Reimagining Development: Understanding the Alter-Globalization Movement from Ecovillages to Gross National Happiness

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Reimagining Development:
Understanding the Alter-Globalization Movement from Ecovillages to Gross National Happiness

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Sociology
by
Daniela Carpano

Committee in charge:

Professor Richard Madsen, Chair
Professor Ivan Evans
Professor Jeremy Prestholdt
Professor Akos Rona-Tas
Professor Charles Thorpe

2015
The Dissertation of Daniela Carpano is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair
DEDICATION

To the people who never stop dreaming that “Another World is Possible”
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<td>AGM</td>
<td>Alter-Globalization Movement</td>
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<td>CC</td>
<td>Community Currency</td>
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<td>CSA</td>
<td>Community Supported Agriculture</td>
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<td>FDI</td>
<td>Foreign Direct Investment</td>
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<td>GEN</td>
<td>Global Ecovillage Network</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>GNH</td>
<td>Gross National Happiness</td>
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<td>GPI</td>
<td>Genuine Progress Indicator</td>
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<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFG</td>
<td>International Forum on Globalization</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<td>LETS</td>
<td>Local Exchange Trading Systems</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>NSM</td>
<td>New Social Movements</td>
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<td>SAP</td>
<td>Structural Adjustment Program</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>WEF</td>
<td>World Economic Forum</td>
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Reimagining Development
Understanding the Alter-Globalization Movement: From Ecovillages to Gross National Happiness

by
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Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology
University of California, San Diego, 2015
Professor Richard Madsen, Chair

Ever since the “Battle of Seattle” halted the World Trade Organization meeting in November of 1999, social movement scholars have debated whether the transnational activists who protested in Seattle and in subsequent international summits constitute a unified global movement with a shared identity, values and goals, or if they are an ad hoc, heterogeneous collection of people from separate movements. This study suggests that it may be useful to distinguish between a “negative” –or reactive –and a “positive” –or proactive –convergence. Studies that focus on the negative convergence see participants as protestors who are simply resisting market-driven forces. In contrast, in a positive convergence approach, participants are seen as sharing common values and working together to build an alternative future.
This study focuses on the Alter-Globalization Movement to investigate whether there is an empirical basis for the positive convergence approach. Most of the research done on the Alter-Globalization Movement has focused on the participants at protest sites, which tends to overemphasize individual grievances at the expense of finding a shared common vision. I employ an alternative methodology by carrying out fieldwork across sixteen disparate communities in both the global North and South. Only by studying community practices in day to day life can we state whether a shared identity really exists. Following Karl Polanyi’s “double movement theory”, I look at how these communities are decommodifying man and nature by employing Standing’s formula of decomodification. Specifically, I analyze how Social Income increases by increasing Self Production and Community Benefits.

I find that all the communities and organizations studied employ most of the following decomodification practices: subsistence farming, organic agriculture, composting, seed saving, Fair Trade, Community Supported Agriculture, sharing goods and services and community currencies. I argue that these decomodification practices produce a new lifestyle that removes the self from the artificiality of consumer culture, creating a new self. The ecological identity of the new self, centers on relationships rather than acquisition, constructing a new world of meaning and a social imaginary that may be more powerful than political movements in bringing about large scale social change.
CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

This nascent movement faces enormous obstacles; it will not be easy to forge a durable alliance that reconciles the often conflicting interests of people in the global South with those in the Global North… Nevertheless, it is of enormous significance that for the first time in history, the governance structure of the global economy has become the central target of transnational social movement activity. (Frederick Block “Introduction” p.xxxxviii in Karl Polanyi, “The Great Transformation” Boston: Beacon Press, 2001)

Outline

1.1 Understanding the “Alter-Globalization” Movement

1.2 The Main Actors: The International Forum on Globalization and the World Social Forum

1.3 Uncovering the Roots of the Alter-Globalization Movement

1.4 Embracing a New Paradigm: Gross National Happiness

1.5 Selecting “Lives on the Ground”: Ecovillages and Community Empowerment

1.6 The Fieldwork

1.7 The Structure of the Work

1.1 Understanding the “Alter-globalization” Movement
Ever since the “Battle of Seattle” halted the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in November of 1999, social movement scholars have been puzzled by that sudden, unforeseen agglomeration of so many people from so many walks of life. The protest in Seattle appeared to present a hodge-podge of grievances, championed by an extremely heterogeneous and diverse multitude of people. Thus, the question that scholars ask is whether the transnational activists who protested in Seattle are the members of a new movement, “or is it just a collection of separate movements?” (Brecher, Costello, and Smith 2008:685).

According to Social Movement scholars, “old” social movements were “nothing more than preference structure directed toward social change” (McCarthy and Zald 1997). In general, grievances developed within the framework of the nation-state, and collective action was aimed at changing some elements of the social structure and/or of the economic reward system in a society. Hence, social movements have been explained by either theories of ideology or by theories of organization and rationality. However, the new forms of collective action that started in the 1960s did not appear to fit the old paradigm. Conflicts were no longer based solely on economic grounds. Rather, identity took center stage, and grievances shifted from having a political focus to having a cultural one. Scholars had to explain the changing tactics, structures, and nature of collective action, and a New Social Movement (NSM) theory emerged.

To return to the “Battle of Seattle”: How does one explain it? Was it just the confluence of two movements, “old” (labor, farmers, etc.) and “new” (women,
environmentalists, etc.)? Or is global society witnessing the formation of a new type of social movement? Perhaps it is a synthesis of conflicts that are taking place on both economic and cultural grounds; perhaps it is even the first true anti-systemic movement. Many questions are still unanswered owing to the fact that the very nature of the movement—global, dispersed, and diffused—makes it very difficult to study in the first place. Where is the leadership? Who really belongs to the movement? What are its core demands?

