire to be - almost all are in some way still connected to the grid - they do have embedded a circular lifestyle to a large extent. As we have one earth<sup>9</sup>, the theory of Degrowth stresses the importance to stay within planetary boundaries, extending the already existing resources within society can significantly contribute to get to this point. Reusing, recycling, improvements of waste disposal, using biodegradable products and applying clean energy are essential in the collective mission to shift towards a low-carbon society. As demonstrated by different studies, such aspects within ecovillages already make an impact and are likely to improve within the near future. Therefore, as argued by D'Alessandro (2020) the implementation of circularity within economies, does not necessarily have to be achieved through technological improvements, but perhaps by applying a more simplistic lifestyle.

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<sup>9</sup> *Earth Overshoot Day (EOD) marks the date when humanity has exhausted nature's budget for the year. For the rest of the year, we are maintaining our ecological deficit by drawing down local resource stocks and accumulating carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. In 2021, EOD was on July 29<sup>th</sup>.*

## 7.2 Downscaling

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*“Just by virtue of my lifestyle and the environment in the city, I would engage in materialistic behaviors and consumption, even though I didn't necessarily value it.”*

*(Depth-interview, 16/3/2021, Eco Caminhos)*

As addressed in the methodology chapter, in the context of this research, downscaling is defined in two parts. First by discussing it in an ideological sense, and second, by analyzing the Ecological Footprint of particular ecovillages to analyze downscaling in absolute numbers.

### 7.2.1 Materialism

Materialism involves a lifestyle whereby happiness is achieved through the attainment of material objects, wealth, or status. Therefore, downscaling refers to a shift towards more spiritual, intellectual, or cultural values rather than the obtainment of materials in order to pursue happiness (Schlosberg, 2019). This shift has emerged very strongly throughout this study. Ergas (2010) states that the downshifted ecovillage lifestyle emphasizes community-building and the connection between choices and environmental- and mental wellbeing (p. 35). This is absolutely in line with conducted data gathered during this research. Personal growth that goes beyond intellectuality but also includes growth on a spiritual and collaborative level has been multiple times touched upon during formal interviews. Seldomly, identity or status is represented in a materialistic way and also mental well-being seems to be prioritized over economic status.

In her book *‘The overspent American, why we want what we don't need’* Schor (1998) defines the ecovillage movement as voluntary simplistic with individuals who make lifestyle changes as a response to consumerism and materialism. She argues that ecovillagers downsize their lifestyles by choosing to earn less money, work less hours, buy less consumer goods, and make their own needed goods (Schor, 1998). Ergas (2010) states that although classified as financially poor by the government, ecovillages are rich in cultural and human capital as they are well networked and educated.

Based on participatory observation during fieldwork it is difficult to state whether or not participated ecovillagers work less hours. However, what has become clear is that limited value is attached to money. Although some ecovillagers - particularly young families - are part- or full time employed, many others only search for employment if necessary. As previously discussed, many ecovillages offer free shelter in return for maintenance of the property. Another important aspect is the integration of different social structures in one place. Often work, social activities and physical exercise are integrated at an ecovillage. Therefore, if the ecovillager has job employment within the community, significant time is being

saved as there is no need to travel between places. For instance, during fieldwork at ‘de Hobbitstee’ the community worked collectively on a new outdoor kitchen, physical exercise was generated by construction and social activities took place during lunch in the afternoon and communal dinner at night.

Moreover, the majority of job activities within a community aim to sustain the ecovillagers’ basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothes. Therefore, the ecovillage is also less exposed to materialism when most of the day takes places outside an urban context (Schneider et al., 2010). Because - as described by a member of Eco Caminhos in the introduction quote of this section - it is difficult to withdraw from material behavior when you are constantly exposed to it even if the individual does not support it. Thus, because the ecovillage is less exposed to materialistic behavior it is therefore likely to be also less engaged in it. Hence, this study suggests the ecovillage movement emphasizes cultural and spiritual values among communities as neither identity nor status or well-being is obtained by means of purchasing objects.

