

How conceptions of the future inform practice, and the degree of engagement with the status quo, in an eco-village in Ireland



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Dedications and thanks

I would like to dedicate this piece of work to the community at the eco-village for making me feel welcomed, for teaching me many new things, and for entertaining my nonsense for three months. In particular I wish to thank my key participants, those who gave me the most of their time and thoughts, and those whom ensured I will be returning to the eco-village again in future. I would like to thank any and all who took the time to talk with me during my research, especially those visiting the eco-village who tolerated my accompanying them, in particular the teachers of the climate action short course for allowing me to join their weekend.

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Introduction

In the contemporary context of climate disaster, global geopolitical instabilities, corralled by significant environmental degradations, there is an increasing salience in examining intentional communities, particularly fourth wave ecological communities, that have arisen as a response to fears and concerns about a liveable future. Intentional communities are often typified by their degree of withdrawal from mainstream, however the literature on intentional communities has identified these fourth wave communities as being typified by their engagement with the mainstream, rather than their degree of withdrawal.

Ecological communities are a reified response in present, with a particular temporal orientation. There is increased consideration of these communities as a site of inspiration for a more sustainable mode of living from; academia, the communities themselves as they seek to further their visions, and advisory and governing bodies. Hitherto the majority of literature has taken the form and governance of intentional communities as their object of focus, namely an overt focus on why such communities tend to fail, or instructing them how they can avoid failure, by locating failure in their internal structures and governance rather than in the effects of the surrounding context. There is some ethnographic literature investigating the degree of withdrawal and engagement in urban intentional communities, these have focused on economic relations or collective identity within the communities, however to the best of this study's awareness there has been no ethnographic engagement with an eco-village placing futurity at the core of its analysis in examining their vision and practice.

Through a three month ethnography in a eco-village in Ireland this study, where I lived and resided in the eco-village full time, this study will outline some themes and commonalities of the conceptions of the future from participants garnered from interviews, and relate them to practices of the eco-village, particularly in regards their degree of withdrawal and estrangement.

Theoretical framework and approach

Futures as an area of anthropological concern

The future as an analytical category for anthropology has been more prevalent in recent decades with fresh conceptions of how we may analyse the future. Wallman (1992:2) identified the proper object of study as being not prediction of the future, but rather a consideration of what particular imaginations of the future may do in the present. Pels (2015) makes the case for anthropology requiring a more thorough conception of the multiple temporalities that exist, and argues the case that “an anthropology of the future was always a fundamental condition of the discipline” due to its predilection with epochal classifications, and makes the case that anthropology must grasp multiple futurities to conceive “how global or provincial they are” (2015:779). Pels makes the suggestion that classical anthropology “rather than leaving others futures implicit, it actively disposed them of their futures” (2015:781) and a need for recognition of multiple fractured, co-existing, and contested temporalities.

This study contends that conceptions of the future, whilst nebulous but coherently negative, are a structuring element in considering fourth wave communitarian living, or eco-villages, in how they practice their vision and practice through considering an eco-village in Ireland.

Bryant and Knight (2019) give a thorough and effective analytical frame work for analysing the future using the frame of “*orientations*” as referring to the relation between the future and present action. Thus by considering how action is conducted in the present as an orientation to a future, we can derive conceptions of the future and how they are affective in the present, we may see how “*future may wedge itself into the present*” (Nielsen;2014). They utilise the term teleologies of everyday life as a way of conceiving the futures role in quotidian action, and more pertinently they consider the ways in which collective action is taken in response to orientations to the future. For something to be teleological is for it to be oriented towards, and pre-supposing an end point, a goal, or a purpose. It is to explain something as a function of its own end, rather than to understand it as a function of its cause.

Teleology can be understood as referring to something that is predicated upon some end point, or a future destination in time and place. Interpreting actions and behaviour through Bryant and Knights (2019) conception of teleology allows such actions to be understood as

relating to an end point, or some conception of temporal progression and arrival at a destination.

Their work makes use of anticipation as a particular orientation to the future, as contrasted to expectation which gives thickness to the present through use of the past, anticipation slims the present bringing to bear the future in the present and they implicate as being affective of collective response and perceptions of future. They note this effect of the future being foreshortened, and that collective anticipatory temporalities are often found in perceived times of crisis, such as a ‘Time of War’, and that actions of people operating under such an orientation may include techniques to inject certainty into their lives, they engage in planning and actions that may forestall the future. These actions may range across the unconscious expectation of actions taken, or can be “intentional future making practices” In other words; collective anticipation of a futurity may be indicated by actions taken in the present to evade the future, marking the “future as threshold and making the present liminal” (2019:40). This study makes use of anticipation as an orientation to the future for considering the collective actions undertaken by eco-village community in particular. Anticipation in particular holds applicability for this study as the research community is one that is borne out of a desire to forestall negative potential futures, it is a community explicitly predicated upon a belief that mainstream and normative modes of living are insufficient, and inevitably deleterious for human living.

The concern with the future as both an analytical tool informing us of the present and as an area of concern for populations transcends anthropology and the social sciences, and has entered a multidisciplinary realm including theorists and policy formulators.

If we are to understand and make sense of actions and organisation borne out of anticipation of a tumultuous and less certain future, then to assess such actions as teleologies distinctly related to the future can give insight into the conceptions of the future being acted upon.

Appadurai calls for us “to place futurity, rather than pastness, at the heart of our thinking about culture” (2013, 194). “By bringing the future back in, by looking at aspirations as cultural capacities,” he argues, “we are surely in a better position to understand how people actually navigate their social spaces” (Appadurai 2013, 195).

By placing futurity as a central structuring force in analyses, particularly in communities that are derived from, and focused around, future conceptions we may ground action and practise within this framework of teleologies of the everyday.

Willow (2020) also focuses on the power and effect of temporal imaginings and their effect on the world we build, positing a role for an anthropological perspective of making positive world contributions. Transition may be considered a loose movement with a non-centralised structure wherein participants seek to build local resiliencies in anticipation of climate challenge (2020:4), it is about “accepting loss of familiar lifeways, and taking action as a personal responsibility”. Willow (2020) makes the assertion that “Embracing images of the future as culturally constructed and profoundly contested, I suggest that temporal imaginings have very real effects on the world we ultimately (re)build”.

Willow made use of amalgamating and collating a number of visions from a variety of sites across the North American transition movement to construct a generalised image of what a positive future may look like for her participants. This research does not amalgamate all visions for the eco-village but locates themes and commonalities from participants, and triangulates, them to everyday actions taken in the community and the derived conceptions of the future. It is this studies contention that refocusing an analysis of actions taken within a sustainable community towards a future temporality, will serve to grant insight into obscured orientations to the future, and to meet and support the political alignment and future goals of the participating community.

Intentional communities

A community may be characterised as a group of people who live together and, share something in common in a particular area, and their relations to one another are interpersonal and revolve round some shared attributes (Brennan and Brown 2008).

Intentional communities can be distinguished as “*a deliberate attempt to realise a common alternative way of life outside of mainstream society*” (Poldevaart, in Meijering 2006) and can have varying degrees of withdrawal from mainstream society from fully removed to partially withdrawn from mainstream society (Meijering et al 2006). These forms of intentional communities have been around since the 17th century and feature a community with a shared set of values of ideals, as well as shared ideas about what is wrong with mainstream society (Sargisson 2007, Locklyer 2013). They can be seen as spaces of withdrawal and resistance, refusing to ‘play by the rules’ of the mainstream (Winchester *et al.* 2003). Intentional communities may take many forms and articulations but they often share some key features including; a desire to live a lifestyle they could not attain in mainstream society, a frustration with mainstream society, and a desire to create an intellectual space (Meijering 2006). They are often normative in proscribing an alternative lifestyle and ‘*aspire to set things right in a more intimate setting*’ (ibid). Meijering et al (2006) identify four types of intentional communities; religious communities, ecological communities, communal communities, and practical communities. Religious communities are typified by their adherence to a shared ideology and spiritual beliefs, and create a sense of community, belonging and home through engagement in communal rituals. These communities may be more withdrawn than some other intentional communities, but often have interaction with the mainstream through social outreach activities, and are often more economically entwined with mainstream society. Ecological communities they define as communities wherein “*They actively reduce the necessity of economic relations with society, for example by reducing the use of consumer goods, by limiting work in paid jobs outside the community, and by aiming for economic self-sufficiency, chiefly by producing food and energy*” (2006:45). Ecological communities are organised around a shared set of principles pertaining to a lifestyle change engaging sustainability as a guiding principle, however sustainability and what specifically that means remains contested and there is no discrete shared schematic of how to achieve this. Ecological communities have highly varied levels of disengagement with mainstream society (Ergas 2010, Sargisson 2007, Meijering 2006) but

there is a propensity for outreach and members exhibit a desire to serve as a model for sustainable living (Ergas 2010). Communal communities are typified by their desire to form close interpersonal connections with those around them, this may be achieved through use of shared spaces and communal resources, and members of communities such as these often maintain close connections to mainstream society and are less typified by normative ideology. The last community type Meijering et al identify is a practical community, this is one less driven by ideological or interpersonal goals or needs, but rather by practical benefits of living in a community, such as shared resources like a garden or kitchen, sharing appliances like tools or vehicles. Members of these communities are not driven by a shared ideology or set of goals, but rather by the practical benefits of such an arrangement. This study focuses on an eco-village that closely matches Meijering (2006) classification as an ecological community. CloghJordan is founded and operates on principles of sustainability with a mission statement of 'explicitly intent on having a lesser footprint on the planet, and working in conjunction with the living world. (DEGREES of practical relationships, share labour, tools, skills, some shar resources like bicycles and cars use, when necessary))

Intentional communities, as collectivities that sought to distance themselves from the mainstream, have a history going back to the Roman empire (Schehr 1997). But it is the distinguishing feature of the latest wave of intentional community, that they do not seek to isolate themselves from the mainstream, rather they can be seen to engage it.

Fourth wave intentional communities

Schehr (1997) identifies a fourth wave of communitarian living that diverges from the previous waves in that these communities do not estrange themselves from the mainstream but rather integrate with the mainstream, these include urban eco-villages and student co-operatives. These fourth wave communities are distinguishable from previous intentional communities because they subvert the notion of achieving a 'better life' at a remove from mainstream society and instead makes an attempt at outreach, at affecting the context that circumscribes them. The eco-village would belong to this fourth wave of intentional communities, engaging mainstream society on a wider level and having close embeddedness alongside a previously extant community, and through the communities avowed purpose to

share their knowledge and conduct outreach and education in “*sharing the fruits of this exploration through research and education*”.

