The EVI Mission: To promote experiential learning about ways of meeting human needs for shelter, food, energy, livelihood and social connectedness that are aligned with the long term health and viability of Earth and all its inhabitants.

Adopted by the EVI Board 28 October 2009

EcoVillage at Ithaca in Publications, Dissertations and Reports

List of Publications about Ecovillage at Ithaca or in which Ecovillage at Ithaca is discussed in a major way
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Books or Chapters in Books


Journal Articles


Abstract

Purpose – To provide an example of how colleges can partner with local EcoVillages to further sustainability curriculum on campus and the educational mission of the EcoVillages, and to strengthen ties with the community.

Design/methodology/approach – Describes four structured courses developed for the Environmental Studies Program, including sustainable communities, sustainable land use, sustainable energy and environmental futures. Additionally, independent research opportunities in wind energy, solar photovoltaics, and GIS/GPS developed as part of the curriculum. Describes numerous ancillary activities that have promoted sustainability across campus and the community.

Findings – Provides information about how to develop educational partnerships with community groups, foster sustainability education on campus, recruit additional faculty involvement, and influence college operations with respect to sustainability.

Practical implications – A very useful source of information for those involved in building sustainability curriculum and linking it to campus operations and community outreach.

Originality/value – This paper describes a unique partnership between a college and an intentional community that serves as a model for other colleges and universities.

Keywords Partnership, Sustainable development, Universities

Paper type Case study

Author’s Abstract
The sociotechnical transitions framework describes how novel practice emerges from marginal “niche” contexts to the mainstream. Scholars of various fields have used sociotechnical transitions to explain processes of structural change for sustainability, yet little research examines the role of local plans or planners in transition processes. The author offers an in-depth case study following the evolution of an eco-cohousing model from its grassroots origins to its current application in the housing market of Ithaca, New York. Planners used existing planning documents to translate innovative practices to the public, defying assumptions of the rational-linear model still common in planning scholarship.

To access the article directly from the Sage Publications website, click on: [http://jpe.sagepub.com/content/34/4/451](http://jpe.sagepub.com/content/34/4/451)


Includes overview of EVI energy task force of 2005. Abstract: The author finds that “ecovillages can play powerful roles in the social transition to sustainability, but need to pay attention to quantification and evaluation to match their results to their intentions and become meaningful examples.” Click [here](http://jpe.sagepub.com/content/34/4/451).


Ecovillages are a growing trend in the effort to find social and environmentally sustainable ways to live. Focused on preserving land and creating a sense of community, their design aims to offer middleclass households a way to connect with each other and the natural environment. Yet missing from this concept is an effort to address equity and environmental injustice concerns. This article examines an ecovillage in upstate New York and some of the opportunities and challenges of including equity and justice in this new socially and environmentally sustainable way to live. It concludes that if ecovillages hope to be more than a greener version of sprawl, they will need to expand their commitment to sustainability by incorporating equity and justice issues, including environmental justice struggles.


Publishers Extract:
Purpose – Ecological cohousing communities, or ecovillages, are emerging as contemporary housing models that attempt to recreate a sense of community and encourage an environmentally sustainable lifestyle. This chapter analyzes a rural ecovillage (Ecovillage at Ithaca – EVI) to find out how the community conceptualizes and practices sustainability. The chapter also examines whether and how the community incorporates issues of equity and social justice into its activities.
http://www.emeraldinsight.com/books.htm?chapterid=1881443&show=abstract


Compares 8 ecovillages including EVI on 11 characteristics including area, food grown, social interaction, decision-making etc. as well as with the US Averages where appropriate. EVI is ecovillage “F.”


Based on 18 unstructured interviews gathered during a week in August, 2000 and grounded theory to interpret five kinds of “connectedness” the first neighborhood residents felt: connection with the wild landscape, connection with community, connection with cultivated landscape, personal integration, and connection through time/intergenerational sustainability.


Compares EVI built design and consumption data with assumed Ecological Footprint and components had the site been traditionally developed. Also compares with a presumed smart growth urban site.
Dissertations

As of current update:

- B.A.: 2
- M.A./M.S.: 9
- Ph.D.: 4


Pages 32–41 summarize early history and development of EVI. Based on emails and on Liz Walker’s book. No abstract.