### **7.2.2 Ecological Footprint**

The EF is expressed in a biologically productive area in global hectares (gha) that is needed to provide everything a person consumes. This measurement is centered around questions regarding housing, food, waste, energy, and transportation. Based on a study in 2014, if humanity should annually use the total available global hectares this would allow every person to live within 1.8 gha (Carragher & Peters, 2019). However, external factors such as population density and physical factors like landscape influence the available gha per country. In general, western countries have far less available gha compared to less developed countries. For example, every person in Germany can only use 1.5 gha to provide everything he or she consumes, whereas an Argentinian has 6.6. biocapacity gha. In short, the EF varies by context.

By incorporating necessary questions in conducted interviews, this study has estimated the EF of three different ecovillages from different countries. As some questions, especially regarding transportation, very much differ throughout the year the final outcome remains just an estimation. Assessing the EF within this study mainly functions to provide clarity and insight in the differences between ecovillages and society at large and therefore the extent to which such communities downsize. The results conducted in this research are in line with findings from similar studies assessed by Carragher & Peters (2018, p. 869) and Daly (2017, p. 1367).

*IEWAN, the Netherlands 1.6 - 1.9 gha (Dutch average 5.0 in 2017)*

*Eco Caminhos, Brazil 1.5 - 1.7 gha (Brazil average 2.8 in 2017)*

*Toustrup Mark, Denmark 2.4 - 2.7 gha (average Denmark 6.9 in 2017)*

*“We have a lot of common stuff. We don't need to have a washing machine for everybody. We have only three here that we share among all sixty residents.”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 17/5/2021, Toustrup Mark)*

### **Concluding remarks**

Ecovillages show that by integrating basic elements of life to one place located outside an urban context and therefore being less exposed to material behavior, a shift that emphasizes intrinsic values arises. This is not only reflected in an abstract sense, but also absolute numbers outline the significant extent to which ecovillages downsize in terms of their consumption pattern compared to society at large. However, based on such EF estimations even if the entire world population would downsize their production pattern to the average ecovillager we would still over exploit our natural resources and the earth's capacity to facilitate every individual in their basic needs such as food, clothes, and shelter (Raworth, 2017). This is a pretty desperate realization given the radical changes the ecovillage movement have gone through in comparison to mainstream society. Still, such numbers can also inspire and let us rethink our perception and measurements of health and prosperity. The ecovillage exemplifies the impact localism can have in terms of a downscaled ecological footprint. Finally, as rightfully described by a resident of 'Small Footprint':

*“It sounds like it is very stupid but maybe it is all it takes that we need to live a bit more local, a bit more sustainable and a bit autonomous for first world problems to dissolve.”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 22/2/2021, Small Footprint)*

## **7.3 Inclusivity**

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inclusion among ecovillages is measured by incorporating decision-making, conflict resolution and cooperation.

### **7.3.1 Decision-making**

Ecovillages use different decision-making methods which mostly involve everyone's participation and are designed so that everyone is seen. All engaged ecovillages have adapted sociocratic decision-making which means that decisions are made based on consent rather than majority voting as is common within mainstream democratic societies. As argued by Hall (2015) - a Dutch bioscience scholar - interest for less hierarchical decision-making models such as sociocracy have only recently been growing. Grinde (2009)

argues that decision-making by consensus generates more support for the initiatives in question. A normal technique used prior to a decision is going around the circle of persons present to hear each person's opinion. As experienced during multiple field trips, "taking the temperature" with a thumb up, down, or in between prior to a decision is made allows a chance to adjust a particular decision to accommodate everyone. Larger communities like Toustrup Mark still allow for everyone to be heard but apply less strict consensus in order to prevent stagnation. In such cases, consensus minus is an often-used way to prevent large communities from being "held hostage" by one member.

Be it because ecovillagers are predominantly anti-authoritarians or that the dominant ideas of natural cooperation lend itself for decentralized and self-regulation, the ecovillage is seldom observed as hierarchic. Direct and transparent communication, large communal meetings, working groups and committees seem to be the normal form of management within ecovillages. During ethnographic fieldwork, it became clear that in most ecovillages a division of tasks and structures has organically evolved throughout the process. At 'het Hof van Moeder Aarde' one particular member was in charge of the vegetable garden while another managed the biological supermarket. Besides structured systems of membership that create divisions between categories or members, ecovillages also adapt rotating leadership bound to a responsibility which is elected by residents. For example, 'ecodorp Bergen' organizes a weekly working day which is open for anyone who is interested. Each week a new member is named as leader for that particular day and is therefore responsible for both task division and completion.