Eco-villages, as a particular form of intentional living, are a relatively recent phenomena with the term having been coined by Gilman (1991) as a means of reconciling principles of ecological support with community design. The prefix of eco indicates the focus on sustainable living done in conjunction with practices that support the surrounding environment, giving primacy to the environmental principles that may be supported through communitarian living. Eco-villages may use green building techniques, have a communal food production area, be designed to maximise green space, but they generally maximise utility from the environment, minimise resource use, and foster community interactions (Gilman 1991, Sargisson 2007). The eco-village at Cloughjordan is built on the principles Gilman (1991) identifies in a number of ways. Green building techniques have been applied to some of the homes built there, with one example being a two storey cob house, i.e. made of straw and mud, built entirely by hand. Solar panels and living roofs are common, there is abundant use of dry stone walling in many of the gardens and braided live willow fencing is the preferred method of marking boundaries. These techniques and methods in use are all hyper local, and involve a minimal use of resources beyond human ingenuity and labour. The eco-village campus is designed around functioning as a biodiversity hotspot with their large forested area, an abundance of small bushes and trees around the landscape making it a haven for birdlife, and through the eco-village runs a river, winding through the residential and forested areas of the eco-village.

Eco-villages are one of the fastest growing forms of intentional communities (Locklyer et al 2013, Smith 2002) and have increasingly become networked together in a global network of knowledge sharing. They can increasingly be typified not by their degree of withdrawal or ‘*estrangement*’ (Sargisson 2007) from mainstream society but rather by their outreach and integration with mainstream society. Eco-villages are intentional communities that have garnered “fresh perceptions of the limits of the possible” (Sargisson 2007) and sought to inject such fresh perceptions into mainstream society through engagement and exemplification of a more sustainable lifestyle. They seek to perform this injection through outreach, education, and through a growing international network of skills exchange, all elements of which are conducted in the eco-village with an emphasis on sharing their learned lessons and skills amongst members, and visitors to their community.

Sargisson (2007:236) said of intentional communities ‘Intentional communities are strange places, full of hopes, dreams, disappointments as groups of individuals work collectively to realise a better life’. Intentional communities are attempts at articulating an alternative modality of living, couched in opposition to mainstream society and its prerogatives. However, there exists an inherent tension within these communities as “One of the most enduring challenges is the need to balance the competing needs of groups and individuals...” (Sargisson 2007:398) and to achieve this without recourse to hierarchical structures of authority. The eco-village runs off of consensus decision making, wherein all members must agree before an action can be taken, and whilst members would readily admit it presents its issues they do feel it is a fundamental principle of their mission to be non-hierarchical as an organisation, and to operate on consensus in all community decisions.

Christian (2008) book on practical guidelines for building intentional communities posits a 90% failure rate for most intentional communities and indicates interpersonal issues as being the primary issue for causing collapse within these intentional communities, locating their failure within the community and their relations to one another. Willow (2020) and Lockyer et al (2013) make the contention that better attention may be given to the context in which these communities form and how that may be shaping and structuring the internal dynamic, instead of the pre-eminent focus on governance structures and disparate visions within the community as being the disruptive force.

Conclusion

This study contends that there is a lacuna in analyses of fourth wave intentional communities, with an overt perception of viewing them as within a state of failure and focusing on their internal governance structures. While some of the literature has taken under consideration reasons for failure as being interrelated to the surrounding context of these communities, rather than lying solely within them, there is no literature considering future temporal orientations in these fourth wave communities and how this may be affective of their practice

and vision, particularly in regards their degree of engagement with the status quo and mainstream society.

Methodology

Methodological approach

In the course of research an ethnographic approach was taken. One definition of ethnography may be given as *“a methodology that draws on a family of methods involving direct and sustained social contact with agents, and on richly writing up the encounter, respecting, recording, representing, at least partly in its own terms, the irreducibility of human experiences”* (Willis and Trondman 2000:5). The data gathered in this research was gathered through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, open ended conversations and data was stored in field notes and journal. Throughout the fieldwork reflective reports were shared with my supervisor, this in addition to note checking helped maintain a reflexive position. Notes were taken on a mobile phone when the situation would not allow for pen and paper, such as in certain participant observations. This research has been informed by an understanding of social life as *“an outcome of the interaction of structure and agency throughout everyday life”* (O’Reilly 2012;1). Using this approach allows greater insights into the lives of participants and broadens the context in which data can be understood and collected, in my case allowing me triangulate data from different methods used. Research was conducted over a three month period in which I lived at the eco-village and participated in myriad events and normal occurrences in my participants lives.

Ethnography is iterative, inductive, and inherently self-reflexive and opportunistic as a research methodology (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). Opportunistic approaches were very applicable in my research, as there were few events in the initial period and I was obliged to be highly visible, present, and ready to avail any opportunity for building rapport, or spectating on an event.

At the beginning of the research period there was little in person activities ongoing in the eco-village, due to covid-19, and opportunities to meet interlocutors were few, except when seeing persons outdoors there was few opportunities to make myself known and explain my role there. As a means of addressing this, and building early rapport, I adopted an approach of wearing a highly visible red jacket and told all whom I met to tell others to keep an eye out for the man in the big red jacket, which worked extremely well in familiarising my

presence in the eco-village. Next I will outline some of the methods used and their applicability in my research.

Participant observation

Due to lingering covid-19 concerns my opportunities for participant observations were few in the initial months, but did increase as time went on and normal parameters of socialisation, and program of education and outreach, returned to the eco-village. However, as a full time resident of the eco-village I did get to witness and participate in what elements of life were ongoing at the time, these included informal everyday practices like going for a walk, or socialising outdoors briefly. In doing participant observation ““a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture” (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 1). Through this approach I was able to participate in several key events and occurrences in the eco-village. The community farm was the one safe space regarding covid, due to being outdoors, where I felt I could most immediately make myself useful to my participants. As the farm is a community supported agriculture project, this means all members of the eco-village have some interest and involvement with the farm, even if it is just to receive their produce. I volunteered fifteen hours a week on the community farm where I helped the Cian the farmer prepare for the spring growing season doing work such as; digging trenches for allotments, rejuvenating soil fertility through manual tilling, planting of crops such as potatoes, and onions, and individually manipulating several thousand propagated seedlings. The farm operates on organic principles and uses no pesticides nor chemicals, with virtually all of the work done manually by hand. The farm operates off yearly volunteers from the European solidarity corps, an EU organisation that places people on internships and experiences in fields that interest them. Participant observation on the farm was vital to gaining inroads and building rapport with members of the eco-village, partly because many of them liked to have a look at the farm which presented an opportunity for me to introduce myself, and Cian and other eco-village members were appreciative of the labour. There was a two week period when the last group of farm volunteers had left, but before the new ones had come in, where it was just

me and Cian, and he thanked me sincerely, reminding me I had helped him save food for about eighty families for the year.

I attended, both virtually and in person, over twenty different meetings, conferences, or discussion groups. Some of these pertained to the internal governance of the eco-village, which holds a monthly members meeting, some were in relation to other areas of the eco-village practices such as education, outreach and visitors, some to the food production on the eco-village, and others being educational events featuring visitors, or guest speakers on topics like soil diversity. I also attended six guided tours given to visitors of the eco-village which gave me good insight into how different members of the eco-village conduct their educational tours.

Opportunism and living in situ

As a short term resident of the eco-village in my three months, by virtue of living there I was given opportunities to engage in a number of activities that would not have been possible had I not lived on site. The eco-village, and the surrounding town are small spaces, with you seeing the same people multiple times daily, and at all times. In the early days of research when there was little in person events, my being present got me invited to a weekly socialising session that took place outdoors, by a fire, for covid safety reasons. These socialisation sessions included members beyond the eco-village and in the wider community of sustainability minded people. Those who partook in these session termed themselves “doomers” because of their predilection with considering realities of incoming crises. Members of this group felt they took a more pragmatic and grounded approach to sustainability crises, with discussions focusing around grounded probabilities and actions that could be taken. These people felt alienated to a degree from the formal eco-village discourse of seeing itself as an example to replicated, and were more reflexively critical of the sustainability mission and discourse, and more likely to have a coherency to their conceptions of the future. Discussions at these events focused on topics like resource acquisition, and what to do when systems collapse, how does one heat your home without a steady supply of fuel? How would we get fertiliser for growing food in case of a major geopolitical upheaval? These discussions gave me a wealth of context and insight into how these conjectures of future issues are discussed from a grounded point of view, that took

the arrival of these issues as a matter of when, not if. Bryant and Knight (2019) use of anticipation and expectation as distinguishing teleologies can be seen in these different orientations of this group, for them anticipation brings thickness to the present through its use of the past, whereas “anticipation slims the present, often breaking with the past entirely as it present and future into the same activity space”.

National census opportunity

During the course of field work the Irish state conducted a national census, in this census there was for the first time a time-capsule section wherein citizens could write or draw a message to be opened in one hundred years. Whilst asking participants their reported census information was evidently an invasion of privacy, the addition of the time capsule section did proffer an opportunity to gain insight into community members predictions, feelings, or beliefs about the future of the nation, and of the nation state as a monolithic entity. I asked approximately fifteen people if they had filled anything in that section, with eight people saying they had put nothing, four saying their children had drawn something, and three participants who wrote something meaningful for future generations to read.

Open ended conversation and walking

Due to the emphasis on nature in the eco-village the use of walking as a method (Ingold 2008), particularly in regards open ended conversations, was highly applicable. In taking regular walks around the eco-village I build a rapport and made myself a familiar figure in a small community. Furthermore these walks presented opportunities to meet people who I had not met prior, before the return of in person events, this method and small conversations I had with people made them much more likely to approach me at a later date. During the course of my research I was obliged to look after a small dog for the final

five weeks of my field work. In those five weeks I build the best rapport with new interlocutors, and made some key connections with visiting groups whom I met whilst out walking. The addition of a dog to these methods of making contact was immediate and significant, with not only eco-village members but complete strangers being willing to chat about who I was and what I was doing there. Conducting open ended conversations whilst walking a dog added a natural flow to the conversations and tended to increase their length, and thus the scope, and length, of conversation.

Semi structured interviews

Semi structured interviews is a method that allows for the exploration of new ideas between participant and researcher (O'Reilly 2012). I conducted seven semi structured interviews with my key interlocutors and participants at the end of the research period. I chose to conduct these semi-structured interviews towards the end of the research period to capitalise on the rapport I had build with my participants. After three months my participants were quite comfortable with me as I had either been socialising with them on a semi-regular basis, had conducted participant observation with them, or had worked with them on growing crops. Six of these interviews were recorded digitally and one was conducted using pen and paper, due to inclement outdoor conditions. I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews to allow participants to interject and query any questions I may ask them, and due to the good rapport I had build with my participants I received long, comprehensive, and very sincere responses. I chose to conduct these interviews with my key interlocutors partly because they were most willing, but also due to the potentially upsetting nature of querying conceptions of the future it felt best to conduct such interviews with a participant I had good rapport with, and who I felt would not suffer to much distress in the interviewing process. In addition to choosing to interview participants I had the best relationship with to minimise distress, I also made use of my research assistant, the dog during these recorded interviews. In three of the interviews strong emotions and feelings, in response to asking participants their conceptions and feelings for the future, came up and tears were shed, both by interviewer and interviewee. With a mind towards

minimising distress to all participants involved the dog was requested and used as an emotional support animal, during moments when interviews became emotionally challenging, and helping facilitate the flow of conversation whilst adding a positive tangibility in discussing negative future conceptions.

