

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

Preamble, The Earth Charter

Provide all, especially children and youth, with educational opportunities that empower them to contribute actively to sustainable development.

The Earth Charter – On Education

REGENERATIVE EDUCATION AND NETWORKS FOR TRANSITION

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SUMMARY

Through **regenerative education** we allow learners to express and develop their love for the world as they learn. They learn through engagement with their families, communities, and the ecosystems that they are an integral part of. They become part of the solution. Education becomes not passive, but instead an active process of creation, understanding and change.

Children, youth and adult learners of all ages need to touch, taste, smell, see and hear that a different world is possible. In this respect, ecovillages represent classrooms par excellence. They are demonstration sites of sustainability in practice, places of inspiration and holistic training centres.

The Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) and its educational programs, most specifically the Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) and Transition to Resilience Training (T2RT), represent invaluable resources for an education for sustainable development.

Key Words: regenerative education, ecovillage, education.

Background

The **Global Ecovillage Network (GEN)** is coming of age: 18 years ago, in 1995, GEN was founded through the concerted efforts of a group of visionaries at a conference in Findhorn, then already a well-known centre for sustainable living in Northern Scotland. GEN was created in order to make visible efforts happening simultaneously and unknowingly in parallel all over the world: people taking the future of their communities, villages and neighbourhoods into their own hands. People initiating,

reknitting and strengthening their communities in such a way that they may fulfil their potential of becoming caretakers of the ecosystems of which they are a part and guardians of the other species with which they coexist.

These intentional human communities go against the grain of a belief we have sadly come to embrace in our modern capitalist culture – that we are, as humans, bound to destroy nature around us as we seek to carve out our living. This belief lies at the heart of the path of collective stupidity that we find ourselves walking. Even though science has brought us detailed knowledge and a multitude of

facts about climate change, the extinction of species, peak everything and a multitude of other questions we are facing, we seem to be magnetically attracted to “business as usual”. Fixated on the one pathway that is not an option for survival, we act like lemmings steering towards a cliff.

In his book, **The Wisdom of Crowds**, James Surowiecki describes a similar behavior in some species of warrior ants: Individually, these ants have extremely small brains. However, collectively, they are able to accomplish astonishing feats and act in a varied and most beautifully orchestrated way. Now, in some rare cases, when the worst comes to the worst, and the core of their fragile organisation, their nest, is destroyed, these ants revert back to their most primal survival instinct, namely “follow the ant in front of you”. As they lose their central hub of exchange of information, their nest, they lose their capacity for differentiation and for appropriate response. This setback can get them caught up in one enormous cycle of movement, which may stretch out over an area with a diameter of several miles, and in which every ant follows the ant in front. The outcome is tragically predictable: in the end they all die of sheer exhaustion.

Have we lost our nest, the core of our “fragile organisation” as humanity? What would this core be for us? A shared

ethics, or value-system? A connection to higher purpose? Or the **self-organizing power of love**, as Charles Eisenstein proposes in “Sacred Economics”? How can our responses to the questions we are facing become more appropriate, both individually and collectively? How can we step into collective wisdom at this time? How can we create systems of education to support our youth and our children to do just that? How can we empower them to contribute their best, their talents and creativity, to the building of a collective path towards solutions that work, not only for us, but for the whole of the planet?

Regenerative Education

In **regenerative education** we allow learners to express and develop their love for the world as they learn. They learn through active engagement with their families, communities, and the ecosystems that they are an integral part of. They become part of the solution. The world becomes their classroom, a fascinating space of opportunities to explore and connect. Education becomes not passive, but instead an active process of creation, understanding, and change. Such regenerative education is central to the creation of

a way of life that works for the coming generations. One of the most powerful resources available is the longing in the heart of people to become part of the solution instead of feeling that they are contributing to the problem. We need an education for sustainable development that helps unleash this potential.

Networks of Transition

Within the networks of GEN, and the broader movements that GEN is a part of, we are working with such an approach to education. Together, we are moving into a **new story** about who we are as humans and what we are capable of. As humanity, we have created our current systems and structures and we can consciously and creatively update them. Instead of being motivated by self-interest and short-term benefit, we see how deeply and thoroughly we are motivated by our care and love for the world. The new physics shows us that we are interconnected, with each other and the world, in ways that we have been painfully ignoring for some time. Everything we are doing to this world, we are doing in some way to ourselves.

I coined the term **luxurious simplicity** to describe the lifestyle I chose when I first moved into an ecovillage. As a mother of two young children,

what could be more luxurious than living in a community - a safe and supportive environment for them? Eating food that comes straight from our own gardens; knowing where our water comes from and how our electricity is being generated; understanding the wholesome materials that make up the houses we live in, and the medicines we administer to those of us in need; having friends and community around with whom to share solidarity and our inquiry into life: what could be more precious? If at the same time, we are cutting our ecological footprint to one third of the German average (true for the case of the Sieben Linden Ecovillage in Germany) or to a half of the UK average (true for the case of Findhorn Ecovillage, where I live now), all the better!