### 7.2.2 Conflict resolution

Hall (2015) states that solving disagreement in one's daily social life is essential for the realization and maintenance of inclusion among residents within a community. In modern society, conflicts remain unresolved due to the lack of interdependence (Matthey, 2010). These conflicts are resolved in ecovillages as they appear at least as frequently as in the rest of society; they are noticed by others in the community, and their existence has a negative impact on others not involved. Therefore, ecovillages have developed tools and techniques for conflict resolution such as non-violent communication, deep-listening, evaluation, and forums. Besides such techniques, ecovillagers aim to avoid creating conflicts based on unconscious verbal aggression. A participant from Kuthumba, South Africa elaborates on this:

*"We are also doing spiritual work together. Wisdom circles are what they are called, and they are guided by a woman. All residents have signed in and we dive pretty deep into personal stuff to create a deeper understanding among each other."*

*(Depth-interview, 28/5/2021, Kuthumba)*

Grinde (2009) suggests that humans are stressed in our modern urban society and that in conditions closer to our evolutionary norm, such as a tribe-sized ecovillage, a community's human behavior can be manipulated towards benevolence and compassion, and away from selfishness and aggression.

### 7.2.3 Cooperation

Cooperation within a community is essential for continuation and this has been multiple times addressed by participants. A member from Kuthumba underlines the importance of cooperation in relation to inclusion:

*“Without co-creation and collaboration, somebody's needs aren't being met. If we as a community exclude others, and we have a kind of ‘take it or leave it mentality’, that can maybe work in the city where there are so many other people who might come in and take over, but in a smaller localized setting that doesn't work.”*

*(Depth-interview, 28/5/2021, Kuthumba)*

Hall (2015) suggests that ecovillages seem to offer more meaningful social relations, which are decisive for promoting a high level of wellbeing (p. 33). Many ecovillages are able to deal openly with mental illness problems which are not acknowledged in society at large (Matthey, 2010). Applying simple techniques such as “check-in” and group sharing allow for residents to talk about their current emotional state. During ethnographic fieldwork, prior to a working day it was common to start with a check-in round. In circle shape, everyone was given the opportunity to share briefly what was on their mind and how they were feeling.

Although this has almost entirely disappeared in modern urban societies, in most ecovillages work related tasks are still a ‘side-by-side’ practice that results in a strong cooperation between residents. Therefore, ecovillages with strong community relations can facilitate sharing (Hall, 2015). The cider production at ‘Small Footprint’, Estonia or the grocery store at ‘het Hof van Moeder Aarde’ are an exemplification of shared work that create community bonding. A resident from ‘de Hobbitstee’ shares his take in cooperation:

*“What I'm really appreciating at the moment is deepening my understanding of what it means to collaborate, why it feels important, and why co creation of anything is so important and that it is actually the only sustainable way to do things”*

*(Walking-interview, 29/5/2021, de Hobbitstee)*

### ***Concluding remarks***

Although conflicts or disagreements on lower scale appear at least as frequently as in the rest of society, the extent to which such issues are addressed differs by the degree of responsibility. I argue that in small-scale societies, such as ecovillages, the sense of responsibility among residents is much higher as issues are more likely to personally affect the individual. Therefore, a small-scale society is more likely to address indifferences whereas in society at large conflicts remain unsolved due to a lack of interdependence (Hall, 2015). This difference has been addressed multiple times by my informants and was powerfully summarized during a formal interview with a resident from ‘de Hobbitstee’.

*“Everything that happens out there on a large scale also occurs on a smaller scale, but because it takes place on a small scale, it is easier to get a grip on it.”*

*(Walking-interview, 28/5/2021)*

Thus, inclusivity in terms of decision-making, conflict resolution and cooperation are remarkably harder to embody on a large scale. Because of this, the theory of Degrowth argues for the allowance of local environments as they empower both decision-making and participation (Kallis, 2019; Schneider et al., 2010). This is completely exemplified, with the field data of this study, by an ecovillage as local-scale settlement.

## **7.4 Intentions vs. reality**

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Although based on the findings gathered in this study the ecovillage has a tremendous contribution to the ideology of Degrowth based on its three core elements, a certain nuance and critical note is necessary to make. During data collection throughout this entire research a certain dichotomy strongly emerged. That of intentions versus reality or ideals versus practicalities.