Positionality

In reflecting on my positionality amongst my research population I had to remain aware of two things, maintaining a critical distance as a researcher which proved difficult as time passed in my field site, and my cultural background relative to the context in Ireland. I shared much of a socio-cultural background with my participants, with many of them being of a white, and sharing linguistic and cultural commonalities. I have an accent from the capital city of Dublin, one that is quite noticeable, and had a shaved head for much of my field work and stood out as not being from the area. As in many countries, rural places do not like people from the big city encroaching, and this perception I was presenting of myself as a threatening city person was one that I had to manage and address as research went on.

Ethics and reflexivity

In conducting research with the eco-village I foremost adhered to their own guidelines in place for visiting researchers which included things like; no mass surveying people, no knocking on doors for information, and to respect the rights and privacy of all residents of the eco-village at all times. As the eco-village has a long standing history of working with researchers I made sure to re-iterate the minimisation of harm, anonymisation and reflexive nature of ethnography to all participants. In all my interactions with participants I sought to be fully honest in disclosing the purpose of my being there, the aims of my research, and to assure the privacy and rights applicable to all participants. As a community the eco-village has much experience with visiting researchers, however ones who stay for the duration of an ethnography are less common, so I made sure to explain the ethics and methodologies of ethnography and to give full disclosure of methods of data collection. All participants were informed they could rescind, withdraw, amend, or request omissions of any data or opinions

shared. In consideration of the topic of future conceptions as being potentially upsetting all measures were taken to ensure the wellbeing and comfort of participants.

Conclusion and research questions

The eco-village at Cloughjordan can be viewed as part of a fourth wave of intentional communities, as an ecological community. These fourth waves differ from prior intentional communities by virtue of their degree of engagement with mainstream society, rather than being typified by their degree of withdrawal. Whilst some literature has focused on how to assess these degrees of entanglement in these fourth wave communities, there has been little examination of considering the role of future orientations in how these fourth wave communities eschew estrangement. This study contends that placing future conceptions at the crux of analyses for practices and behaviours engaged in an eco-village in Ireland can grant insights into how these sustainable communities navigate their dynamic with the mainstream and seek to influence the status quo.

1. Are there conceptions of the future present in the eco-village at Cloughjordan.
2. Can practices and vision of the eco-village be considered as futurally oriented?
3. How do these conceptions of the future impact practice and vision of individuals and the community, particularly in regards estrangement.

Chapter one: “How are we fucked?”

Contextualising Cloughjordan and the eco-village

Foremost of note is the presence of multiple communities within the area of Cloughjordan, of which the eco-village is only one. The existing village centres on a junction of three roads, with a main street approximately two hundred metres long where the business's are located. The main pedestrian entrance for the eco-village comes off the main street, down a slight hill and immediately onto its 67 acre campus. Please see appendix one for a map of the eco-village and town of Cloughjordan.

The population of the locality was in the low four hundreds in 2002 and Cloughjordan was experiencing many of the same crises as other small rural towns across Ireland namely; rural depopulation, an ageing population a failing local economy, and the closure of state facilities such primary schools for children and the local post office, and was facing the closure of the railway line connecting the town to major city routes. I asked Sarah, an original founding member of the eco-village project from its inception who works with one of the ecological charities operating out of the eco-village still, to outline how the eco-village came to be at Cloughjordan.

“We were a group of environmentalists all living in Dublin, most of us we were all 20 years younger, we were very idealistic and ambitious. And, we had, this idea of finding a space, and we were given an about it edge to it as a response to climate change issues and issues around green living. And once we've kind of made the decision to found an eco-village. So we're actually very central it's really good quality agricultural land. So we always planned on growing food and food security was always going to be, you know, an important element for us. And the land here is very high quality. We didn't want to be in commuting distance from Dublin, that was a really important one for us that we figured if we were only an hour outside Dublin, then people would spend the whole time commuting into ended up”.

At the timing of the project Ireland was just exiting an economic boom known as the Celtic tiger, with rapidly rising house prices and financial credit hard to find driving the Dublin housing co-op to seek further afield, with a rising cost of housing being a significant factor is the co-op moving from an urban idea to a rural one. Meijering and Huigen (2006) make a

particular focus of examining intentional communities in rural spaces, concerning themselves with the degree of alienation or withdrawal from mainstream society. They contend the move from urbanity to rurality in the intentional communities can be seen as a desire to create an intellectual space, “where their ideas can be realised on a small scale”. They do argue this is a spectrum of degrees of withdrawal and most communities retain some relationships with the mainstream, such as banking and medical facilities. Much of this can be applied to the eco-village at Cloughjordan, however this study and my interlocutors would contend that the move from rural to urbanity, and the choosing of location of the eco-village with a train line specifically in mind, would indicate the move to rurality as being spurred by greater than a desire for withdrawal, but by the desire to build a fulcrum from which the community could centre itself, and engage the mainstream in attempting to influence the status quo.

The eco-village operates a consensus model of decision making as a body, operating under a members committee, and under that there is the village, education, research, and training (VERT) team who oversee events relating to education, research, and training in the eco-village. The eco-village was designed with principles of permaculture in mind, whereby one third of the site was for residential, one third for food production and enterprise, and one third for forestry. Within the eco-village it looks similar to many estates in Ireland, rows of houses winding alongside each other with a large empty green space between them in the centre. There is approximately fifty homes on site, a communal farm, communal amphitheatre and outdoor shared spaces, as well as a hostel and education centre for visitors. Cloughjordan eco-village has an emphasis on outreach and information sharing so for their purposes it behaved them to be situated close to mainstream society, and the population of the village was undertaken on a first come first served basis which has the effect of a diversity of demographics, motivations, and ideologies amongst the residents.

Below is the mission and purpose statement of the eco-village;

“(The) eco-village is our response to greatest challenge facing humanity today: the growing impact of human activity on the planet and how its peoples live and work together. The deeper purpose of the eco-village is to create a living example of a healthy and harmonious future, while treading more lightly on Planet Earth.

We are building a resilient and supportive community based on fairness and mutual respect. We are caring for the land in partnership with the living world.

*We are learning how to live more socially, economically, environmentally sustainable lives.
We are sharing the fruits of this exploration through research and education”*

Communities within communities

There a number of communities that can be considered in relation to the eco-village in the wider Cloughjordan area including the original community, the “eco’s”, and the “blow in’s”. The eco’s are what the original members of the existing community would term members of the eco-village, or persons beyond the eco-village boundary whom they consider to be there for the eco-village community. The ‘blow in’s’ refer the vast swathe of temporary residents who, usually but not always, are there for a short period of time working with the eco-village, or some program members of the eco-village were participating in.

As a researcher I was deemed a ‘blow in’, but so were interning volunteers working on a nearby organic farm outside the eco-village but within the wider area. On the community supported agriculture (CSA) farm within the eco-village there is an annually rotating cast of volunteers, as well as usually a few more interns or volunteers participating in the education or outreach programmes. Meijering and Huigen (2006) identify a potential perception from the mainstream of seeming threatening, and out of place, and whilst this could be seen by some members of the wider community, by and large the perception of the mainstream in Cloughjordan is one of acceptance, but with a wary dose of bemusement, as denoted by the otherising term the ‘eco’s’.

The original community would maintain some divisions from the eco-village members, they would not be likely to drink in the same pub as the locals for example, but there is a broad spectrum of a relationship with the community with some in the wider community more

insular, on an interpersonal level, than others. This became evident to me when I was playing board games one evening with the CSA farm volunteers who had made friends with a young local farmer over the winter, and who inquired who I was. When I explained my role as researcher with the eco-village he responded “Ah feck, I’ve managed to my whole life without talking to one of you ‘eco’s, and now I’ve ruined it”. When I inquired if the two farm volunteers didn’t count he said “No because they’re only here short term, and they usually play soccer and are sound. But the real proper eco, hippy folk I wouldn’t go near them no”. When I asked did he not like the eco-village he made a wobbling gesture with his hand saying “It’s not that I don’t like them, and they definitely saved the town with the schools and shops for sure. But, why did they have to take the town name? We’re Cloughjordan, they’re the eco-village, they’re not Cloughjordan”. After making assurances I wasn’t a ‘real’ hippy eco we let the topic slide and continued our game.

This incident indicated that for some members of the locality their sense of belonging was very much rooted in being ‘not’ the eco’s, and that the perception and assessment of what constituted an ‘eco’ was somewhat porous and contextually informed by the wider community. Considering who is, or is not, considered a member of the eco-village community is also an area of consideration within the eco-village itself.

The nebulous boundaries for what constituted who was within the eco-village sustainability community was made clear to me one evening socialising with some of my key interlocutors. One of my main interlocutors, Noel, invited me to an evening around a fire with some of his friends in my first few days on site. As the fire burned questions were asked of me regarding my role there and my research aims, I explained my interest in future conceptions in the eco-village community. The man I was speaking to asked me “And how do you know who’s in the sustainable community or not, is it just the members within the eco-village grounds who count?”. In my hesitancy he explained that he and most of the others around the fire that night did not live in the eco-village itself, but lived in the surrounding area and, for almost all of them, had been attracted to the area by virtue of the eco-village and the principles of sustainability it espouses.

Ergas (2010) studies collective identity formulation in an urban eco-village context and considers communicating shared beliefs, skills valued, emotional investments and ultimately actions taken as being formulative of building a collective identity. So, whilst there exists the formal eco-village, consisting of members within the houses on the eco-village campus, there

also exists a wider eco-village sustainability community typified by shared actions, beliefs and emotional investments.

Later on I asked Noel, a founder of the eco-village project if he could give me some insight into that discussion, what makes someone a valid member of the eco-village community as “So when I say ecovillage, it's sort of this, like little estate thing, and the people, only the people who are here and a few other people who claim to have certainly some kind of ownership or membership here. But I see it as a much broader thing where the community is lowercase eco village, as opposed to uppercase Eco Village. So when talking about lowercase eco village people but aren't involved in the uppercase eco village. But I would include them in the Eco, because they're here for broadly the same reasons why we are, they just don't happen to live in this little estate”.

So the parameters of who was included in the site population became broader and more heavily dependent on context of engagement with my interlocutors, and that the parameters for being seen as belonging to this sustainable “community isn't bounded by the walls of the estate”.