As a starting point, it may be useful to distinguish between a “negative”, --or reactive –and a “positive” --or pro-active --convergence (Brecher, Costello, and Smith 2008). A negative convergence suggests that the groups involved are simply resisting global corporations and the market-driven “race to the bottom.” This stands in contrast to a positive convergence, in which the participating groups share common values and work together to build an alternative future. It has already been ascertained that labor union workers, French farmers, and defenders of endangered species protesting together in Seattle could not possibly share much of a common interest beyond that of feeling equally threatened by free trade (Buttel and Gould 2006). Thus, protesting together in Seattle represented a “negative” convergence—a resistance to globalization in which the parties involved did not possess a shared model to propose in its place.

The object of this study is to investigate whether or not a positive convergence does in fact exist. In other words, what are the shared values and goals among groups that purport to be constructing “another world”? The presence of a common framework of values constituting a model for the future, should it exist, would be
indicative that a single social movement with the ability to “develop a common interpretation of reality to nurture solidarity and collective identifications” (Della Porta and al. 2006:18-19); Alternatively, the lack of this common framework would imply that these movements are merely the agglomeration of distinctly separate coalitions whose cohesion is limited to a “common critique of neoliberal economic policies” as described by Buttel and Gould (2006:270).

“Another world is possible” was the slogan at the World Social Forum (WSF) convened by the “Seattle people”\(^1\) in 2001 in Porto Alegre. What world are they referring to? What does it look like? Who is building it? And where do those individuals come from? What identity, if any, do they share? And above all, is Castells (2004) right when he says that “the internal diversity of the movement forbids a simple, unified characterization of its values and goals”? These are the questions that this research proposes to answer, providing a glimpse on an “another world” that seems impossible to locate and define because it deals with lifestyles, practices and ideas carried across the globe by diverse people, who are continuously in a flux of change. Yet these people are nonetheless members of a global network, which, as Block noted (see opening quote) for the first time targeted the governance structure of the global economy.

\(^{1}\) One of the terms used by the media to portray the participants to the AGM movement.
1.2 The Main Actors: The International Forum on Globalization and the World Social Forum

Much of the theoretical framework for the groups opposing capitalist globalization comes from scholars affiliated with the International Forum on Globalization (IFG). This institution was created in 1994 in response to growing concerns over the power that multinational corporations and international organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the newborn World Trade Organization (WTO) held over the process of economic globalization.

The IFG was formed by scholars from the Global North and South. Its website describes the organization as being an educational institution designed with the purpose of supporting social justice and environmental movements, and it purports to do this by providing the critical thinking and frameworks that inform campaigns and activities "on the ground." It adds that its goals are twofold: “(1) Expose the multiple effects of economic globalization in order to stimulate debate, and (2) Seek to reverse the globalization process by encouraging ideas and activities which revitalize local economies and communities, and ensure long-term ecological stability” (IFG 2011).

The IFG works to support a list of ten principles that have been recognized as a shared platform among all the disparate groups composing the AGM (Cavanagh and Mander 2004:77). Among the core principles enumerated, those relevant to this study’s purpose of verifying which concepts are actually shared and implemented across
different cultures and levels of economic development included (1) ecological sustainability, (2) food security and safety, and (3) equity.

The formation of the IFG preceded the protest in Seattle and actually contributed to its success. In contrast, the WSF symbolizes the legacy of the protest, since it was born out of the very momentum that the movement gained as a consequence of the visibility that the media gave to the “battle” in Seattle.

The first WSF gathering was held in 2001 in Porto Alegre as a “counter-summit” to the World Economic Forum (WEF), a meeting held every year by the world’s political and business leaders at a luxury resort in Davos, Switzerland. The objective at Porto Alegre was to provide a platform for a debate on globalization, and with over 16,000 people participating in that first meeting, it was considered a success. The number of participants then rose to 52,000 in 2002, and to 100,000 in 2003 (Della Porta and al. 2006:9).

Following the first meeting a charter was established in which it was declared that the WSF “stands in opposition to a process of globalization commanded by the large multinational corporations and by the governments and international institutions at the service of those corporations interests” (WSF 2001). In the thousands of meetings and seminars held at the WSFs gathering, alternative visions and policies were presented and debated. Some of them had been already tested, such as involving citizens in public decision making, as implemented in the Porto Alegre participatory budget (Della Porta and al. 2006:10). Thus, a wider objective of the WSF is to
generate viable alternatives to the current neo-liberal globalization, and to contribute to the development of a transnational identity (Smith 2008:199).

In other words, the forum is meant to be the place where movements and organizations can share knowledge about successful ways to build new communities, “if globalization is the challenge, it also seems to be the resource of protesters who… do not oppose it absolutely but aim at changing its content” (Della Porta and al. 2006:16).

1.3 Uncovering the Roots of the Alter-Globalization Movement

Social movements acting beyond the border of the nation-state are not a new phenomenon. The “old” labor, anti-slavery, and suffragette movements all acted transnationally, to name a few, as did many of the “new” identity based social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, social movements based on some of the same “old” and “new” grievances were even represented in the “Battle of Seattle.” Yet, the Alter-Globalization Movement (AGM) appears at least in part to be something different in so far as it represents a unified global movement that is counter-hegemonic to the present capitalist world-economy.