All my informants spoke about the importance of incorporating the three Degrowth criteria. However, none has all of them completely integrated. In many cases one aspect is due to different reasons prioritized over another. Although the ideals and intentions of each of my informants are mostly one on one with the Degrowth ideology, the reality of their way of living has not always parted from the capitalistic manner of growth. Within the Netherlands, due to restrictions regarding co-housing, sharing a property with a group of people is made difficult to realize. As a solution some Dutch ecovillages have created a campsite which allows them to accommodate a multitude of people during the year and realize different housing structures. The flip side of this, is that the campsite becomes a major source for income and therefore



maintaining such facilities is often prioritized over other aspects. at ‘het Hof van Moeder Aarde’ this was clearly at the expense of the yield from the vegetable garden.

Moreover, as addressed in the *7.1.2 renewables section*, the purchase of solar panels has mostly been observed at Dutch ecovillages. Although Indian ecovillages also indicated that they aspired to purchase these, it was simply too expensive which makes them still largely dependent on grid utilities. Residents of ‘Bergen’ indicated they would like very much to start building permanent dwellings. However, after six months the municipality has still not approved for this. As a result, progression stagnates. One of the initial founders from ‘Oude Molen, South Africa indicated they would like to renovate a number of poorly insulated houses within the community. But after almost a year, they are still waiting for a loan from the bank.

Perhaps the most strikingly observed difference between intentions and reality is the wish to expand in numbers. The majority of my informants spoke about the importance of a growing community in order to increase environmental and societal impact. However, attracting new residents is in most cases very difficult to realize as a result of regulations. Be it South African or Dutch ecovillages, they are all affected in the same way. A zoning plan - typical for the Netherlands - restricts a limited number of people to a piece of land. Housing structures such as yurts, vans or tiny houses are still today in most cases not acknowledged as a full-fledged home. As rightfully stated by a resident from Kuthumba:

*“You could buy a farm that has many hundreds of hectares in size, but ultimately you would only be allowed to point out a main house, a second dwelling and five labor cottages.”*

*(Semi-structured interview, 22/3/2021, Kuthumba).*

This accurately describes the problem faced by many communities. A communal lifestyle is mostly not facilitated by governments.

Conclusively, being part of a capitalistic growth paradigm that has been dominating mainstream politics and economics since the ‘80, makes choices towards an opposed idea of Degrowth intrinsically difficult. The significant progress the world has made over the last decades in terms of healthcare improvements, food security and poverty eradication have mainly been realized due to growth. Hence, the global system is simply not equipped for steps that go back in growth. Co-housing, alternative housing types, accommodating multiple people on a property appear to be hard to realize no matter the geographical context. From South Africa to Brazil and India to the Netherlands all my informants face such difficulties in one way or another. Despite institutional obstacles resulting in a significant difference between certain intentions and reality, these ecovillage pioneers still make incredible impact.

The people that do persist and manage to realize communal and ecological ways of living, even if not all criteria meet Degrowth standards, inspire a growing movement. All my informants address the rapidly growing interest in such lifestyles. All of them speak about requests by outsiders who have similar ideas and ask for guidance and all of them highlight the spreading of the ecovillage model within their particular country.

## 8. Conclusion and discussion

The ecovillage movement has seen serious growth in recent years. Its ideas and practices have become increasingly relevant in society simultaneous with the growing consequences of a changing climate. As ecovillages are often praised in scientific literature for their practical contribution to Degrowth, this study has analyzed to what extent core criteria of this post-development theory are met by such intentional communities. In this section, the empirical findings of this research are connected to the analytical framework in order to conclude and discuss the answer to the research question: *To what extent does living in an ecovillage meet the Degrowth Ideology?* First, the concept of the ecovillage is (re)defined through a combination of existing literature and the ethnographic findings. Second, an attempt is made to grasp a deeper understanding of the ecovillager by careful generalizations of its identity. Thereafter, building on the conceptualization of the ecovillage and its ecovillagers the third section will open the debate in a development perspective by reviewing its contribution based on the Degrowth ideology. Lastly, a section will be devoted to a comprehensive insight on the contribution exceeding solely the concept of an ecovillage.