Conceptions of the future

As I explained to my interlocutors that my area of focus was considering the future I received questions asking if I was looking for predictions, many times to which the answer was “We’re fucked”, said sometimes with a grin, sometimes with a grimace. Rather than predictions I was considering open ended teleologies of everyday life as orientations to an imagined future, deriving from participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Conceptions of the future were almost overwhelmingly negative, which is not unsurprising in an intentional community borne out of a derived sense of crisis and liveability. Ergas (2010) found in her analysis of collective identity in urban eco-village that sixty percent of her participants framed sustainability and its meaning to them in an apocalyptic context.

Many participants when asked what brought them to become involved with the eco-village spoke of a growing awareness of oncoming climate challenges through the late nineties when the eco-village project was inceptioned. The project was originally inceptioned from a group operating Dublin city, about two hours train journey from its current location in Tipperary, Cloughjordan. Participants were worried about future living possibilities in Ireland, and the original idea for the eco-village was borne out of a desire for co-housing in Dublin, “We were environmentalists, who were trying to live better lives, trying to live in better communities, trying to live a better sort of everything” as one participant, Noel, put it.

The world is on fire

In my casual interactions and discussions with participants comments about their conceptions of the future were always said flippantly, with it being a topic to be brushed off. As my research period went on I had the realisation that the future was an uncomfortable topic for many of them, and whilst an ever present principle in the sense that the eco-village is a future building project, it could still be a cause of great upset, and was not something anyone wanted to focus on for any length of time. Imagining the future caused pain. In asking participants to share their imaginings of the future strong feelings arose. My participants for semi structured interviews knew me quite well at this stage of the research period and there was very little digression between us. They were in all cases very forthcoming about how their conception of the future manifests itself in feelings of distress, of desperation, and pessimism, and uncertainty. Boholm (2003;p167), in engaging with anthropology of uncertainty states “Uncertainty concerns the future, which might be a future that an individual can expect to experience personally during the lifetime, or a more distant one to be experienced by coming generations or by other living creatures in times to come. Uncertainty implies recognition of change and awareness that states of affairs are not static; they can alter drastically, for better or for worse”. From my interactions with my interlocutors this state of uncertainty is located in a longstanding recognition of an oncoming change, an uncertainty that has been gaining increasing imminence in the lives of my participants, with them expecting these drastic alterations to affect both them and future generations.

I spoke to Declan, an academic of politics and founding member of the eco-village project. Declan has a background in politics but professes his main passion has always been environmentalism, and more particularly, how welfare states may transition in the case of systemic collapse. Declan is a stout proponent of the work of the eco-village and in disseminating it's research and works hard at giving talks, and has written several books on Polanyian transition in welfare states. Declan is well informed, highly educated, and is a member of the eco-village who puts some of the highest amount of his own time into managing the eco-village through its members meetings, and through engaging outreach groups to come and see the eco-village as an alternative, and viable, model for sustainable

living. Declan would place himself as an optimist, conceiving the future negatively, but orienting himself towards it positively in striving to see it as an opportunity window.

“I mean, I must say, I think society is breaking down and I'm more worried than I've ever been in my life...But, you know, at the moment, everything is pointing towards a transition towards breakdown and a lot of violence as a kind of reality, you know, an awful lot of, of collapse of institutions and systems that we've taken for granted”.

The theme of systemic collapse was one that all my participants mentioned as a concern, there is a strong understanding of the interconnectedness of global supply chains, and of how their daily lives and future plans would be affected in case of disruption to this. The members of this community were attuned to potential shocks, and seemed to be in an anticipatory frame for how to engage them. This was clear to me one evening socialising with Noel, who is an experimental grower, and Trish, who runs the bakery with her husband, just after the Russian invasion of Ukraine began. As we discussed this event it was intriguing how my participants were immediately able to grasp some of the consequences as they would apply to them. Noel, as a grower, prophesied huge fertiliser shortages and the closure of fertiliser plants in the United Kingdom within the week. He was only slightly incorrect, those factories shut down within three days, and the knock on effects were felt quite soon around the world. Trish, as a baker informed about twenty percent of global wheat supply coming from Ukraine, and whilst she doesn't import from Europe she knows her suppliers in the United Kingdom do.

Noel, in particular is “well versed in exploring the darker possibilities” of what's coming for humankind and is quite certain there is no way out for humankind. When framing the future as crises Noel took a stance that any of the problems of the future that we predict, are arguably ongoing now and have been for the last twenty of thirty years. Noel outlines how there is no possibility of fixing the damages that have been done, but rather sees it as a problem to be endured rather than fixed. I asked Noel how does he see these connections and what are his conceptions of the future.

“Well, there's, how are we? How are we fucked? Let me count the way's we're fucked”. Noel draws linkages between the energy crisis and total energy descent, whereby the amount of energy available to be extracted for human use decreases, and the energy needed to access that energy increases. Noel argues that yes this is a huge problem for the future, but its also a currently ongoing problem, one that he see's disguised in other geopolitical and economic

instabilities relating the invasion of Ukraine to energy descent, and the sub-prime mortgage recession in the U.S. in 2008.

Whilst Noel and Declan discussed human systems and large scale collapse, Bethany, who is discussed the future on a more immediate and local scale. Bethany is married to Noel, and is a self-proclaimed 'doomer', and whilst she does not like the term 'prepper', due to its association with American apocalypse survival tactics which largely revolve around isolation, weapons, and resource hoarding. Outside of the American connotation she does feel it to be an applicable label in the sheer sense that she is prepared, not just passively planning, but has her systems and plans already formulated. Bethany is prepared for the failure of complex human systems, and how they would affect her immediate needs. I ask her why she disavows the American prepper modus operandi and she tells me it simply wouldn't work. You need a community to survive any such disaster, she argues, even a small group of skilled people isn't enough you need to have a sufficiently large, and cohesive community to weather any disaster. Bethany asks me to imagine huge food shortages across Ireland and to imagine what they would be as a community that produces much of its own food. I tentatively suggest they would begin guarding their fields and greenhouses with weapons in such a scenario. At this point, Noel came onto the porch where the interview was conducted, and joined the hypothetical. Noel and Bethany were firm believers that, in the case of systemic collapse, the best option for survival is helping others and looking after them, which can and does work in small scale direct and indirect reciprocity communities they attest. Bethany tells me the topics of discussion that the 'doomers' had discussed in a preparatory manner previously; where they would get access to clean water locally, having at least six months of dried food stuffs at all times, they have an almost endless supply of fresh vegetables due to Noel's garden, held discussions with the local pharmacist about the shelf life of certain necessary medications, and how many months supply are held in stock at any one time. Noel remarks that while someone could steal cabbages from his fields, they cannot build up the excellent soil fertility he has built up over the years, and he can always continue growing.

The imminence of the future and hanging in there

Bryant and Knight (2020) draw a distinction between anticipation, and expectation as teleological orientations in how they grant thickness to the present, with expectation being viewed as giving thickness to the present through its reliance on the past, and anticipation as slimming the present and drawing the future and the present into the same activity timespace. From my interviews with participants it was clear that the future, taking the future as their accumulated negative conceptions of future imaginings, had varying degrees of imminence to participants, vacillating on the day to day in how it guides their behaviour. Trish, and Sarah, were two participants whom initially framed their conceptions of the future as distant from themselves and their daily life. Sarah identified her future worries as surrounding biodiversity loss, and the inability to return to a world that was once beautiful, she expresses vehemence for the wrongs done to the world saying she feels we have robbed and ruined the earth, even though it may eventually heal. I first met Trish when I accompanied her on a tour she was giving of the eco-village and she struck me as a very positive person so I requested of her an interview which she obliged. Trish admits she tries to be optimistic but that it all depends “on the day to day”, explaining that whilst she is deeply scared and pessimistic about the future she does her best not to let it bog her down, and to focus on the present where she can rather than the future. Trish’s can be seen as in an orientation of expectation, in the times when she tries to thicken the present through focusing on her trajectory through her past, she attempts to keep negative future conceptions at a distance from her thoughts but admits it’s difficult. I can see Trish becoming more visibly upset as the interview proceeds, she draws allusions to historical collapses of societies and expresses trepidation at how quickly systems can, and do, fail. Despite trying to maintain a positive attitude it is clear that negative future conceptions weigh clearly on her mind regularly. For Trish, all one can do is ‘build islands of sanity’ in which to weather the coming future and to “Hang on in, it’s all going to shit basically”. The slimming of the present in an anticipatory orientation, that renders the future and present into a more immediate work timespace, was one that I could see take effect under the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This event brought many potential future considerations, such as where do I get sunflower oil from into the immediate present. In doing so the future, and negative conceptions associated with it, had a clear impact on the discussion and prerogatives of members of the eco-village. During my participant observation with Cian, the eco-village farmer, my queries about growing techniques and best practices

and how he felt this might impact his ability to grow were informed the principles of a closed nutrient system for the community farm. The eco-village operates on a closed nutrient system for all of its food growing, where possible, and if additives are used they are organic such as seaweed, so the focus on fertiliser shortages were not Cian's main concern, but rather the procurement of seeds, as the farm still buys most of their seeds commercially. Cian explained to me that the dependency on monoculture seeds from large global firms was a dependency that they had been trying to break for a long time, but due to European legislation around the sale of certain seed types he is restricted to buying his seeds en masse. As a farmer Cian has a natural tendency to think about the next growing seasons and how to navigate them, and in this case the disruptions provided by the Russian invasion brought his concerns and conceptions of the future to the forefront of his thinking, and his practice as a farmer.

Declan, like Noel, would be of the belief that negative imaginings of the future can be seen in evidence today. Declan opines that society is in collapse right now, even though we worry about it as a potential about to happen, it is currently ongoing and can be seen in a slew of "screaming evidence" such as biodiversity loss markers, critical threshold limits for life on earth being transgressed, the collapse of institutions, and the rise of right wing ethno-nationalism. Akin to Noel, Declan would be of the belief that we are in crisis now, and whilst we have conceptions of how it may get worse, he would argue that these negative conceptions are already present and being affective of daily life and planning. In many of my interviews the future felt present, in the sense that participants feelings and conceptions about the future were given expression through a currently ongoing process, such as biodiversity collapse and ocean acidification. Interestingly several participants asked me how far in the future did I mean, and when I left that decision up to them, there was a tendency to conceive the future, as an accumulation of negative imaginings, as currently ongoing in many senses, and no participant took a conception of the future, as it relates to humanity, beyond a few generations. For my interviewees, their conceptions of the future were currently ongoing and being played out in front of them.

This idea of humanities future being short lived was supplemented by inquiries into whether eco-village members had filled out a time capsule on a national census form to be opened in one century. Many members expressed that they didn't see the point, either because the world will be too broken and "fucked up to bits" by then for anyone to heed any messages from the past, or through expressing a doubt that there will be a functioning state or national census board to oversee the time capsule. One participant admitted to writing something to the effect

of a warning for future generations, and Bethany admitted she wrote a message of hope, and that the idea it may be read was a source of small hope for her.