The alter-globalization movement is commonly thought to be born at the time of the “Battle of Seattle.” However, through historical investigation and through the fieldwork in particular, I learned that this movement has existed for over a generation
at minimum. The symbolic beginning of this movement would be more correctly recognized as stemming from the protest movement of the 1960s than from the “Battle of Seattle” in 1999. This finding may not come as a surprise when one considers the communities of the North that were examined in the course of this research, such as Findhorn in Scotland (founded in 1962) or the Farm in Tennessee (founded by “hippies” in the early 1970s). Much more unexpected was the finding that activists in Bangladesh and Thailand are likewise able to trace either their own personal involvement in the AGM or their movement’s origins back to the 1968 student movement at the University of Dhaka or Bangkok.

It turns out that when Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein (1989) hypothesized the 1968 movement as a rehearsal for global counter-hegemonic events to come, they had, indeed, anticipated the advent of the “Battle of Seattle” and of the larger AGM. If it appeared that “by the early Seventies the upheaval was over—as mysteriously as it had appeared, and as worldwide” (Gitlin 1987:3), it is because the most committed participants had retreated to learn new techniques to resist the capitalist economy. As Klatch has already pointed out, “Contrary to popular assumptions, leftists did not “sell out” at the end of the 1960s, becoming bankers and businessmen, and abandoning their beliefs… “ (Klatch 1999:7)

In fact, although most of the “hippy” communes in the North dissolved due to being unviable economically, many of their activists went on to learn permaculture
design, to experiment with renewable energy and alternative currency systems, to establish non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Co-housing arrangements, and finally to converge with the environmental and social justice movement. By the time the internet came on the scene, they were ready to move again, and there was an explosion of global networking. Successful techniques such as permaculture, earth building, compost toilets, and sustainable business strategies were spread faster than ever, allowing many more communities to thrive. The internet furthermore became an economic tool to market and sell items—e.g., sustainable production became “Fair Trade” and found a niche market: For example, one of the ecovillages in the north of Thailand that I visited for this study had just started selling “Fair Trade” certified jasmine rice, which I could buy, once back home, through the internet.

1.4 Embracing a New Paradigm: Gross National Happiness

If neo-liberalism is the system that the AGM wishes to abolish, its critique of the former cannot be limited to neo-liberalism’s practices on the ground, but must also extend to the values and goals promoted by the neo-liberal order. One of the strongest

\[\text{Bill Mollison, the developer, together with David Holmgren, of the permaculture concept defines it in this way: “Permaculture design is a system of assembling conceptual, material, and strategic components in a pattern which functions to benefit life in all its forms. It seeks to provide a sustainable and secure place for living things on this earth”}\]

\[\text{Bill Mollison,}\]

\[\text{Permaculture: A Designers’ Manual,}\]

\[\text{Tagari Publication, Tyalgum Australia, p.69.}\]
critiques to the current worldwide system is the model of development that has been imposed around the globe. This model was first theorized by economists in the West, then designed by business lobbies influencing governments (the US government in particular), and lastly implemented through the reach of various global financial institutions and organizations, namely the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO.

As intellectuals in the IFG, ecological economists, and even some Nobel laureate economists\(^3\) have pointed out, the way success itself is measured determines the course of action that is taken on the ground. Thus, changing the way progress and development are measured is the *sine qua non* to change the way development programs are designed and implemented.

Currently, Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—the total market value of all final goods and services—is all that is used to measure the progress and success of a country, and as of today it is also the principal measurement with regard to judging the well-being of a country. This practice of reducing every human achievement to an economic variable is considered by intellectuals of the AGM to be one of the most insidious operationalization tools used by international financial institutions. Indeed, even according to many intellectuals outside of the movement, measuring a country’s

performance solely through GDP growth has become a political instrument to compel people to accept unjust and unpopular economic policies implemented by their national governments. Ironically, the “invisible hand” of Adam Smith has turned into the visible threat of the IMF and the World Bank!

In the last two decades, however, other ways of measuring a country’s success and well-being have emerged. The most notable among them have been the Human Development Index (HDI), which has been published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its Human Development Report since 1990, and the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), which was developed by ecological economists. Still, according to many activists, these new measures fall short of accurately assessing the whole well-being of a society.

Since the standards of measurements contribute to the definition of values and goals, it comes as no surprise that the IFG calls for the introduction of a new standard that emphasizes human well-being and environmental sustainability to replace GDP⁴ (Mander 2007). It is in this context that the AGM’s enthusiasm around Gross National Happiness (GNH) must be understood: GNH is viewed as a new paradigm to

contrapose against that of the dominant economic development model. It is envisioned to be a new standard of measurement that expresses a more complete vision for a holistic development program—one that would balance economic growth with the needs, aspirations, and values of the whole community, and that would simultaneously pay due respect to the physical environment.

Interestingly, it was in the traditional and pre-industrial kingdom of Bhutan that the concept of GNH was born. Rejecting the western idea of development encapsulated by GDP, Jigme Singye Wangchuck—the fourth king of Bhutan—launched the idea of GNH as a “challenge to the discourse of orthodox developmental theory … because it called for a shift of attention away from development in purely material terms to an emphasis on development in terms of an objective that material development served rather than serving as an end in itself” (Galay and Ura 2004 p.vii).