### 8.1 The ecovillage

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Rather than a static frame that is often used by scholars to define an ecovillage (Ergas, 2010; Mijering, 2012), this study emphasizes the element of fluidity when conceptualizing this movement. An ecovillage is not a checklist of certain elements, rather it is a social construct with blurred boundaries. As displayed by the GEN and the communities involved in this study, the ecovillage movement varies greatly in ideas and practicalities. However, what connects them is their common purpose is to live together, to work cooperatively and to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values (Ergas, 2010). Residents of an ecovillage share ideology, skills, knowledge and resources both among community members and with their social surroundings (Kasper, 2008). This study argues, it is the intention and representation on ecological, social, and political levels, that characterizes ecovillages most accurately.

An ecovillage leads by example meaning that the ecovillage manifests their values by putting its ideals into practice. *Ecologically* through the integration of different core elements in one place. They create work where people live, produce fresh local foods, and allow for a diversity of recreational and creative activities, all within walking distance, resulting in a higher quality of life while using fewer resources. *Socially* through its communal character, by organizing spiritual and cultural activities and by its social engagement among residents. Lastly, they are *politically* engaged by sharing their views with society at large. Instead of a closed community, ecovillages actively seek for interaction with their social environment.

They organize courses on sustainability topics and have weekly working days that are open for outsiders. Because of this openness and interaction their lifestyle has become more accepted in mainstream society as their ideals are carried forward to a wider audience.

Because the ecovillage movement only started in the early '90, the majority of ecovillages have originated in the past twenty years. While still facing a lot of difficulties in their attempt to set up an ecovillage, the movement is still in its pioneer phase. My informants often addressed the search for funding, suitable land, and other group members as significant challenges. Although ecovillages are mostly located in remote and rural areas this is mainly out of necessity rather than preference. As often addressed by my informants, property simply becomes a lot cheaper when located more towards the countryside. Besides, communities mostly aspire for a large piece of land consisting of several hectares. Nowadays, this can be seldomly found within an urban context.

## 8.2 The ecovillager

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The people attracted to an ecovillage mostly join such a community because of social reasons and environmental considerations. As identified by Ergas (2010), ecovillagers are a voluntary simplicity movement in which individuals make lifestyle changes as a reaction to consumerism and materialism. During this study, two concepts fundamental to the ecovillager have emerged strongly. First, a cooperative culture which consists of participatory decision-making, the peaceful resolution of conflict, and a 'we rather than me' mentality is at the heart of an ecovillage approach (Mychajluk, 2017). Secondly, the ubuntu philosophy accurately defines the ecovillagers' character. Due to this sense of humanness, this study states, the ecovillager fully embraces the understanding that humans are naturally communal rather than individualistic and therefore accepts and respects any individual regardless of its status. The majority of communities start from the realization that within a collective group, the success and well-being of an individual very much depends on the success and well-being of all community members. Hence, ecovillages emphasize the importance of community-building which is completely embraced in their everyday life through cooperation.

The importance of mastering and incorporating both concepts became even more clear during interviews with informants. When developing an ecovillage lifestyle, constructing a new home, or organically farming for the first time were seldom addressed as the main challenge. Instead, my informants underlined the difficulties of creating collaborative decision-making, and harmonious coexistence within a community. Participants rarely emphasized their sustainable contribution. Rather they would address the importance of increased cooperation and conflict resolution as their collective contribution towards a more

sustainable and inclusive society. Thus, this study has found, the ecovillager can be defined by not only its ability to live within collaboration but the existential motivation to do so.