Ecovillages represent classrooms par excellence. They are perfect places of inspiration and holistic training centres for the wider society, demonstration sites of sustainability in practice. Children, youth and adult learners of all ages need to touch, taste, smell, see and hear that a different world is possible. As Arundhati Roy once said: "It is possible to change our world. A different world is already coming into existence. On quiet days I can hear this new world breathing." In ecovillages around the globe, this new world can not only be heard breathing,

but also be seen thriving. A myriad of different solutions in all 4 dimensions of sustainable development (social, cultural, ecology, economy) is being implemented and further refined.

Ecovillages are rural or urban, intentional or traditional communities with vibrant social structures, vastly diverse, yet united in their actions towards low-impact, high-quality lifestyles. Fundamentally, an eco-village is a human-scale settlement consciously designed through participatory processes to secure long-term sustainability, integrating four dimensions of sustainability: ecology, economy, the social and the cultural. Today, ecovillages are gaining global recognition for the innovative and practical tools they offer to tackle simultaneously the many social, environmental, cultural and economic challenges we face. They are precious playgrounds for civil society engagement, and village networks can weave local solutions into a new tapestry for resilient societies.

Global Perspectives

When GEN started, the network was mainly focussed on intentional communities in the Western and Northern

hemispheres. This has drastically shifted in the past decade, with more and more traditional and indigenous villages approaching GEN in order to have the fragile preciousness of their way of living recognised, honoured and represented. The **Guidelines for the Recognition of Ecovillages** (attached) were created and an influx of whole networks of traditional villages, consciously transitioning into eco-villages, began. Currently, within GEN, the Global South is thriving: the Ecovillage Network of South America (**CASA**) and the Ecovillage Network of Africa (**GEN-Africa**) have strongly emerged in the past years to join the other three broad regional organisations that GEN-International works through: the Ecovillage Network of Oceania and Asia (**GENOA**), the Ecovillage Network of the English and French speaking Americas (**ENA**), and the Ecovillage Network of Europe (**GEN-Europe**). While the communities in the North tend to focus on a scaling down of ecological footprints, in the South the question may be more of a need to 'scale up' in order to meet basic needs. In contrast, while social systems of solidarity are still very much alive in many areas of the South, many individuals and communities in the North are looking to strengthen their social capital. The North has much to learn from the deep-rooted wisdom still alive within Southern cultures.

In the face of climate change and resource depletion, **a network that builds bridges between North and South** in the spirit of true collaboration and mutual respect deserves special attention. Our global legacy of colonialism and slavery has left giant footprints in the hearts of whole nations and peoples. Climate change is being caused by the lifestyles of the Global North, while its main impact is currently hitting the Global South. Yes, there are many reasons for rightful anger in the world. On the other hand, the authenticity of actually walking their talk in lowering ecological footprints, and the experience of building strong relationship, attracts interest and respect for Northern ecovillages from projects in the South.

In regenerative education for networks of transition, we foster a focus on a truly **global perspective** that is able to embrace all these feelings and perspectives. Creativity flourishes when people see (or are enabled to see) not just the individual trees but the forest as well. The connection between big picture and local details is what inspires breakthroughs. GEN works through promoting dialogue and exchange, building solidarity and partnerships across all borders. The global need and potential for **North-South reconciliation work** (with very practical implications) surfaces as soon as communication dee-

pens in such contexts. GEN's regenerative education programmes can build on decades of experience in building relationships of trust within groups of rich cultural and ethnic diversity – bringing core ingredients for fruitful international exchange.

Educational Programs

One of the fastest growing initiatives of GEN is its educational program, with courses such as the **Ecovillage Design Education (EDE)** running in over 35 countries and on all continents, with the encouragement and promotion of local trainers at its core. The EDE is a 4-week training that empowers communities to determine and consciously design their own course towards a sustainable future. The curriculum has been recognised and endorsed as setting a standard for the United Nations' 'Decade of Education for Sustainable Development – 2005-2014'. The EDE is universal in scope but local in application, directed towards honouring and drawing out valuable cultural diversity. Rather than losing valuable local knowledge in the process of 'modernisation', the aim is to honour and preserve local wisdom and sustainable traditions, while creatively merging these with innovative technologies, wherever appropriate.