The idea of GNH was born in the 1970s and predates many of the critiques on GDP in the West. However, it is only in the last few years that the concept has received global attention. The first seminar on GNH took place in 2001 in the Netherlands, and since 2004 the annual GNH conferences have become another regular meeting place for many AGM scholars and activists to exchange ideas and compare experiences. For example, the 2007 GNH conference was held in Thailand, and the main NGO responsible for organizing the conference was simultaneously organizing a Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) supported “ecovillage design course” in its own ecovillage of Wongsanit Ashram in Thailand.
The concept of GNH is founded on four pillars: (1) Sustainable and equitable socioeconomic development, (2) Conservation of the environment, (3) Preservation and promotion of culture, and (4) Promotion of good governance. Although economic growth is considered a necessity in the face of widespread poverty, the means and nature of economic activities are considered as important as their results in terms of economic growth, as are leisure time and the social contributions of households and families. Economic redistribution is considered to be as important as growth, as are social and environmental capital. Conservation of the environment is an important pillar because nature is recognized as having a value that goes beyond that of storing resources for the satisfaction of human needs. Biodiversity is strongly promoted and conservation of the environment is considered essential for a holistic development.

The preservation and promotion of culture is thought to foster meaningful interdependence through the preservation of the diverse indigenous cultures, since well-being and happiness are understood as a shared pursuit. Finally, good governance refers to the need for a government to reflect the will of the people, but also to the need for it to mediate between freedom and equality, private and public domains, and secularism and politics (Thinley 2005).

The four pillars of GNH closely resemble the alternative lifestyle already promoted by many actual ecovillages worldwide. Thus, many AGM activists found in GNH a measure of well-being that reflected their values and that could be adopted to guide the practices they advocated on the ground. That said, the fact that this new theoretical model originated in an ancient kingdom untouched by modernization was
an element that I could not ignore. It begs the question of compatibility between the “state policy” of a pre-modern kingdom and what many define to be a post-modern movement—a question that I posed to the social activists I interviewed.

Understanding the commonalities between Bhutan and the AGM led me to explain environmental consciousness differently from the dominant contemporary theories. The prevailing paradigm—in which poor societies want to emulate the West by polluting first, getting rich, and cleaning up later—is insufficient to explain Bhutan’s environmental consciousness, in the same way that “post-materialism” theory is insufficient to explain the holistic submersion of man into nature that is seen in the “ecovillage” lifestyle. Instead, the reconceptualization of the man-nature relationship evidences striking commonalities in both intent and outcomes between the two cultures—principal among them, the common pursuit of healing the wounds that “modern man’s” domination of nature has inflicted on the planet.

In addition, the preeminence of income-related variables typical of mainstream development policies is, in these models, integrated into a project of holistic development. Quantity has been substituted by quality; the well-being of the whole community is balanced against individual self-fulfillment. In line with the four pillars of GNH, the environment is considered part and parcel of human well-being rather than being reduced to a mere warehouse of resources. The satisfaction of social and spiritual needs is put at the forefront of consideration as a necessary condition to development. Indigenous knowledge, holistic medicine, and inner-growth are recovered from the abandoned spaces of modernity. In short, homo-economicus is
rejected in favor of a social-spiritual way of being, and the dualistic man-nature division is overcome.

As Escobar (Escobar 1992:22) points out, to think about “alternatives to development” requires a theoretical-practical reconceptualization of the notions of development, modernity, and the economy. It appears that the concepts of “ecovillages” and “GNH” do constitute radical visions of alternative futures; so much so that both of these models must be interpreted and analyzed as autochthonous, yet essentially identical alternatives to the hegemonic Western model of development. They transcend modernity, among other things, by denying that the modern construction of the world is a man-nature dualism.

1.5 Selecting “Lives on the Ground”: Ecovillages and Community Empowerment

Once having established that the research should focus on those groups working to build “a better world”—the “positive” convergence—the question of how to identify those “living the dream” surfaced. The sine qua non, of course, was that the communities and NGOs selected would be open to receive visitors. In the end, I developed two central requirements: (1) the NGO or ecovillage had to be directly involved with building communities that implement socioeconomic system alternatives to the present capitalist model—it had to “walk the talk,” as one
interviewee told me; and (2) it had to be either part of a global network supporting the AGM, or it had to attend protest events and/or alternative forums such as the WSF.

Even with these requirements in place, there are still literally hundreds of forums, organizations, NGOs, groups, initiatives, and communities that come together to oppose to the current corporate-led global system. Thus, I found it helpful to rely in part on the work already done by one NGO in particular: the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN). GEN was specifically created with the intention to “support the people who are intentionally living sustainably already … [to] make them more visible” (Jackson 2000:64), and to identify a wide range of communities (e.g., urban/rural, traditional/intentional, etc.) across the globe.

However, although the GEN website lists hundreds of ecovillages present on all continents, following its lead alone was not sufficient. To begin with, there are many “ecovillages” involved in the AGM that have not yet been “discovered” by GEN, as one of its directors recognizes, “numerous communities in the global South, for example, clearly qualify as ecovillages but exist in countries where GEN is inactive or unknown” (Dawson 2006:21). Indeed, at the time I began this research in 2006, there were no ecovillages listed in Thailand; nevertheless, I did visit two “ecovillages” there that were active in the AGM, and by 2008 GEN listed half a dozen

5 I use the term ecovillage as GEN does, to describe its members, whereas “ecovillage” in quotes refers to communities sharing similar characteristics but that are not yet GEN members.
of them in Thailand—including the two I had seen. By the same token, it also happens that some organizations and communities listed as GEN members cease to become actively involved in the AGM—as is the case with Arcosanti in Arizona.

The other limitation of GEN that I had to overcome was finding ecovillages located in the countries that were out of its reach. Bangladesh, for example, has a very large number of NGOs involved in building communities and “ecovillages,” and often these organizations are active at the WSF and other forums. Nevertheless, they are not yet networked with GEN. To provide the necessary breadth that a study on a global movement requires, I judged it important to explore several Bangladeshi NGOs so as to include a country with a very low level of economic development and with a different religion—the only Islamic one in this study.