## 8.3 Contribution

To assess to what extent an ecovillage has met the ideology of Degrowth, circularity, downscaling and inclusivity have extensively been researched. Degrowth stresses the importance for society to live within ecological boundaries. Therefore, the ideology focused on the necessity of shifting societies comprehension of economic growth. Downscaling consumption patterns so that less space is required to sustain humanity, extending the existence of resources to create a circular economy, and allowing for local environments to arise as they empower both decision-making and participation are three core conditions inextricably linked to Degrowth. This study states that these three criteria have to a large extent been covered by ecovillages and the differences with society at large are impressive. However, a strong difference between certain intentions and reality have emerged strongly. Although the ideals of my informants were mostly one on one with Degrowth, the reality of their way of living has not always parted from the capitalistic manner of growth. In many - particularly more developed nations - the system is not designed to facilitate such a communal simplistic lifestyle. Communities face a lot of adversity in their attempt to set up an ecovillage, which is a pity given the contribution ecovillages make paired with the growing interest in such a lifestyle. Reusing, recycling, and the use of clean energy sources have shown to be at the heart of an ecovillage approach. This large extent of circularity is translated in a limited consumption pattern. As a result of elaborated data collection, this study was able to identify the EF for three different ecovillages involved in this study. Even though these outcomes remain estimates, such results still underline the significant impact ecovillages make compared to their respective national average. Thus, ecovillages show what a significant impact practical sustainability implementation as discussed in this study can make. The fact that even such a simplistic lifestyle in many cases still over exploits earth's natural resources only accentuates how unsustainable the current western way of relating to the natural environment has become. However, the true contribution the ecovillage movement makes goes far beyond such practical applications.

### 8.3.1 Responsibility, the key-concept

Take a moment to think about this. You might travel to work forty-five minutes daily, on the weekends you visit friends in another city, for groceries you go to a nearby town while spending your holidays along the Mediterranean coast during summer. So how likely is it for you to notice when your neighbor gets sick, when a tree in the neighborhood has been felled or the sheep in the meadow have given birth. It is the integration of such facets in one place exemplified by ecovillages that increases the extent of experienced

connectedness with our physical environment. Hence, the responsibility to take care of this environment and prevent it from deteriorating automatically increases. The point here is that the implementation of tools - of which ecovillages are praised for - such as recycling or conflict resolution, naturally follow as a result of this increased sense of responsibility for both social and natural surroundings. Therefore, the contribution of this study to the theory of Degrowth and the broader development debate around ecological boundaries, is the importance of felt responsibility.

*“Ecovillages and just having people learning how to live together instead of being isolated in chicken apartments in big cities, is part of a larger solution.”*

*(Depth-interview, 16/5/2021, Oude Molen)*

This study states that local environments - in which ecovillages thrive - are the key facilitator to realize this increased responsibility among individuals. This was displayed in both social and ecological terms.

First, because of its small-scale character, the ecovillager is more likely to address indifference as issues are more likely to affect the individual. As stated by Hall (2015), although disagreements on lower scale appear at least as frequently as in the rest of society, conflicts that arise on a large scale often remain unsolved due to a lack of interdependence. Truly feeling responsible for something instead of just being concerned becomes easier when a person is more likely to be disadvantaged. Hence, because of the local scale and increased interconnectedness with the social environment aspects like cooperation and conflict resolution have been so well integrated by ecovillages.

Secondly, this increased responsibility is also reflected in the care and maintenance of my informants for their natural surroundings and again this is facilitated by the local scale. Because ecovillages have integrated different facets of life in one place, a lot more time is simply spent at this particular place. While in comparison with mainstream society as described in the intro of this section, facets like living, working, exercising and recreation often take place in many different contexts.

As argued by Bergh (2011) and other scholars with him (Sekulova et al., 2013) today the shift to Degrowth might be questionable considering the dominance of capitalism and the unprecedented sense of interconnectedness among nations and regions. However, the ideas of Degrowth can still inspire, instigate change, and partly be incorporated. Because whether it be in a capitalist era or in another development paradigm, humanity will not escape from the short-term consequences human-made global heating is causing and will continue to do (Raworth, 2018). So, if there is one aspect of Degrowth we should learn from and incorporate in today's policies that aim to create a 'better and more sustainable future for all' as described by the UN (2020), it is the allowance for local environments to arise more often. By analyzing the ecovillage movement, this study has exemplified the tremendous impact localism has in both social and environmental terms. Finally, intentional communities like an ecovillage show us that growth and

innovation do not necessarily have to be accomplished by means of technology but instead can sometimes still be found in simplicity.

### **8.3.2 To conclude**

Overall, this study states that the ecovillage lifestyle does meet the ideology of Degrowth to a large extent and contributes in different ways. This starts by adapting a multitude of practical sustainability measures which have in almost any case led to the incorporation of a circular economy on small-scale. Secondly, because of this resource efficiency, ecovillages exemplify what impact such measurements can have in terms of the ecological footprint. A small-scale environment and shared intention which brings residents together, results in a strong social interconnectedness. However, most communities have still in some way not completely parted from the capitalistic manner of growth. This study emphasizes the gap between the ideals of informants on the one hand and the current reality on the other. Often because of a result of policies, restrictions, and conflicting interests.