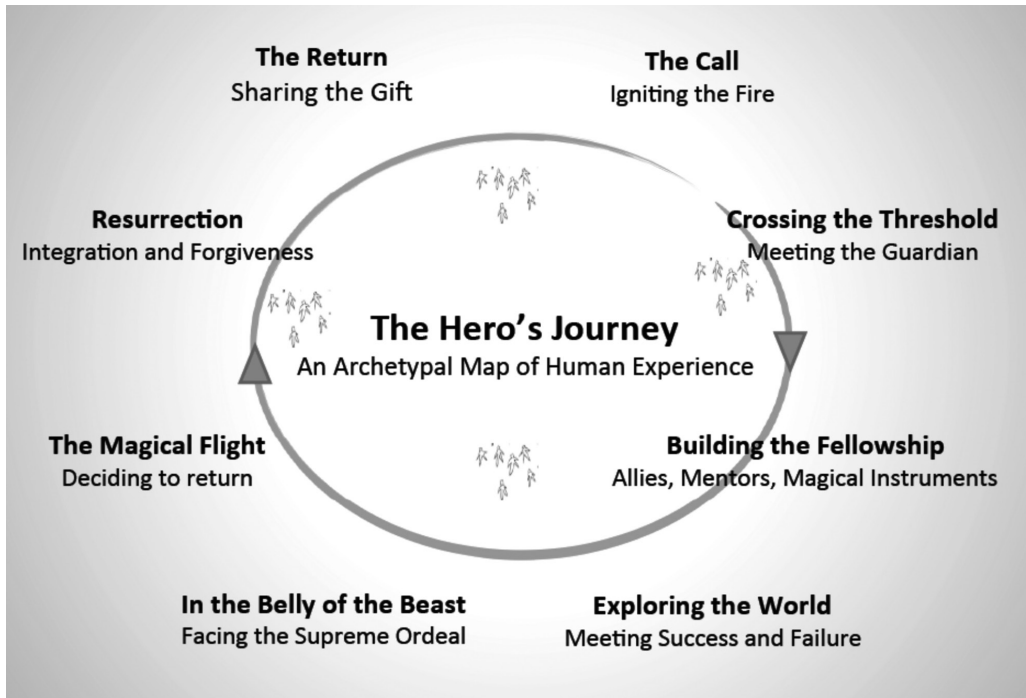
FIGURE 1.



After working with the EDE for some years, GEN, together with the Permaculture and Transition Town networks, several well established ecovillages and other more urban networks has now gone on to develop the **Transition to Resilience Training (T2RT)** and to add this to our repertoire of core courses. While the EDE provides an overview of solutions in all 4 areas of the

social, cultural, ecology and economy, the T2RT goes on to support participants through the turmoil of actual change and **transition processes** as projects are implemented. We found that, while students left the EDE and other one-off trainings highly inspired, they often needed more understanding and support as they tried to implement change within their local environments.

FIGURE 2.



The EDE is moulded around the archetypal model of the EDE-Mandala (see Figure 1 above). The T2RT is moulded around the archetypal model of the Hero's Journey (see Figure 2 below) and works with participants at three levels: the personal (I), the group (we) and the larger context of sustainability and resilience (world). To build capacity in the face of change processes, we need to understand how to develop personal resilience and a resilient group life in order to meet the world's needs. We need to learn to work in teams and to celebrate and learn from both success

and failure. We need to understand the nature of change.

At the level of the individual, modern science tells us that, contrary to the popular myth that 'you either have it or you don't', creativity is hardwired into everyone's brain. The challenge of regenerative education is to unleash this untapped potential. The networks of GEN and its educational programs represent invaluable resources for such an education. They are, moreover, set within a context of progressive educational theory. Sir Michael Barber, former head of UK Prime Minister Tony

Blair's Delivery Unit and currently pioneering educational reform throughout Pakistan, Russia and in some of the most disadvantaged states in the USA, writes that the progressive education curricula of the future will focus around 4 variables: ethics, knowledge, thinking and leadership. In his article, 'Oceans of Innovation', he arranges them in the following formula:

$$E (K + T + L)$$

i.e. the progressive education curriculum will be based around the teaching of knowledge (facts, informa-

tion etc), how to think in different and varied ways, and leadership; and that these will all need to be set within an ethical framework.

The descriptions above of the EDE and T2RT clearly fit this formula. The regenerative education that GEN and the ecovillage networks are pioneering, teaches :

All this is set within a clear ethical framework that sets the human being within a global Gaian perspective and involves inculcating a culture of care, sensitivity, interconnectedness, generosity, compassion and service.

- **Knowledge (the hard and soft technologies of sustainable community)**
- **Thinking (with head, heart and hands; cognitive, artistic, kinaesthetic development – a holistic range of approaches)**
- **Leadership – when you spend your life living and working in groups one learns about leadership and group dynamics both by osmosis and immersion, and through the application of theory**

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