1.6 The Fieldwork

Between 2006 and 2008, I visited a total of sixteen sites. These were ecovillages and NGOs active in the AGM and located in Bangladesh, England, India, Italy, Thailand, Scotland, and the US. I also visited Bhutan, the cradle of the GNH model. Visits ranged from a few days to a few weeks, often with follow-up visits one year later. During the visits, in addition to formal and recorded interviews, I shared meals and had informal conversations with participants and visitors, and I took part in formal lectures and social events. I also participated in ecovillage design courses at
Findhorn (one of the founders of GEN) and at Wongsanit Ashram in Thailand.

Appendix 1 depicts a list of the sites visited and the people interviewed.

1.7 The Structure of the Work

It would not be possible to understand a movement against the capitalist world-economy without understanding what the object of rebellion entails. As Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein (1989) have argued, the world-system of historical capitalism has produced a set of anti-systemic movements, and it is necessary to understand the structural processes that caused the emergence of these movements. In addition, if the concept of development, as Escobar says, is rooted in modernity and the economy, then it is necessary to spell out the defining traits of these two realms.

Any understanding of historical events requires a pair of lenses through which to interpret them. This research rests primarily on the insights of Karl Polanyi, one of the leading economic historians of the twentieth century, who is especially known for his work on nineteenth century capitalism and the relationship between the economy and society. For Polanyi the rise of a market economy in England rested in an ingenious invention: the fictitious commodification of labor, land, and money. His work enables the understanding of today’s AGM as a rejection of these fictitious Commodifications (Brown 2010; Munck 2007; Nikitin and Elliot 2000; Patel 2009).
The commodification of labor, land, and money is fictitious because by definition a commodity is an object produced for sale on the market, but neither man, nor land, nor money is created to be exchanged on the market. Thus, the first manipulation of the state was to separate labor from all the other human activities and to subject it to the law of the market. The commodification of land, instead, required an appropriation of nature. In other words, the artificiality of a market economy is rooted in the extension of ‘buying’ and ‘selling’ to the process of production itself. However, this artificial commodification of the elements of the industry itself—labor, land, and money—was “the inevitable consequence of the introduction of the factory system in a commercial society” (Polanyi 1957:73).

In chapter 2, I borrow the lens from Karl Polanyi to identify the waves of commodification and de-commodification that took place from the industrial revolution up to the birth of the AGM.

In chapter 3, I look at how the communities and organizations I visited are decommodifying man and nature by employing Standing’s formula of decommodification. Specifically, I analyze how Social Income increases by increasing Self Production and Community Benefits through practices such as subsistence farming, organic agriculture, composting, seed saving, Fair Trade, Community Supported Agriculture, sharing goods and services and community currencies.

In chapter 4, I present the AGM critique to GDP as a measure of development and well-being, and I discuss alternatives measures such as the Human Development Index (HDI), Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), and Gross National Happiness.
(GNH). I conclude by showing that the similarities between the GNH and the ecovillage model explain much of the reason for the nascent GNH movement among AGM activists in the Global South.

In the last chapter, chapter 5, I argue that decomodification practices produce a new lifestyle that removes the self from the artificiality of consumer culture, creating a new self. The ecological identity of the new self, centers on relationships rather than acquisition, constructing a new world of meaning and a social imaginary that may be more powerful than political movements in bringing about large scale social change. I suggest that the AGM fits the description of what Castells calls “project identity,” and that this identity is producing a new cultural model that is an “alternative to development”.

This study places itself at the intersection of political economy, political sociology and social movements. These disciplines are engaged through the analysis of a global social movement that questions the whole capitalist development paradigm. It fills a gap in literature of contemporary politics and social movements because, despite the growing number of scholarly work that has begun to analyze the possibility of a global countermovement to subvert the current economic logic and globalization practices, the “scholarly literature lags behind the growth of the movements themselves” (Evans 2005).
CHAPTER 2 – THE “DOUBLE MOVEMENT”

The philosophical and ethical bankruptcy of globalization was based on reducing every aspect of our lives to commodities and reducing our identities to merely that of consumers on the global market place . . . But the human spirit refuses to be subjugated by a world view based on the dispensability of our humanity. (Shiva 2003:115)

Outline

2.1 The Expansion of Commodification to the Factors of Production
2.2 The Countermovement: The Rise of the Welfare State
2.3 Desacralizing Nature
2.4 The Commodification of Food
2.5 The Chemical Turn
2.6 The Countermovement: The Sixties
2.7 The Environmental Movement
2.8 The Backlash: the Self-Regulating Market Goes Global
2.9 The Alter-Globalization Movement

2.1 The Expansion of Commodification to the Factors of Production

For the alleged commodity “labor power” cannot be shoved about, used indiscriminately, or even left unused, without affecting also the human
individual who happens to be the bearer of this peculiar commodity. In disposing of a man’s labor power the system would, incidentally, dispose of the physical, psychological, and moral entity “man” attached to that tag. (Polanyi 1957:72)

As Polanyi explained it, the changes that occurred in England in the 19th century could not have taken place were it not for an ingenious invention: the fictitious commodification of labor, land and money. For Polanyi the rise of a market economy in England was not the product of an evolutionary process rooted in the expansion of market activities in the middle Ages. Rather, it was the deliberate creation of the centralized state, since a market economy must include all elements of industry including labor, land, and money.