EVI is contrasted with Dancing Rabbit and Los Angeles ecovillages. Most EVI materials are found on pages 89–90. 140–178 and 211.

Author’s abstract: Solving the ‘wicked’ and ‘persistent’ environmental problems of the twenty-first century will require changes in the social and technological structures that guide urban development. While modern planning offers a century’s worth of solutions to environmental problems at the local scale, many of these ‘first-order’ solutions exacerbate problems at larger scales (e.g. sprawl, auto dependency, climate change). Change of the ‘second-order’ is necessary to address problems such as climate change, energy scarcity, and the destruction of finite ecosystems.

The Multi-Level Perspective of Socio-Technical Systems (MLP) claims that ‘second order’ structural change is resisted by socio-technical regimes—a tangle of mutually reinforcing rules, physical structures, and social networks. While regimes are critical for day-to-day functioning in a complex world, the regime structures that guide urban development in North America have resulted in human settlements that consume life-supporting resources faster than they can replenish, and result in diffuse social and environmental consequences that are difficult to ‘solve’ at the local scale. According to the MLP, regimes begin to transform under the exogenous pressure of sociotechnical landscape forces (e.g. demographic shifts, national politics, armed conflict, resource scarcity) and with alternatives incubated in socio-technical niches, or networks of actors that play by different ‘rules of the game.’

This dissertation looks specifically to the relationship between local urban development regimes and ecovillages—grassroots niche projects ideologically committed to low-impact living. Ecovillages are a locally-rooted response to the inadequacies of government environmental policy in the twenty-first century. They exist in urban, suburban, and rural areas on six continents. They attempt to model alternative housing, transportation, energy production, food production, and social governance all on one site. In recent years, multiple ecovillages have earned media attention for partnering with local policy makers on climate change and other environmental initiatives. Some have helped craft new land use regulations that allow for a broader mix of uses and cooperative spaces. Others are less influential. Why are certain ecovillages influential and others less so—especially in terms of urban policy? Drawing from Smith (2007), I hypothesize that the most
Influential ecovillages share some but not all elements of the urban development regime. That is, they are ‘intermediately’ situated relative to the mainstream and the radical grassroots. This enables them to translate their innovative practices to mainstream actors.

I test this relationship by disseminating a survey to ecovillages across the United States and Canada and scoring them on two scales: *regime distance* (independent variable) and *regime influence* (dependent variable). The survey results confirm Smith’s hypothesis. “Intermediacy” is a necessary but insufficient condition for ecovillage projects to influence mainstream planning policy.

I elaborate on these results by conducting several ethnographic case studies that compare ‘influential’ ecovillages against their less influential counterparts. Taking up residence in ecovillages and conducting semi-structured interviews with ecovillage member-residents, I find that ‘intermediacy’ is a dynamic and liminal state. Influential ecovillages exist simultaneously inside and outside the urban development regime, but they do not start as intermediate. Rather, they “earn” this status by ‘settling in’ to the regime, accepting some regime rules, and demonstrating their feasibility to institutional actors in the mainstream. It is through these connections that the regime begins to ‘warm up’ to the niche experiments, and begins to adopt their practices as municipal code.

The results of this dissertation offer planners a path toward a clearer understanding of systemic change for sustainable communities and support interpretive/pragmatic conceptions of planning, which frame planners as facilitators of communication amongst diverse entities rather than objective analysts or experts. Future research and practice might use the MLP and similar theories to frame innovative local and regional environmental policies as *regime transition*.


Author’s abstract: When dealing with environmental issues, most reports highlight global-scale solutions. However, as the problem is embedded in all levels of our society, we must also implement solutions on smaller levels. Ecovillages, for example, are intentional communities engaging in initiatives to address sustainability in practical matters. The purpose of my research is to study how EcoVillage at Ithaca New York, USA as a small-scale experiment in sustainability, has organized itself. Data collection took place from August 21st to October 6th 2007 and involved multiple techniques: participant-observation, field notes, documents analysis, and in-depth interviews with 21 key informants. An analytical framework based on organization theory was developed in order to explore the case study. The results suggest that three major tensions are created within EcoVillage at Ithaca's organizational process. The strategies developed to adapt to these tensions are: shared leadership, enhanced communication among members and partnership with the surrounding social environment.