For everyone to live in an ecovillage might be an unrealistic goal. However, this study has found an emphasis distilled from the ecovillages' lifestyle that actually can be implemented in current society. Increasing felt responsibility facilitated by a local-scale environment in which different facets of life can be implemented.

## **8.4 Limitations and suggestions for further research**

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In this section the researcher takes the time to reflect on the limitations of the research as well as discuss any open ends that deserve further research.

### **8.4.1 Limitations and reflection**

First of all, the risk of generalizing data from my limited field research needs to be acknowledged. Due to COVID-19 imposed restrictions to this study, the research population has solely been observed within the Netherlands. The limitations and risks this research entail are the Eurocentric view of both the research population and the researcher. This research gives an extensive description on the Dutch context while including limited data from other continents around the world and that is how the study must be viewed and used.

Secondly, the concept of the ecovillage emerged in the 1990s as a result of a mainly western environmental movement. Even though the GEN, a European initiated platform, is open for initiatives around the globe to join, its European roots cannot be ignored. The concept of an ecovillage has found roots globally but is conceptualized through a western lens.

Complementing the above argument, one of the limitations this research entails is the generalization and merging of different groups as *mainstream society*. Within the context of this research, the impact or contribution the ecovillage movement makes in terms of Degrowth conditions has often been compared to '*mainstream society*' or '*society at large*'. This '*mainstream society*' is generalized as a society with a large ecological footprint focused on economic growth and entangled with consumerism and materialism. However, in large parts of the world people do live with small ecological footprints and in certain ways do live within the Degrowth ideology. This study overlooks, by writing from a mostly western perspective, the population outside the ecovillage movement who live within or inside Raworth's (2018) Doughnut model.

Altogether, in this study the ecovillage movement is portrayed as a solution or contribution towards a more inclusive and sustainable lifestyle. However, this must partly be disclaimed as a result of research related limitations. Overall, a western perspective is recognizable throughout this study. Firstly because of the western oriented definition of an ecovillage. Secondly because of the location of the research which mostly took place in a developed nation like the Netherlands. Third, due to the limited research population as the GEN only included initiatives who themselves apply for it. When not solely focusing on self-named ecovillages but at the broader Degrowth spectrum a mostly self-sustaining population has been neglected.

#### **8.4.2 *Suggestions for further research***

The above limitations represent a suggestion for further research incorporating larger research populations elaborating on this research and the existing body of literature by incorporating more than only a westernized perspective on ecovillages.

The most relevant finding this study has conducted, is that of increased responsibility analyzed among my research population; the ecovillager. As this increased responsibility is a result of the local environment in which the ecovillage has integrated its core facets of life to take place in, this finding has the potential to exceed the concept and contribution of an ecovillage. Therefore, this study suggests further research solely on the topic of increased responsibility and the influence of operating at small-scale from a variety of disciplines. Further researching this topic from a socio-political, economical, and anthropological angle could contribute to a deeper and more comprehensive take on this particular topic. I argue, as a result of limited time to prepare and mitigate for climatic consequences we should emphasize on ways to increase responsibility given its tremendous impact for the maintenance of both the social and natural environment.

A second suggestion for further research focuses on the concepts of ubuntu and or a cooperative culture. This study has revealed the importance of both concepts for an ecovillage to thrive. Simultaneously, developing such collective identity has shown to be arguably the hardest component of community-building. Ethnographic fieldwork in this study has only been displayed at thriving communities that have



overcome a multitude of difficulties to get to the point they are today. Hence, components such as Ubuntu have only been observed and perceived. However, giving the importance such a cooperative culture has on community continuation, it is suggested to further research the criteria that underlie such concepts. What principles must be included to develop such collective identity.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Interview guide semi-structured interviews

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### **A. introduction**

introduce myself

introduce the research (consent)

communicate intentions for conversations

### **B. The ecovillage**

introduce informant

establishment, members, location

Land ownership

reason of joining

volunteers

expanding

### **C. Every-day-life**

Housing

Transportation

Income and work

Self-sufficiency

    energy

    food

Cultivation

Animals

recycling

Waste disposal

### **D. Personal experience**

Life before the Ecovillage

Compared to life at the ecovillage

    Housing

Transportation  
Work  
social needs

#### **E. Ecovillage in next five years**

#### **F. Close out**

### **Appendix B: Interview guide depth-interviews**

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The context discussed during depth-interviews completely depended on conducted data from the first semi-structured interview. First, this data was analyzed in order to create depth-question elaborating on specific topics. However, a general set-up has still been used.