Around the fifteenth century, England began the process of denying the poor the right to access common land by transforming the lands held by the rich into “private property” (Patel 2007:76). Between 1750 and 1850 all the available arable land and common grazing pastures in England were enclosed. Chapman calculated that the size of the common land enclosed as a result of parliamentary acts amounted to over seven million acres (Hudson 1995:177). The laws that regulated harvests, husbandry, and agricultural techniques in the township were abolished favoring instead the concentration of agriculture in the hands of a few landowners. The Parliament intervened to recognize exclusive rights to the land in order to halt common usage practices; at the same time, the mechanization of agriculture required a less intensive use of labor power contributing to a surplus of rural labor.
In the English countryside, peasants had traditionally cultivated small plots of land individually, while grazing the livestock on common pastures. Women and children contributed to the household economy with complementary subsistence activities on the common lands, such as raising chickens and pigs. Once the common lands were enclosed, it first placed women and children “out of work,” explaining why they were the first to be used in the factories around the urban centers (Hudson 1995:178-9). Then, in addition to the loss of grazing pastures for the animals and the disappearing of subsistence activities practiced by women and children, the high cost associated with enclosing the land forced many small landowners to sell their plots. As a result of some 4,000 acts of Parliament, Bollier reports that by 1876, less than 1 percent of the population owned over 98 percent of the agricultural land in England and Wales (Bollier 2002). The result was that what was once a self-reliant peasant population became an army of unemployed and under-skilled laborers to supply the factories in the cities

Thus, one of the critical components of modern capitalism—the commodification of labor—has at its root the nineteenth-century process of industrialization in England, where the critical mass of labor “liberated” from working on the land became “fungible commodities to be bought and sold” and “human life became commodified into labor or work time, also measured and valued according to supply and demand” (Loy 2003:204-5).

Not only was self-reliance taken away from the general populace by privatizing the land, but also—since prices had begun to fluctuate according to the law
of supply and demand—the money acquired from selling one’s labor was not able to guarantee access to a minimum standard of living. Of course, changes were slow because people resisted the loss of autonomy and the creation of a new system they could not understand: “like buying and selling land, buying labor was incomprehensible to pre-capitalist mentalities. Labor is something you do, not a ‘thing’” (Roy 2001:171). Indeed, eighteenth-century England resisted the attempts to establish a market for labor until 1834, the year in which the Speenhamland Law, or “allowance system,” which guaranteed a minimum allowance to the poor was repealed (Polanyi 2001:82).

In addition, to separate labor from all the other human activities required the introduction of a legal principle that would subvert customary traditions. The establishment of the principle of freedom of contract was introduced to subject labor to the law of the market, and to “free” the individual from non-contractual relations, such as those based on kinship or group allegiance, which had actually protected individuals from destitution in pre-capitalist societies, “as a rule, the individual in primitive society is not threatened by starvation unless the community as a whole is in a like predicament” (Polanyi 2001:171). However, in the eyes of economic liberals,

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6 In 1795 the justices of Berkshire recommended that a minimum income be assured to the poor irrespective of their earnings, in accordance with a scale dependent upon the price of bread. Although the scale itself was never enacted, it became the law of the land in the countryside and even in some towns. It established a “right to live,” and effectively prevented a full commodification of labor until the middle class forced its way to power to remove this obstacle to the establishment of a capitalist market economy (Polanyi 2001:82).
allegiance to a group or a community placed a restriction on individual freedom. Thus, labor contracts, and the principle of noninterference in labor contracts, were seen as means of furthering individual freedom. In reality, however, this principle was simply expressing “an ingrained prejudice in favor of a definite kind of interference, namely, such as would destroy non contractual relations between individuals and prevent their spontaneous reformation” (Polanyi 1957 p.163).

The shift from feudalism to capitalism brought profound changes not only to modes of production, but also to the relevance of the market itself. To be sure, markets have always existed, and people have bartered or traded goods that they could not produce themselves—such as salt and spices, or luxury goods for the wealthy—throughout history. But when commodities such as grains were traded locally, “it was considered morally wrong to charge as much as people could afford” (Roy 2001:171). Contrary to a capitalist economy, in feudal times prices were set by a “moral” standard rather than by supply and demand⁷, and “a seller was supposed to charge a traditional “fair” price, even if supplies fell” (Roy 2001:171). Therefore, the success of nineteenth-century capitalism in transforming the means of production—man and nature—into commodities that were subjected to the law of supply and demand hinged

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⁷ Tilly describes how, during the period of transition, merchants that were attempting to charge the market price were often forcibly detained by crowds and the commodities sold to locals for a “fair” price. Tilly, Louise A. 1971. "The Food Riot as a Form of Political Conflict in France." The Journal of Interdisciplinary History 2.
upon the establishment of a “free” rather than a “fair” market for all goods, including the ones that supported life itself, namely food.

Polanyi also explains how the commodification of the elements of the industry itself—labor, land, and money—was at the same time inevitable and artificial: it was inevitable because of “the introduction of the factory system in a commercial society” (Polanyi 1957:73), and it was also artificial because a commodity is an object produced for sale on the market, but neither land nor man are created to be exchanged on the market.

Thus the system that ensued proved to be a cruel one. As such, it would not have survived the social tensions it had created, had not the state intervened to ameliorate the negative effects of the free market (Galbraith 1996).