Compares EVI and Cambridge Co-housing with US and Northeast regional averages in heating energy and electricity use.
Author’s abstract: The sizes of both single-family and multifamily homes have grown steadily in the United States over the last fifty years. During this time, despite more efficient production processes, energy consumption in the country also rose. The many concerns associated with increased energy consumption include hastening depletion of fossil fuel resources, increased dependence on foreign resources for fuel, environmental concerns related to fossil fuel emissions, and ensuring all people have access to economic energy sources. Awareness of the necessity to engage in more sustainable practices (environmentally, economically, and socially) has existed at least since the 1960s. The United Nations formalized these concerns in the 1987 publication, “Our Common Future” in which they defined and popularized the term “sustainable development.” Despite this awareness and the continuing efforts of governmental and non-governmental agencies to reduce the impact of energy consumption, the rate of consumption has continued to rise and the rate of growth of energy consumption has only seen marginal improvements in the United States (and has risen dramatically in some developing countries such as China and India). One way to reduce the rate of consumption or slow the rate of growth is to reduce the impact of the United States housing market through demand management techniques and energy efficient construction. Cohousing offers one opportunity to accomplish that goal. This thesis outlines the background information related to U.S. energy consumption and housing trends, the relative impact of energy consumption in cohousing, and the challenges of implementing cohousing on a large enough scale to make an impact in nation-wide consumption trends.


Author’s abstract: Participatory or collaborative design is a strategy for incorporating user values into the design process. Through the direct participation of a user group, collaborative design is relevant to both public projects and private residential developments as a method to empower participants, develop more user suitable designs as well as build a community. This thesis examines the group processes of collaborative design. The literature on user participation in design emphasizes techniques and methods. Generally, the literature lacks attention to the group decision-making, conflict resolution and community-building aspects of participatory design. This thesis attempts to address some of the gap in the literature by addressing how consensus-building strategies may contribute to the practice of participatory design. This thesis examines the EcoVillage at Ithaca collaborative design process. EcoVillage is a project for creating an ecologically and socially sustainable community in upstate New York. An exploration of the group processes of design is conducted through in-depth interviews of participants, designers, and project organizers. A finding is that a consensus-building approach to participatory design helps to manage group conflicts, fosters better communication between designer and participant, as well as provides a basis for future group projects and collaborative decision-making. It is found that while participatory design is a community-building activity, the method also contributes to member attrition from the group by clarifying values through conflict and discussion.

Based on 15 months participant observation and interviews at EVI starting in May 2001. Main argument is that use of green products is not a sufficient means of reducing the footprint of the village – or, by extension, of a society based on capitalism. Click here.

Author’s abstract: Communities such as Ecovillage at Ithaca are redefining ways individuals in the United States are responding to the concern for environmental and social sustainability. These housing developments bring together individuals who aspire to create a sense of community while preserving nature. The new themed communities materialize as isolated parks where the mission of social and ecological sustainability is expressed through the daily practices of its residents. By exploring the everyday life of residents through extensive participant observation and conducting numerous in-depth interviews, this work examines the social construction of a green lifestyle. Through consuming commodities marketed as “green,” lifestyles hinge on the discourse of natural capitalism, suggesting the possibility of using a capitalist framework to achieve environmental sustainability. The marketing of green commodities has resulted in a convoluted combination of prioritized efforts to reduce human impact on the planet by engaging in practices that at once appear to reduce consumption, while endorsing a culture of green consumption. Enacting a green lifestyle through the construction of new ecovillages creates a juxtaposition for residents who seek to address environmental and social degradation through the consumption of green commodities. Living in an ecovillage is a means to express the need to redesign neighborhoods that encourage reduction in resource consumption, while responding to a nostalgia for community.

Fischetti, Diana Michelle. 2008. Building Resistance from Home: Ecovillage at Ithaca as a Model of Sustainable Living. A THESIS Presented to the Department of Geography and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts September 2008. Link is at end of the abstract. 239 pages.