Hope, to some degree

Through my fieldwork, and through the interview process, there were some expressions of hope, or at least aspirations to be hopeful and to be able to remain so. Bryant and Knight (2019) discuss hope as a future orientation as “a swell of emotion, a feature of blocked or unrealised potential... as a form of futural momentum about something that could exist”. Expressions of hope were small and qualified when expressed in fieldwork, hope was a small thing to be applied to that which one could influence. In the interview process Declan was the only participant to locate his hope in persons and actions, rather than as a nebulous desire for realising unrealised potential. Trish expressed a desire to remain hopeful, but struggled with being able to do so. Whilst Declan has been versed in environmental challenges for decades he still retains a degree of hope for change to be eventuated. For Declan he identified hope within the mission and practice of the eco-village, being of the opinion that if there was absolutely no hope then the eco-village would have failed and they would not have so many tours and groups visiting to learn their knowledge. In particular he is hopeful for future generations, and takes heart from younger generations than he being deeply aware and involved in environmentalism and exploring alternative modalities of living.

I had spent some time with Declan, at various meetings and educational groups, and just in day to day life, and in the course of these encounters he would express great enthusiasm and exuberance at the chance to share his knowledge and the accumulated knowledge of the eco-village. In getting to do so, Declan was nurturing and maintaining hope for future generations and for the project and mission of the eco-village.

Children, and future generations held a central role on conceiving and relating to the future in this field research. Zalom (2020;1085) whilst discussing the relevance and prevalence of the future across anthropological domains notes “it has largely left a critical future making apparatus; the family”. Participants in my study expressed fear and concern for their children,

and expect times of turbulence and uncertainty for their children's lifetimes. The most participants spoke of was two or three generations in the future for their offspring. Family making can be considered as a future making practice inherently so, and residents in the eco-village have thought sincerely about the role for future humans in an era of anthropogenic collapse. In regards imminence, and the feeling of the future as increasingly present one of my interviewee's expressed that she had not had children, in the face of the future she see's coming for them. This woman loved her children dearly, but as the concerns and desires that brought her to the eco-village namely; societal collapse, biodiversity failures, and geopolitical instability, become ever more present she would not wish her child to experience what she feels is no sort of a future at all.

Chapter two; Eschewing estrangement

Estrangement and it's applicability

Intentional communities can be distinguished as “*a deliberate attempt to realise a common alternative way of life outside of mainstream society*” (Poldevaart, in Meijering 2006) and can have varying degrees of withdrawal from mainstream society from fully removed to partially withdrawn from mainstream society (Meijering et al 2006). These forms of intentional communities have been around since the 17th century and feature a community with a shared set of values of ideals, as well as shared ideas about what is wrong with mainstream society (Sargisson 2007, Locklyer 2013). They can be seen as spaces of withdrawal and resistance, refusing to ‘play by the rules’ of the mainstream (Winchester *et al.* 2003). The eco-village at Cloughjordan can be seen as an intentional community that eschews estrangement in its vision and practice, and is instead more so typified by its outreach and engagement with wider society. While still remaining a space where an alternative mode of living may be attained, and they refuse to ‘play by the rules’ rather than embracing estrangement and withdrawal to achieve their vision, they rather embrace engagement, seeing full withdrawal from the mainstream as futile, and deleterious to their vision of living more sustainably, and anticipating negative futures

Intentional communities may take many forms and articulations but they often share some key features including; a desire to live a lifestyle they could not attain in mainstream society, a frustration with mainstream society, and a desire to create an intellectual space (Meijering 2006). They are often normative in proscribing an alternative lifestyle and ‘*aspire to set things right in a more intimate setting*’ (ibid). As the prefix eco would suggest the eco-village at Cloughjordan is an ecological community, and to some degree a practical community, in that members can and do share resources, such as bicycles, tools, and vehicles as necessary, and community members would tend to be less consumeristic overall. One of my key interlocutors, Noel, was well known for never leaving the eco-village and surrounding area as he had no car, and felt no need to having all his resource needs

available in the surrounding area and his community and work in his experimental gardens. A frustration with larger society was evident in members attempts to influence or affect change outside their own community, and there was and remains a strong impetus on creating intellectual space for knowledge and skill share, through the eco-villages research team, and through conferences and network building with groups varying from farmers representatives, politicians, visitors from eco-villages abroad as part of the global eco-village network.

Ecological communities are organised around a shared set of principles pertaining to a lifestyle change engaging sustainability as a guiding principle, however sustainability and what specifically that means remains contested and there is no discrete shared schematic of how to achieve this. In the case of the eco-village at Cloughjordan some of these typification's are evident and some absent. Whilst the role of economic relations has been lessened on an individual level, many in the community would be less consumeristic, and there is a strong impetus to build a local economy in the surrounding area. However, whilst many community members are retired, those who do seek employment tend to do so in a local manner. There are a number of charities and organisations operating under the umbrella of the eco-village and in these there are several full time paid positions for members. Others on the community have localised their labour, such as plumbers and others with building skills. However, the eco-village cannot significantly reduce its economic relations with wider society through its engagement with the state and applications for state funding and grants, many of which are vital to fulfilling the goals of the eco-village.

In striving for local economic and resource sufficiency the eco-village has been quite successful, with several members owned business located on the main street of the town, feeding back into the locality and the eco-village. The eco-village also makes some income from hosting events on site, and uses these funds to further reinvest into the eco-village project.

Ecological communities have highly varied levels of disengagement with mainstream society (Ergas 2010, Sargisson 2007, Meijering 2006) but there is a propensity for outreach and members exhibit a desire to serve as a model for sustainable living (Ergas 2010). In the eco-village members expressed a strong desire to serve as an example, and had several weekly tours for interested groups, or school groups to tour and learn about their way of doing

things. Rather than avoid the mainstream, the eco-village is predicated upon inviting the status quo to come and see how they do things differently, and moreover, why they do things differently.

In a discussion with a member of the eco-village talking about the eco-village practices I inquired why, if in their conception of the future there is little hope and expectation of disaster, would they not flee from society and the incipient problems of the future? Their understanding of it was that there is nowhere to flee to, there is no being protected from ecological collapse, or climate crises, or the collapse of fossil fuels, and thusly there can be no withdrawal from mainstream society, that's merely "burying your head in the sand". The inevitability of the negative future conceptions to come is a central role in how the eco-village at Cloughjordan structures conducts its practice to eschew estrangement and invite engagement through building relations, and does so as a result of negative future imaginings influencing its practice.

Schehr (1997) identifies a fourth wave of communitarian living that diverges from the previous waves in that these communities do not estrange themselves from the mainstream but rather integrate with the mainstream, these include urban eco-villages and student co-operatives. These fourth wave communities are distinguishable from previous intentional communities because they subvert the notion of achieving a 'better life' at a remove from mainstream society and instead makes an attempt at outreach, at affecting the context that circumscribes them. Cloughjordan eco-village can be seen as belonging to this fourth wave of intentional communities, being both parallel to mainstream society in existing alongside a mainstream village, and through the communities avowed purpose to share their knowledge and conduct outreach and education in "*sharing the fruits of this exploration through research and education*" (Eco-village mission statement). The eco-village at Cloughjordan in particular eschews estrangement and attempts to attain their vision of a better life through engagement with the mainstream, and furthermore individuals and the eco-village itself orient themselves futurally in eschewing estrangement.

Eco-villages, as a particular form on intentional living, are a relatively recent phenomena with the term having been coined by Gilman (1991) as a means of reconciling principles of

ecological support with community design. The prefix of eco indicates the focus on sustainable living done in conjunction with practices that support the surrounding environment, giving primacy to the environmental principles that may be supported through communitarian living. Eco-villages may use green building techniques, have a communal food production area, be designed to maximise green space, but they generally maximise utility from the environment, minimise resource use, and foster community interactions (Gilman 1991, Sargisson 2007).

Eco-villages are one of the fastest growing forms of intentional communities (Locklyer et al 2013, Smith 2002) and have increasingly become networked together in a global network of knowledge sharing. They can increasingly be typified not by their degree of withdrawal or '*estrangement*' (Sargisson 2007) from mainstream society but rather by their outreach and integration with mainstream society. Eco-villages are intentional communities that have garnered "*fresh perceptions of the limits of the possible*" (Sargisson 2007) and sought to inject such fresh perceptions into mainstream society through engagement and exemplification of a more sustainable lifestyle. The eco-village at Cloughjordan would have a strong understanding of their role as to serve as an example of these fresh perceptions of the limits of the possible, orienting itself as a community and organisation towards serving as a site of potential inspiration for those who see few alternative modes of living exemplified in their lives. This comment from Declan, an eco-village member and regular participant in the research output of the eco-village, touches upon this desire to serve as an example. "The eco-village models a viable model for a lower resource intensive lifestyle, but not only that but it serves to change the discourse from one of a threat that we can't face, to an opportunity to effect change within a community and live a good life. Eco-villages have a role to play in modelling a successful attempt at changing lifestyles, and in changing the outlook from a disempowering one to a positive, locally viable opportunity event."

Local embeddedness and dynamic

In choosing the site of the eco-village members were intent upon meeting such criteria that would allow “we were environmentalists who were trying to live better lives, trying to live in better communities, trying to live a better sort of everything”. This brought members to their location in the midlands of Ireland for a multitude of reasons including; the cost of the land, the fertility of the land to allow for food production, and importantly due to the position alongside an existing, and active train line. Cloughjordan’s positioning along this train line gives locals a means of access to population centers, but the journey remains a significant enough distance that daily life, such as jobs and shopping, is encouraged to be done locally. In choosing this location the eco-village balanced the need for separate physical space for their community, and the desire to be an accessible community for outreach and education.

From its inception the ecovillage had not been intended to supplant an existing community and was expected by members to “But originally, we had envisaged the idea that we'd exist which would be typical of any ecovillage around the world is that it kind of separates it does its own thing”, this is from Sarah a founding member of the eco-village project that grew out of a Dublin city housing co-op. But as they assessed the site they found “when we were talking to planners, the planners were much more interested in us using resources that were already extant already present. And in fact, the more we thought about it, the more it made much more sense from an environmental and sustainability perspective to connect with an existing village”.

From its inception the principles of sustainability influenced the decision on the physical location of the eco-village, but I will contend that, as a community borne out of an explicit vision couched against the status quo, that conceptions of the future are affective of the vision and practice of the eco-village today.

Having to navigate the existing community was a careful process undertaken when the planning was began, with numerous meetings with local businessmen, religious leaders, and political representatives of the area. Long term acceptance and good relations with the locality were, and remain a focus for the eco-village. As one could expect there have been some minor issues with local kids, not from the eco-village, over the years with some littering, minor graffiti and some minor theft and vandalism. When I was asked was this still a problem I was told no a lot less so now that it had been previously. The improved relations

with the local youths in particular, were ameliorated through outreach and engagement my members of the eco-village to the local children. One member, Noel, who runs an experimental garden wherein he assesses growing techniques and methods, decided to approach the children and invited them into his gardens. These gardens had previously been vandalised and Noel felt the best approach was to teach the kids and show them the space. In doing so Noel demystified the space for them, making it less alluring, built direct rapport with a problematic social element, shared his passion and the significance of his work and the damage that had been done, and shared some skills and knowledge with the kids when they returned, giving them an access point and an investment in the practices of the eco-village within their locality.