2.2 The Countermovement: The Rise of the Welfare State

As explained in the previous section, the principle of freedom of contract served to commodify labor by doing away with “non-contractual organizations of kinship, neighborhood, profession, and creed” (Polanyi 2001), thus destroying the institutions of social protections, “as well as displacement of status by contract” (Standing 2007:68). With the abolition of Speenhamland and the Poor Law Reform in 1834, the “right to live” ceased to exist (Polanyi 2001:86), and there were no more barriers to an unfettered market economy in which man and nature—“man under the
But as soon as the Speenhamland law was repealed, other forces in society aimed to resist the expansion of the market came into being, producing a countermovement of anti-laissez-faire legislation, not only in England, but also in Germany, Austria and France, and leading to the development of the modern welfare state. Thus, as soon as industrial capitalism established itself as a new social system, “a political and working-class movement sprang into being” (Polanyi 2001:87); to appease the working-class movement, and to taper the excess of capitalism, governments intervened to set minimum standards such as health and safety regulations, minimum wages, child protection laws, social security, etc. Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898), the master minder of the German Empire, is generally considered the father of the welfare state. In an attempt to win support among the proletariat, and to weaken the rising Social Democratic Party, Bismarck passed a series of laws to improve the health, safety, and retirements of workers. Between 1883 and 1889, workers gained public insurance against sickness, accidents, disability, as well as old-age pensions (Opello and Rosow 2004:135).

Other European countries followed suit. In 1911, England introduced the National Insurance system, and in 1919 the International Labour Organization (ILO) was instituted with the aim of promoting social justice. The creation of an international organization that would promote humane conditions of labor was a struggle that lasted for nearly a century. It is noteworthy that the first principle of ILO
affirms that labor is not a commodity; a testimony to the tensions created by the fictitious commodification of labor as described by Polanyi. It is not a coincidence that the history of industrial capitalism goes hand in hand with the history of labor regulation: while the hegemony of the market made the welfare of individuals dependent on the sale of labor, the introduction of social rights mitigated the commodity status of citizens (Esping-Andersen 1990:21).

Although the welfare state kept on growing steadily in most industrialized countries for nearly a century, there is still little agreement on the causes behind this growth. Up until the 1980s, most scholars explained its rise to be a function of demographic changes, industrialism, and urbanization (Cutright 1965; Wilensky 1975). Since the 1980s, however, a number of scholars have focused on the role of power relations and class mobilization in the designing of social policies (Esping-Andersen and Korpi 1985; Korpi 1983; Korpi and Shalev 1980). Esping-Andersen (1990), in particular, reconceptualizes social rights as a means of decommodification, in the sense that social policies “diminish citizens’ status as ‘commodities’” (Esping-Andersen 1990:3) by guaranteeing the individual a ‘right to live’ on the basis of citizenship rather than on the performance in the market. The degree of decommodification, along with full-employment efforts of a state, is for Esping-Andersen a function of the strength of the left/labor parties, and thus “the balance of power in a society is decisive for what a welfare state will look like” (Esping-Andersen 1990:105).
The General Conference of the International Labour Organization, meeting in its Twenty-sixth Session in Philadelphia, hereby adopts, this tenth day of May in the year nineteen hundred and forty-four, the present Declaration of the aims and purposes of the International Labour Organization and of the principles which should inspire the policy of its Members.

I

The Conference reaffirms the fundamental principles on which the Organization is based and, in particular, that:

(a) labour is not a commodity;

(b) freedom of expression and of association are essential to sustained progress;

(c) poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere;

(d) the war against want requires to be carried on with unrelenting vigour within each nation, and by continuous and concerted international effort in which the representatives of workers and employers, enjoying equal status with those of governments, join with them in free discussion and democratic decision with a view to the promotion of the common welfare.

Figure 1 Key Principles of the ILO Declaration of Philadelphia

2.3 De-Sacralizing Nature

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, everything has to be scientific and technological progress and they do not see the consequences that is bringing more harm than good … I think we have to learn not to control; you see, everything is sacred, the tree is sacred, so is mother earth, once you see that you become more humble, I think humility is a good sign for human beings and we learn not to be arrogant. (Sivaraska)\(^8\)

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\(^8\) Sivaraksa, interview, January 18, 2008
Between 1830 and 1860, the principle of freedom of contract was extended to the land as well. Indeed, as we have seen in the previous sections, the separation of man from land through the enclosure of the commons, was a *sine qua non* to the commodification of labor. In a society organized around the market, “a real-estate market was a vital part of the utopian concept of a market economy” (Polanyi 1957 p.178). In feudal times, land was leased for 99 or 999 years—a system designed to ensure continuity and to contain prices. However, once land became a commodity, any kind of communal control was lost. Even the layout of urban cities lost any relation to human needs and involved no adaptation to topography. Rather, the patterns of cities were simplified and the gridiron plan was utilized so that land could be easily broken into parcels for sale, as “urban land, too, now became a mere commodity, like labor: its market value expressed its only value” (Mumford 1961:422).

According to Loy (2003), from a religious perspective the commodification of labor and land meant the de-sacralization of human life and nature. Ultimately, the “sacred” was lost because nothing escaped the reach of the technological transformation into resources (Loy 2003:206). Indeed, society’s ability through scientific and technological progress to turn nature into resources is one of the central tenets of the development paradigm; one that has “spread like a universal new religion over the entire globe” (Ullrich 1992:276), without any critical consideration for side-effects or unintended consequences.

In addition, the commodification of land required an appropriation of nature through legal means, which necessitated a further de-sacralization of nature. Since de-
sacralization implies the removal of God and the divine from nature, the debate in this case is centered on human values and religious beliefs. Although there is disagreement over the intellectual, moral and religious influences that led to the de-sacralization of nature, there is little disagreement that modernity, at least partially, is founded upon it.

In a groundbreaking and controversial article published in 1967, Lynn White became the first scholar to claim that religions, specifically Christianity, are ultimately responsible for our ecological crises. His arguments move on two levels: first, that all societies are shaped by their values and religious beliefs—“human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny—that is by religion” (Toynbee 1974:14); and second, that Christianity’s contention that humans are created in the image of God separated humans from the rest of God’s creation, thereby setting up the premises for the exploitation of nature.