Author’s abstract: Because of the personal, social, economic, and environmental impacts of material consumption, resistance is afoot. The creation of new places is a tool used by those resisting the negative aspects of consumer culture. One example is the Ecovillage: an intentional community whose members strive to live in a socially and environmentally sustainable manner, to practice voluntary simplicity, and to cultivate meaning, life satisfaction, and fulfillment. This research involves a case study of EcoVillage at Ithaca, located in New York, the goal of which is to create a model of sustainable living that is appealing to mainstream America, reduce the ecological footprint of inhabitants and increase meaningful relationships within the community. Through its educational mission and accompanying outreach, EcoVillage at Ithaca models an alternative to middle-class, mainstream American culture. EcoVillage at Ithaca’s impact beyond the lives of the individual residents demonstrates its effectiveness as a space of resistance to consumer society.

Analyzes EVI and three other cohousing sites in the US in terms of Emily Talen’s Four Urbanist Cultures Model. EVI data from Liz Walker’s book and the EVI website.

Abstract: Currently, the amount of planned cohousing communities in America outnumbers existing and completed communities. There is, therefore, a need for further studies so that a new typology for cohousing community planning may emerge which reveals various degrees of communal developing and living. Together with the specific design methods chosen by residents, it may be concluded that the success or failure of any given cohousing culture is linked to its ability to think about its relationship to other cultures, both within and outside the cohousing model. In this thesis, I will focus on an analysis of four urban and community planning methods developed by Emily Talen and expand upon these in order to understand the contemporary designs of cohousing communities. Furthermore, a thorough analysis of four cohousing communities will be conducted in order to clarify existing cohousing variations based upon the urban intensity and order of each communities’ situation.


Author’s abstract: The purpose of this thesis is to capture the lives of my friends and informants at EcoVillage at Ithaca (EVI), an intentional community in the state of New York, USA - where I conducted ethnographic field research from the 30th of December 2010 through March 29th 2011 - as they attempt to define and balance the ideals of unity and individuality, in their journey toward establishing a shared culture within an inclusive and supportive environment for all.

One might ask: What is the main dilemma the community faces in this regard? Is too much individualism getting in the way of forming a cohesive community, able to work toward common goals and reach for a shared vision; or is too big a drive toward communitarianism overshadowing the personal expression of, and understanding for, individual differences that inevitably exist within a community?

Through extensive participant observation, and personal interactions with various EcoVillagers, I can only conclude that it seems to be both and neither, under varying circumstances, for different individuals, and at different times in the community. In this thesis, I will give voice to both sides of the dilemma - the hardships that come with being different in a close community, as well as the struggle to overcome individualistic mind-sets and form a cohesive community - in an effort to provide insight into the central question: How is ‘the balance between a deep respect for individuality, while living together as a community, striving toward a common vision, conceptualized and maintained’?

This tension, present in the EcoVillage at Ithaca can be linked to the central themes of individuality and importance of community in U.S. society. Individuality and diversity are frequently ‘celebrated’ in U.S. society, but problematized by some or in some cases. Likewise, strong sense of community is often experienced as empowering, but can also become a
restrictive experience for others or in other cases. Why, how and when do these tensions arise? The clash between the shared ideals of individuality and community will first be explored in the context of American society, followed by recollections of specific instances in the EcoVillage community that mirror the theoretical discourse.

In conclusion, I aim to show the EcoVillage’s (potential) evolution toward a community in which a shared respect for individual differences (in needs, perspectives, life style choices, etc.), bind the EcoVillagers together in their collective effort to model a social and environmentally sustainable community. A place where ‘unity in diversity’ is possible and empowering. The full text of this dissertation can be accessed on the EVI website at:


Author’s abstract: This report assesses the residential energy systems of two ecovillages in the United States (Ecovillage Ithaca, New York and Twin Oaks Community, Virginia) in an effort to determine how these developments can contribute to an overall energy transition in the country. The report finds that both ecovillages studied are living more sustainably with regards to their residential energy systems. EVI consumes about 46% less residential energy per resident than the average New York resident, and produces approximately 11% of all residential energy consumed. Twin Oaks consumes about 31% less residential energy per resident then the average Virginian, and produces approximately 41% of all the residential energy it consumes. Interviews with residents suggest that the social and economic institutions at each ecovillage - which allow for different forms of communal investment and agency – enable many built form investments and behavioral changes to improve residential energy systems. ‘Built form’ improvements are found to be more easily replicated in broader society than behavioral changes, due to the ease of implementation and the compatibility with the current regime. External interaction with the local, state, and federal governments as well as the private market is seen to be greatly dependent on the specific ecovillage in question – including the institutions established within the village, the community’s relationship with local authorities, and the methods of adaptation used. The report concludes that these two small-scale community energy systems offer many lessons for broader society and other emerging intentional communities. However, their contribution to an overall energy transition is minimal due to a lack of cohesive policy towards such a transition from the national government.


Compares Calgary, Alberta, Nelson British Columbia and Ithaca, NY (not specifically EVI) on demographic variables and on attitudes towards various sustainability practices such as organic food, vegetarianism, general purchasing habits, and more. Ithaca was apparently chosen partly because EVI is in the area.


Contrasts sustainability accomplishments and causes among Ecovillage at Ithaca, Earthaven and Sirius. EVI discussed throughout the text and especially on pages 35 – 73. Click here.

Author’s abstract: Ecovillages are small, intentional communities which focus on reducing environmental impact while creating a community that incorporates the natural world. Despite varying approaches, each ecovillage attempts to create a community that integrates the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainability. This study investigates several of these communities to better understand two key questions: 1) to what extent do ecovillage residents have a lower environmental impact than residents of nearby communities and the national average? -- and 2) how is the reduction in environmental impact achieved? These questions are addressed through the use of life cycle assessment and qualitative case studies of three sites, specifically one suburban and two rural ecovillages. Comparisons with nearby communities and the national average are made, and the results show that the case study ecovillages have a much lower per capita environmental impact. My research suggests that this is achieved through a combination of physical (village building and planning) and behavioral adaptations supported by community ideals and norms.


Author’s main conclusion (page 39): The purpose of this dissertation has been to argue that inherent in the intentional construction of ‘community’ is the process of conceptual boundary-making. I suggest that these conceptual boundaries are necessary because of the intentional creation of a community which is intrinsically intertwined within the modern world. I suggest that it is the volatile relationship between EVI and “the outside world” which makes the conceptual boundaries of this community necessary because EcoVillage at Ithaca is ultimately a distinctive pioneering experiment in sustainable, community living. The continuing construction of ‘community’ at EVI and therefore the process of boundary-making infers a cultural critique onto the current societal mode in the United States

Whitfield, Jason. 2001. Understanding the Barriers Encountered by Residents of Ecovillages. A thesis presented to the University of Waterloo in fulfillment of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Planning. Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. A print copy is available at EVI.

Miscellaneous Reports and Documents

Local village cooperatives residents have developed in printing, winter root vegetables and neighborhood photovoltaic cells at Ecovillage at Ithaca. [http://geo.coop/node/617](http://geo.coop/node/617)


Detailed account of the FROG Neighborhood 50 kw Solar PV array planning, construction and results. The project now delivers 55% of neighborhood electricity.


Abstract: The rise of a protest movement to challenge the forces that promote the globalization of a non-sustainable capitalist industrial system has been paralleled by the rise of the ecovillage movement as a national and international enterprise.


**Websites with Further Information on EVI**

Architect and builder description of the technical aspects of the FROG heating system:


Intentional Communities Directory Listing for EVI – includes some basic information about the community: [http://directory.ic.org/1722/EcoVillage_at_Ithaca](http://directory.ic.org/1722/EcoVillage_at_Ithaca)

Information on the FROG Neighborhood PV Array installed December 2011, including statistical record of the power generated:


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Actual electrical usage by neighborhood and by individual house number after installation of the FROG photovoltaic array. Data begin in January 2012: [http://metering.ev.ithaca.ny.us/](http://metering.ev.ithaca.ny.us/)

EPA Climate Showcase Grant website. Has information on TREE, the third EVI neighborhood plus two other Tompkins County communities influenced by and sharing some characteristics with EVI:

[http://community-that-works.org/](http://community-that-works.org/)