Members of the eco-village and other locals all use the same services and facilities, particularly schools, and the distinction and division between the two groups of kids has become less distinct over the years and alienation between them is diminishing.

The eco-village at Cloughjordan exhibits many of the features of the above classifications for an ecological community and, as a collective entity would strive for principles of localised autonomy. However, the eco-village as an organisation has fundamental principles and practices and seeks to change its wider community and to engage them in the principles of the eco-village project. One example of relationship and community building within the local context can be understood through a community energy masterplan project.

On the evening of 16th of February I attended an event called ‘Cloughjordan energy awareness masterplan’ in a community hall in the village centre. This event was organised by the Cloughjordan community development committee, one of several committees and organisations to be found in the area, but notable for the remit of the committee being the entire, wider locality, incorporating desires, members and the needs of both the wider Cloughjordan community, and those of members of the eco-village. The eco-village itself is governed by a members committee consisting of those who live within its campus, as well as a number of smaller organisational bodies within this, and have been proactive in serving as an effective action group in such matters as ensuring the local train line remains. With its arrival in Cloughjordan the eco-village brought a slew of organisational capacity, and experience, to help them in achieving their vision and achieving an impact locally, and

beyond. As a corollary to this, over the years a wider Cloughjordan community development committee came in being, one representing the entire population of the Cloughjordan area as a single cohort, with their largest project to date being this energy masterplan for the community.

Within the hall there were several stalls from five different groups and bodies, and nearly seventy people from the locality. In the hall I recognised a significant number of people as members of the eco-village, or as non eco-village locals would tend to call them, simply, the 'eco's'. But there were others I did not recognise, families with their children from the wider community, farmers, and other business representatives such as the local shopkeeper.

People are getting advice from the stalls about how to reduce their energy bills, induced with a large banner saying "greenify your life" from a local credit union community loan scheme. I see, and overhear the proposed benefits to retro-fitting your home, as including job creation, and largely as means to reduce one's own bills. One group present, the energy communities Tipperary co-op, stands out for its claim of benefits of energy reduction as including; tackling climate change, warmth and health benefits, and community benefit, with financial benefit taking a lesser priority.

The culmination of the event is a report from a private firm that was commissioned two years previously by the Cloughjordan community development committee, with the use of a grant funded by the state body Sustainable energy authority Ireland (SEAI). This report constituted the masterplan for the local energy scheme, one requested and organised by the Cloughjordan community development committee two years prior.

The presentation was given in front of the crowd, with charts and figures to explain the report which focused on "identifying ownership of energy spend" through examples of ten properties in the area. The stated aim from the report was "to identify opportunities in line with government targets", and this had a focus on home energy bills, and retrofitting houses to reduce cost of heating and energy". The presented reached a figure of six hundred thousand euro being lost through poorly insulated houses and framed such loss as loss to the community through money that could be spent in local businesses. In addition to heating the report focused on the tonnes of carbon dioxide that could be reduced if locals switched forty percent of their vehicles to electric, and espoused government policy of encouraging working from home or working in small regional workspaces to reduce commercial energy usage. After the presentation the floor was opened to questions from the locals. Looking around the room there did not seem to be impressed faces, with some small groups of people muttering amongst themselves. The first question posed to the report presenter was simple, "You've

spoken a lot about electric vehicle changeovers needing to be made, did you consider a large part of this community relies on the train and take that into account?” to which the response was a flustered “Ehh yes I believe it’s in a section of the report”. Ignoring the role of public transport, and the centrality of this particular public transport to this community, when considering a community wide scheme to manage energy struck me, and attendants as egregious. When the topic of community power generations schemes was inquired about the representative from the SEAI stepped in and said, while yes it is technically possible the legalities and engineering of such a scheme would have to be considered further and he forewarned of the commitment needed to embark on a community power generation scheme. When asked about the possibility of local storage of locally produced power, essentially a battery storage system for the community he responded with a very bemused “No, you can’t do that, it all has to go back into the national grid, it cannot only be for use in the locality”. The local community, beyond the eco-village whilst encompassing it, were being told they could not localise a key resource, even in the case of pure local production of said resource.

In seeking to meet the latest government relations and holding state prerogatives as the guideline, and paid for state grants, the report on the energy masterplan seemed tailored to state specifications and parameters, rather than the desires, and capabilities of the community it was serving. The Cloughjordan community development committee strived over two years to clarify the desires and goals of the community, goals and desires of lower energy usage, more sustainable futures, and empowering the use of local resources, and in doing so the eco-village translated its own precepts and values to the wider community and facilitating robust, local, and proactive civic engagement that seeks to secure its future and localise its capabilities and resources.

Engagements with state apparatus

The above master plan event indicates how the eco-village has inculcated its principles and vision into an effective cohort to attempt to realise, and address the needs of the locality, and how these visions of local need are construed through the lens of the state, and of state bodies. The community energy plan seemed to have several desired outcomes for the Cloughjordan community; a map of their energy usage and losses as a wider community, a means of reducing the cost of energy expenditures, and a desire to use less energy overall, in better systems that suit their specific needs of the locality. Whilst these were the desires of the community, the sustainable energy authority of Ireland (SEAI) was quick to curtail suggestions outside of the state's established targets for achieving emissions reductions, when asked about the role of the vital train line for the town, and its role in reducing energy consumption as public transport, the response was calculatedly deflective and instead focused on electric vehicles.

Throughout field research there were a number of occasions whereby the vision of the eco-village, and the wider community when in alignment, was curtailed by an involvement in state funding for a project, or by bureaucratic and regulatory need.

One such example is in considering food production on the eco-village. The eco-village operates off agricultural principles such as agro-ecology, whereby the entire surrounding ecology is considered when producing food including the soil and addition of other beneficial plants. This results in an 'edible landscape' whereby in season there are soft fruit trees and apple trees in full bloom across the eco-village. The permaculture principles that the eco-village was founded on stipulate that one third of the land goes back to native forestry, and whilst on a walk one day it occurred to me wonder why the forestry section was fenced off at waist height, surely this was an amenity to be enjoyed responsibly also?

In a conversation over lunch with the farmer, Cian, I asked him about the forestry and why it was fenced off. Cian has been a lifelong member of the eco-village and has been their main farmer on and off during those years. I worked with Cian several hours a week outdoors on the farm and had ample time for discussion. Simply put, he blamed grant stipulations granted by the Irish state, that states that tree's must be fenced off and inaccessible to deer for twenty years and to prevent early harvesting. In seeking to reintroduce native forestry to the eco-village project the eco-village was obliged to rely upon the state for funding and grants to do so. As a result the desired vision and purpose of the forestry was perverted through state

stipulations and regulations. I explained my own interest in doing native forestry to Cian, and asked him, if my goals were the same as the eco-village, namely increasing biodiversity and some small coppicing for firewood how should I go about it?

“If you can afford not to, don’t go anywhere near the state grants, they’re useless and entirely restrict your possibilities and options of what you can do, even if you just want to leave them wild. The fencing that was put up is bad for biodiversity under the trees, and you can’t put any animals under the trees either”.

In taking state grants to plant forestry the long term vision for those forests was fixed, and frozen at the whim of state regulations, diluting all the potential benefits in biodiversity and agro-ecological possibilities, making it less than suitable to the purposes of the community who claims the forest. This is similar to what was seen in state bodies’ responses at the energy masterplan evening, an inability, or unwillingness on behalf of the state to allow for localisation of resource, and leave control of said resource to this community.

One other means of engaging with the state is as a civic block and political entity, influencing both local events and on a wider scale. These can be seen in two key infrastructural areas with one being the train line running through the town, a vital connection point, and the other being the sewage treatment facilities in the locality.

The train line that runs through Cloughjordan gives transport options to two cities and is vital for the functioning of the eco-village in its mission to reduce members’ footprints. It has been under threat of closure for many years, under a generalised neo-liberal decline of public goods and services that can be seen in Ireland.

One evening around a fire I am relating to Bethany, a staunch activist her whole life and busy volunteers within the eco-village, about how ridiculous my experience trying to use the train was yesterday. I was unable to buy tickets online except two hours before my trip, and there was no machine at the station, as I was lamenting the inoperability of these services she told me to tell her all of that again, so she ‘could have a word’ with someone in Irish rail, the national transport service. It transpired that several years before she has been central in the committee that campaigned to keep the railway line open, a local line connecting eight locations to further transport this was a tremendously significant piece of transport infrastructure that the eco-village was able to influence the decision making over. This remaining train line is the only public transport option for a large swathe of the central south east of the country, and it would not remain were it not for the dedicated engagements of the eco-village at Cloughjordan. Furthermore the community at the eco-village is active

politically at a national scale, with members and groups within the community being involved with the Irish Green party, the ostensible political group representing sustainability in Ireland. As I was departing I was informed it was a shame as they would be hosting the green parties annual meeting in the eco-village, and this would present great opportunity to see how they attempt to influence political thinking and discourse through close engagement with official state representatives. In this event the eco-village and its members will be taking a central role in engaging with green party representatives, and had established five key themes for their weekend with the green party; Localisation, and how they can learn from the eco-village, youth and age in generational perspective, survival versus extinction, net zero by 2050, and the decline of democracy into despotism. In this meeting we can see the eco-village members mutually setting an agenda, an agenda that is direct and sincere about the scope of the problem, and in doing so have brought political representatives into their site to share knowledge, and influence policy thinking, through sharing their own learned lessons. In negotiating with the realities of state prerogatives, and their prerogative to have standardised means and methods for all citizens and communities, any capacity and success in challenging the status quo can be viewed as successful. One example of this, in which the eco-village engaged the immediate locality, and state bodies, and brought them round to their line of thinking and vision. This is in regards to street lighting, which is mandatory in all residential areas of more than one house. Within the eco-village there is no such lighting, due to bureaucratic understanding of the eco-village as being an unfinished building site they have been able to avoid the necessity of installing street lighting. This was very much desirable to the community for reasons of biodiversity, animal habitat interference, and for their own enjoyment of the night skies, which are some of the least light polluted in Ireland. Not having street lights was a desirable outcome for the community, but in light of recent refurbishment of the street lights in the mainstreet of Cloughjordan village the eco-village came back under scrutiny and was told they would have to install streetlighting. The standard halogen street lights in use in Ireland give off an excess of light pollution, and have been studied as having deleterious effects on human sleep and on animal behaviour and movements. The light pollution from the main street and business in Cloughjordan town washes over the eco-village and does spoil the night sky for some distance around. So representatives of the eco-village proposed to representatives of Cloughjordan town about the possibility of alternative lighting, one that would reduce light pollution, energy usage, and would be kinder to animal behaviours and human sleep patterns. Together, as a collective of the wider community they were able to engage the state authorities and negotiate an

alternative infrastructural provision, one that more so aligned with the vision of the eco-village, and were able to effectively communicate this vision beyond their immediate community.