#### **A. Circularity**

Nutrition  
Energy  
Recycling  
Waste disposal

#### **B. Downscaling**

Materialism inc. EF  
Consumerism  
Norms/values

#### **C. Inclusivity**

Decision-making  
Conflict resolution  
Cooperation

#### **D. Personal take on contribution**



## Appendix C: Ecological Footprint

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The Ecological Footprint (EF) is the biologically productive area required to provide everything a person consumes. The Ecological Footprint can be compared to biocapacity, which is the productive area that exists on our planet, in a particular country, or region. These estimations have been calculated by means of <https://www.footprintcalculator.org/>

Note: outcomes are an indication of the EF. Calculation is based on data out of the first interviews. If needed, a follow up interview has added extra required data. The outcomes are an estimation based on the moment of interviewing. As stated in the thesis especially questions related to transportation strongly differ throughout the year. Therefore, it is likely to keep a small margin.

### Eco Caminhos, Brazil

1. Infrequently; vegetarian
2. 60 - 80% (slight difference between summer and winter)
3. freestanding, with running water (connected to grid)
4. adobe, see Eco Caminhos YouTube channel construction consist of clay, sand, and straw mixture
5. 3.4 (10 full time residents atm. Spread over 3 houses. Volunteers staying separately)
6. Medium. (Between 100 – 150m<sup>2</sup>)
7. electricity, yes.
8. very well insulated. House completely designed for energy efficiency.
9. 70% atm, solar panels are being installed so coming years up to 90%
10. less (many neighbors are large scale farmers; see interview)
11. 150km by car each week
12. 30km by motorcycle each week
13. average in use
14. 50km by PT each week
15. 10h flying each year. (Visit family Houston once each year)

**Outcome: 1.5 earths. (Average EF Brazil: 2.8 (2017))**

### Toustrup Mark, Denmark

1. occasionally
2. 50% (common groceries)
3. row-housing
4. images steel/ concrete. But mostly reused materials.
5. 60 persons in total divided over 25 apartments makes 3
6. 80m<sup>2</sup> apartment; medium
7. yes, connected to grid
8. average (see interview)
9. 50%. When solar panels are installed, this will increase. (See interview)
10. much less, all trash very well separated.
11. 200km by car (3 times Aarhus a week)
12. 30km by motorcycle
13. average in use
14. 10 km
15. 0h

**Outcome: 2.5 earths (average EF Denmark 6.9 (2017))**

### IEWAN, the Netherlands

1. anywhere between vegan and occasionally
2. 75% (mostly locally grown by nearby farmers)
3. multi-storey apartments
4. straw/ brick
5. 52 persons across 3 housing blocks = 17 each. Household consist of 4 persons (Bea)
6. 150m<sup>2</sup> (4x30m<sup>2</sup> pp + living room/kitchen/bathroom)
7. yes.
8. very well insulated. House completely designed for energy efficiency.
9. 60% rainwater use, filter system, solar panels
10. less
11. 75km
12. 30km
13. 50%
14. 150km

15.3h

**Outcome: 1.7 (gha) earths (average EF Netherlands 5.0 (2017))**

## Appendix D: List of informants

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<b>Informant</b>	<b>Ecovillage</b>	<b>Country</b>
Pierre	Small Footprint	Estonia
Romain	Green Village	India
Shekhar	Kumaon Maati	India
Mare-Nynke	IEWAN	Netherlands
Bea	IEWAN	Netherlands
James Luiz	Eco Caminhos	Brazil
Verena	Balenbouche estate	St. Lucia
Tristan	Kuthumba	South Africa
Hudson	Oude Molen	South Africa
Residents	‘Hof van Moeder Aarde’	Netherlands
Residents	‘Ppauw’	Netherlands
Residents	‘Bergen’	Netherlands
Residents	‘Land van Een’	Netherlands
Residents	‘De Hobbitstee’	Netherlands