Building networks and knowledge

It has been noted that many ecological communities do not operate in isolation, and build networks and relations with other like minded groups and communities, Ergas (2010, Meijering (2006). Cloughjordan similarly is engaged in network building and sharing capacities between different groups interested in their practice. Not only does the eco-village engage and influence discussions directly, but it also functions as a focal node for all considerations and discussions regarding sustainability and future transitions. As espoused in the eco-villages mission statement it wishes to serve as a site for inspiration and possibility for what can be achieved, and would see sharing its knowledge and lessons they have learned as a vital component of its mission. It was whilst sitting in on one of these sessions involving food production and alternative modes of agriculture against commercial monoculture that I asked a member of a farmers group from the south west tip of Ireland, what would the different groups gathered here actually do in the case of widespread crop failures? This is where I first heard the term 'lifeboats' used to describe this process of network and relationship building, and the first time someone placed these knowledge sharing events within a context of preparing for a future. The concept being that while in a storm one lifeboat is not much good, if you can gather together several such lifeboats then you may have a better chance of weathering the storm. This concept of linking like minded peoples, and their skillsets, as a means of coping with negative conceptions of the future was one I would see in action throughout my field research. There is a longstanding joke amongst the eco-village that if you stay for any length of time, you will end up staying forever, and whilst mostly a joke there is some truth in it. At least three members of the eco-village that I encountered had done that very thing. In all three cases these people had attended an

educational event, cultural event, or the annual summer permaculture course and found themselves returning to live there full time. One of these people is Donna, who works assisting Noel in his research gardens and who moved to Ireland as a result of Brexit, due to feelings of dismay in her home and worries of a worsening political situation. Donna used to work in resource management for large firms in the U.K. and says she felt a deep alienation from her work, and a pervasive sense of being stuck in a world that desperately needed to change. Donna wanted to change her lifestyle, to try offset her footprint on the planet and to do so she “looked for people who seemed less stuck, people going forward”. For Donna the only way in which she could see to make a viable future, and a bearable present, was to join a like-minded community who shared her concerns and woes. Donna attended a permaculture course in the eco-village and decided she had to stay, as it felt like a place where she could change her pace of life and be with like minded people in the future. In joining the eco-village Donna brought a whole slew of expertise in grants and bureaucratic management, that the organising committee expressed tremendous gratitude for, and in exchange she said she felt privileged to get to participate in the project, and particularly in learning practical skills and competencies, like growing crops and how to do more with less equipment, that help make her feel more secure about the future and her capacity to weather it stating “People can suffer awful mental health wise, in suffering in the world and trying to change it and failing...people can get stuck in very legitimate worries about the future...but growing and being here centres me more in the present”

The eco-village, whilst being involved as a discrete entity in many of these events, also operates as a focal hub for different groups who will use the site, either because its principles align with their vision, or by virtue of its central location in Ireland and abundance of space for hosting meetings. The eco-village has established its own momentum and reputation as an area of knowledge dissemination and production, even insofar as events that are not directly related to the eco-village committee. One such event occurred on a Saturday morning as I was returning from walking my dog back though my accommodation in a hostel on site in the eco-village, as I entered the lobby there was a group of 13 people sitting in a circle around a presentation on the wall saying “Teachers training; Global justice initiative”. My interest was piqued, and I asked the hostel owner did he know who they were and what they were talking about? He told me he wasn’t too sure but they had booked the space and were here for the weekend to do a course. The distinguishing element of this event, that I could see, was that there was no input or guidance being given by the eco-village, in other words this group with no prior relation to the eco-village chose it as a location for knowledge dissemination and

learning. As I tentatively hovered near their session I eventually interrupted a camera man recording the event, explaining who I was and if I could spectate on proceedings. The group had a quick discussion to check if everyone was ok with it and made one request of me if I wanted to join them, that I must bring the dog along. This group was a collection of secondary school teachers, teaching children aged 12-18, and were from a number of different schools across the country and had all come to learn about an optional, newly designed course for state examinations. There had recently been a change in legislation allowing new courses to be added to the curriculum, pending the approval of state bodies, and this group was learning about a new course called climate justice that was being developed. The aims of the course to encourage democratic citizenship goals, skill development in collective decision making, to make evident the scope of the global climate disaster, and to encourage global thinking and democratising learning. The presentation they sat through was a thorough primer and guide in anthropocenic analyses, structural inequalities, global imbalances in the climate crises distribution, and critiques of colonialism and neo-colonial ideologies and biases. I spent the weekend with the group trying to gain insight into their motivations for taking their free time off to learn about a new course. For many of them they expressed concerns with the climate and environment in relation to themselves, but for several of the teachers from more rural areas who would have more children from a farming background, they expressed an urgency to teach these children who would have a traditional view of environmentalism as being in opposition to farming. These teachers could see the ideological conditioning occurring in their students and as a result designed and created a whole new course content, and syllabus, for use in national schools. The national school's curriculum and general discourse in Ireland on climate crisis could be best described as minimally existent, it had not previously been a focus in any secondary school subjects, with students not being informed of the interrelations between climate and justice. In the context of the status quo in Irish education this climate justice course is significant in its clarity, coherency, and pragmatism in dealing with climate justice and introducing the role of ideology, critical thinking, and structural elements, a topic that has hitherto has no focus in the education system. Through hosting their course in the eco-village this group of teachers spread word of their goal, and formed connections and relationships promising to assist in their endeavour. The teachers group did seem somewhat surprised at the level of excitement and encouragement they received from eco-village members, because despite them being only few in number they granted a touch of hope that younger generations may be taught so comprehensively, and that gratitude expressed to them for partaking in promulgating these

new climate justice course. When they expressed doubts as to the efficacy an eco-village member told them to think of every farmers child who they can get to think a little differently as a win, and to consider how their influence may travel.

Food; its production and relationship building aspect

Food is a large part of life within the eco-village, with its principles being that it aims to feed its own community throughout the year. Growing crops was of immediate support to the eco-village community, as a means of seeking self sufficiency and reducing dependencies on external inputs for its production.

In terms of practices relating to food the eco-village manages its needs a few ways. Primarily they grow as much of their own food as possible, and in line with permaculture principles they grow as much diversity of food as possible on their farm to promote a healthy ecology, and through cultivating an edible landscape, with soft fruit trees and apple trees in season. Members of the eco-village relate to food in few ways; it is seen as a source of community empowerment and community building, it is healthier for those who consume it, and it costs less than commercial produce whilst having functionally zero food miles attached.

In my first few weeks volunteering on the community farm I had spent dozens of hours tilling fertiliser into old rows of beds, and when I asked the farmer about why so much he told me he was building fertility for the next few decades, rather than just for the next crop. At the community farm there is a holistic approach to growing that takes a much longer temporal view than traditional farming techniques, for example considering the siting of a compost toilet and how, and when that site may be best used in several years when the soil is safe to grow crops for human consumption. The community farm operates off a community supported agriculture (CSA) scheme wherein members pay a fee for the year and receive weekly produce in return. The benefits of this method are that the farm has money upfront for its needs for the year, members have reliable and predictable supply of vegetables, and the food is accessible at all times to members as it is stored in a stone building accessible by code for members to gather produce. In my initial time there early on in the growing season there were already available five different types of herbs and leaves, as well as several tonnes of last year's staples of potatoes, onions, and garlic.

One day working with Cian and the other farm volunteers they offered for me to stay and join them for lunch, which they often cooked in a cabin on the farm site, and I took them up on the offer, keen to try some of the produce I had been surrounded by. The lunch meal consisted of simple rice with green leaves and lemon, and a potato and onion stew. The food was absolutely delicious, fresh and vibrant and all the more so for being from fifteen feet away. After the meal Cian told me "Dessert is on the wall" and to use a spoon rather than a

knife. Perplexed I looked inside the cabin and there was a honeycomb hanging on the side of the cabin, the aforementioned dessert on the wall, that was kept from the previous year from one of the twelve hives located around the eco-village. The quality and nutrition of the crops that were grown on the community farm was a point of pride for eco-village members, with Cian demonstrating one day via the use of a prism that indicates densities of sugars and nutrients in the sap of crops, indicating the CSA grown was sixty percent more nutritious than commercial examples of the same.

Food sovereignty, in the context of climate action and local resiliencies is an important topic for the eco-village members in considering how they can best maintain their current system, whereby there is a nearly direct relationship between producer and consumer, and in many cases are where the producer and consumer are one and the same. Outside of the crops grown in the CSA the eco-village operates a buyers club, wherein they do a bulk purchase order of dried staples such as grains, spices, and household goods like detergent and soap. The eco-village does tend to seek sufficiency in what they see as their most fundamental needs, food and the required inputs to grow successfully. Whilst the community farm and RED gardens try to operate on a closed nutrient cycle, composting waste from the community, there are some chemical elements that cannot be kept within the nutrient cycle, one of these being nitrogen. Nitrogen is a vital additive to soil for crop growing and is a mass produced fertiliser used the globe over, and its production and distribution was severely disrupted by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. One evening towards the end of field work, outside my hostel an eco-village member I had seen before but not spoken to stopped to query me about what type of research I did. I explained my role there and that I would be departing soon. This man, Nick, was asking me if I could be of any use, or if I would be in anyway interested in a project he was embarking on. Nick had had the idea of producing nitrogen from urine collected from the eco-village and using it themselves, rather than relying on increasingly shaky and complex supply systems. In doing this Nick was responding to an existing weakness in global supply issues, extrapolating the consequences into the immediate present, and sought to localise production of a vital input for feeding the community, through using community resources and the willingness of like-minded people to reconsider the utility of their waste.

Overall food and its provision can be seen as an area where the eco-village does, for the most part and to the best of its capacity, avoid entanglements with the status quo of food production and maintain their own local systems of provision. This is done with an eye towards community resilience, fostering a local economy, and building relationships within the eco-village and beyond. The excess produce from the community farm is placed on an

online website that connects small scale growers and producers and gives them a digital location in which to advertise their products for people in the surrounding areas beyond Cloughjordan.

Noel, the experimental grower, believes that changing the relationship between people, their food, and particularly food production is the single most important change that could be done to improve the future. Noel is a vehement believer in the empowerment and significance of teaching people to grow their own food, and he shares his skills and learned experience through an extremely popular youtube channel for growers called RED gardens. RED stands for research, education, and design and indicates his methodology of applying differing growing techniques to his garden and attempting to be scientific about how he assesses outputs of his gardens. Noel, when he originally got into growing crops found that much of the information available was either incomplete, didn't take account of the context, or were simply outdated and ineffective in his experience. In his gardens he has six different subplots, each using different techniques and slightly different crops to assess their applicability in his context. Noel is a firm proponent that there is no single best growing technique, but that there can be a better technique most applicable to your area, and it is this contextual utility of different techniques of growing that Noel explores. Noel shares his findings on youtube and has over one hundred thousand followers, he regularly has inquiries from growers from as far away as South Africa, and Tasmania reaching out to him to learn and compare techniques. Whilst Noel is a firm believer that every person growing is an improvement, he does not feel like it is significant enough. One afternoon as I was sitting with him cleaning some spinach from his garden he broke down his viewership numbers for me, telling me where most of them were located in North America and elsewhere across the world, he was dismayed by how few of his followers and viewers appeared to be in Ireland. Noel does not enjoy making his videos he says, but he feels he has to do his part to help the world out as much as he can, but does lament in the fact that those who learn from him are not in Ireland, for the most part. This came up in the context of discussing food collapse, and how it would look like in Ireland in the face of having to supply the nations own food supply. Noel believes the need for this is going to be sooner, rather than later, expecting major problems with food supplies in ten to fifteen years and breaks down for me the failure rate for new growers, and the difficulty in getting to a position where one can reliably feed themselves and others. In Noel's estimation Ireland would need nearly one quarter of its population to be capable of growing effectively, nearing one point two million people. Noel has data to indicate three hundred people in Ireland are regular viewers of his channel.

Noel's conceptions of the future are very thought out, he has considered most future problems from a number of angles, and in his conception, that he feels to be an inevitability rather than a probability, his knowledge and skills would better hedge against this future conception if they were consumed and replicated regionally, rather than internationally. By no means does he doubt the value of his work, but as a man who wanted to teach people how best to grow in an Irish context he would like a more local reach on his channel. Another day I am discussing the RED gardens with Donna, Noel's protégé, who had expressed feelings of 'stuckness' in her life prior to joining the eco-village and beginning to work with Noel. I ask her about how she feels about the work RED gardens does through its youtube channel and she replied that she felt absolutely privileged and delighted to get the opportunity to be a part of the gardens and eco-village project. "I struggle to even comprehend the ripple effects of what we're doing, even if Noel doesn't always".

Food is a vehicle for bringing the eco-village members together, and building and maintaining their sense of community and connectedness. Noel grows far too much food for his own needs, and has a system of sharing whereby he stores excess produce in a container outside his home and community members can take as they please, leaving whatever monetary value they felt. In building community spirit the eco-village hosts twice monthly community dinners. I was fortunate to attend the one of the first ones that took place after covid. In this community dinner people congregate at one person's house and everyone normally brings a dish. Almost the entirety of the food came from the eco-village itself and was outstandingly delicious. Eco-village members relaxed, ate, discussed food and these provide an opportunity for volunteers on the farm, or visiting researchers, to get familiar with the community on their most common of footing, food. Food is also an excellent outreach tool, with the research that Noel produces in his gardens attracting hundreds of people every year to learn from his experience, and the produce from the eco-village that is used by a café run by an eco-village member, makes that café one of the most popular eateries in all the surrounding towns, including large population centres.

Food security and assuring it is a core practice of the eco-village that is futurally oriented, as Sarah explained to me in choosing the site food security, and the quality of the soil were key considerations. The community seeks to empower its food growing capacities and, insofar as possible become fully locally autonomous in all their food production. There are barriers to achieving this, such as European union guidelines about the sale and trade of seeds being restricted, meaning growers are reliant on commercial procurement in many cases. However

there have built a strong relationship with a group called Irish seed savers, a group that focuses on saving and re-discovering native heritage seeds, and through their ongoing relationship with this group one can see heritage varieties of trees and fruits that have not been common for over a century or more, in many cases. There are sixty eight varieties of apple tree in the eco-village, when there are four or five common grown elsewhere.

Trish, for whom the availability of wheat was a concern due to global supply issues resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, was conducting a tour one day and was asked if she had tried growing her own wheat to fully localise her bakery production. Trish import much of the flour she uses from the United Kingdom, struggling to find the quality of wheat she needs on the Irish market. Trish showed us a section where she had planted previously, and explained the return on the square footage would mean she would have to plant far too large a field, and stated that the protein content was insufficient for the quality of bread she produces. After the tour I asked her what was she likely to do in the long term and she showed me around the side of her bakery where there several different sheaves of wheat, all slightly different. Trish explained she had found some heritage wheat varieties, and whilst they did not give the same yield as commercial varieties, giving less wheat per acre, she explained there had a wonderfully high protein count and that she was in discussion with another sustainable grower in another part of the country, to see if he could grow this variety in sufficient amounts to supply her. In anticipation of a nearing future concern Trish used her knowledge base, her network, and some citizen science in assessing the heritage varieties, to build a relationship and dynamic that can allow her to continue feeding her community, whilst engaging beyond her community, as a means of securing the future, and the daily bread of her community.

Conclusion

Islands of sanity

From this study we can see that conceptions of the future are present in the lives of residents of the eco-village, and that the influence of these future conceptions can be seen in how both individuals, and the eco-village as a collective orient their practice towards an indeterminate, but coherently adverse and insecure, conception of the future. Members of the eco-village are anticipating the future, as an amalgamation of adverse potentialities, and in that anticipation the future is drawing nearer to their lived present, slimming the present and past. For my participants the future is both bleak, and imminent, but they do conceive the eco-village project as one to help them prepare and survive the future as its conceived. This study argues that the eco-village, rather than being typified by its withdrawal from mainstream society, is better understood by its engagement with the status quo, and through its attempts to challenge it and to effectively have their principles and vision transgress the boundary of their community. The eco-village seeks to localise its resources such as food, fuel, and energy but encounters barriers to these desires through having to operate through the state and state apparatus, thereby limiting the scope of their desire for local autonomy in some areas. The eco-village builds smaller, local systems, and corresponding relationships to reduce their own footprint, but also in expectation of failures of large, complex human systems.

In eschewing estrangement, and inviting engagement, the eco-village is building islands of sanity, creating networks of relationships, knowledge, and skills beyond their community and understanding the dissemination of these skills as securing against a negative future. This community, as a response to their conceptions of the future, eschews estrangement and has affected change in line with their vision in their immediate locality, in the wider region through public transport, and continues to engage with green party government representatives in inviting them to their community, and setting the agenda.

As both individuals within the community, and as an organised community, practices that engage wider society and the status quo are undertaken in response to these negative conceptions of the future, borne of an understanding that negative futures are imminent, if not currently ongoing, and that to create a future in which they can survive they must build

community and relationships, both within their boundary and stretching beyond into the status quo.

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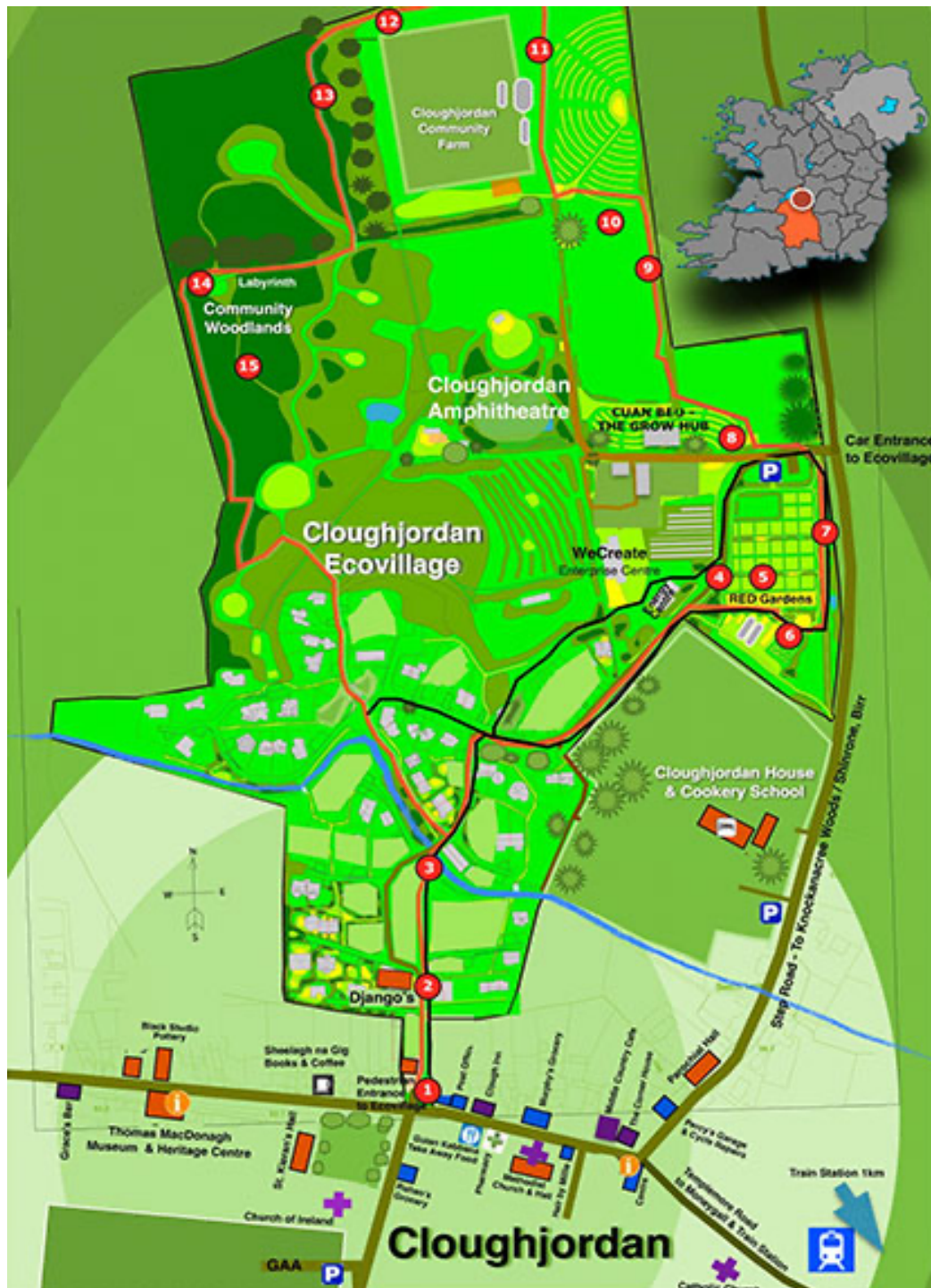
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Appendices



A map of the eco-village site indicating residential in the lower section in brighter green, the community farm, RED gardens, and the amphitheatre. The lower half shows the historical town of Cloughjordan and where it meets the eco-village at the point labelled number one in a red circle. The upper right indicates the relative position in Ireland.



My research assistant, Leroy Diego Adventure II. A key rapport builder and interview assistant, pictured in the eco-village.