Toynbee (1974) extended religious responsibility to monotheism in general. He argued that even though man has always cultivated plants and domesticated animals to satisfy his needs, yet “for pre-monotheistic man, wheat and rice were not just “cereals”; they were Ceres herself, the goddess who had allowed man to cultivate these life-giving plants and had taught him the art . . . Man’s greedy impulse to exploit nature used to be held in check by his pious worship of nature” (Toynbee 1974:143-5). Thus, he says, that all monotheistic religions are responsible for removing God from nature. Contrary to White, however, Toynbee believes that once monotheism had spread, religious beliefs ceased to become a necessary prerequisite for bringing about environmental destruction.
Toynbee’s thesis is reminiscent of Weber’s idea of the protestant ethic and capitalism. While Weber sees the importance of an initial affinity between the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism for the latter to take roots, the former was no longer necessary for the development of capitalism once it was established. Similarly, Toynbee writes that “the monotheistic disrespect for nature has survived the weakening of the belief in monotheism in the ex-monotheistic part of the World, and it has invaded that major portion of the World in which monotheism has never become established” (Toynbee 1974:145).

Kinsley (1995), although recognizing that Christianity allowed for the domination of nature, points out that it is not until the rise of science that the modern, desacralized, and mechanistic conception of nature was born. It is with Bacon, Descartes, and Newton that the divine origin of nature was denied in a profoundly different way from the Christian writers of the middle ages (Kinsley 1995). Bacon refuted the idea that all of creation was made in the image of God, because only humans had souls, thus, only humans were made in His image. “What makes Bacon’s view so different from those that dominated until his time is his insistence that the nonhuman world, while clearly possessed of life and movement, is primarily mechanical in these respects, that there is nothing comparable to human moral, conscious, rational being in the rest of the world. There is no essential continuity between human beings and the rest of nature” (Kinsley 1995:127).

That religion and environmental actions are correlated is a strong belief among some strands of the modern environmental movement as well. Deep ecologists, for
example, reiterate that religious teaching and spiritual attitudes are the keys to saving the planet from destruction. In their view, religious sensibilities must change in the face of the current environmental crises (Barnhill and Gottlieb 2001:3). Humankind has to bring the sacred back into nature, since the treatment of nature is a moral question, not just one of the efficiency of property rights (Barnhill and Gottlieb 2001).

In the eyes of deep ecologists, the root of the environmental problems lies specifically in the anthropocentric understanding of the world, which by focusing on the difference between man and nature makes “the idea that human beings could identify with or see themselves in nature seems vaguely ridiculous” (Sutton 2004:98). Instead, they argue, the best way to prevent environmental destruction is to teach people to cultivate their ‘ecological self’ and to identify with nature; “this means encouraging a way of thinking about environmental problems, which goes beyond the modern dualism, implied by the separation of society and nature” (Sutton 2004:101). For deep ecologists, the current lack of identification with nature is due to the prevailing social processes of identity formation; “recognition of this means that if theorists of ecological selves are to do more than simply exhort people to ‘find themselves in nature’, it will be necessary to understand how social selves and social identities are being constructed” (Sutton 2004:109).

2.4 The Commodification of Food
You have to understand the nature of power in our society . . . the structure of our economy in Guatemala . . . people in power . . . own and run the big plantations down in the lowlands, exporting things like cotton and fruit to you people in the United States . . . they make big profits because they have people like us, peasants from the highlands, who are so desperately poor that we are forced by our poverty to go down to those plantations and endure that horrible work in the fields and get pesticides sprayed on us . . . because we have no alternative. So if we do things like teaching each other how to raise rabbits so we can feed ourselves without being forced to go and sell our labor for a dollar a day that is subversive. (Guatemalan peasant)⁹

Once nature has lost its “sacredness,” the extent to which it can be used and exploited becomes limited only by technological ability. The nexus between the commodification of labor and land is in the production and allocation of food. In other words, nature is the source for the satisfaction of our basic needs, food and shelter: as long as humans have access to natural resources, they are also free to choose whether or not to sell their labor on the market.

Man as labor, and nature as food, are symbiotic commodities, meaning that one cannot be fully commodified without the other. Food is an intermediate good in that it is necessary to fuel the bodies of the laborers. It can become a commodity only if there are people who cannot produce it themselves. By the same token, man can only be commodified—selling labor power on the market—only if there is access and an

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⁹ Guatemalan peasant explaining why her husband was killed by the Guatemalan military, as reported in Kevin Danaher, 10 Reasons to Abolish the IMF & World Bank, New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004, p.22-23.
obligation to purchase food on that market. In other words, if humans have access to food that is independent of their purchasing power, they can withhold their labor from the market, thus decommodifying themselves.

The degree of decommodification of an individual depends on the level of the standard of living he or she can achieve independently of his or her participation in the market (Esping-Andersen 1990:37). However, the definition of a socially acceptable standard of living is culturally constructed. For Jon Jandai (interview excerpt above), for example, the standard of living that he achieves by producing his own food and building his own shelter—i.e., simply having access to natural resources—is not only sufficient, but is actually a desirable way of life. Indeed, before Thailand as a nation began to pursue a Western style of development, Jon’s lifestyle was the norm not only for Jon’s family (his father was a farmer as well), but for the quasi-totality of Thai people. Twenty-first century Thailand seems to follow the footprints of nineteenth century England, although, as we shall see, with profound differences, since neither colonies nor slaves are today producing food for Thailand’s industrial workforce.

As Britain industrialized and urbanized, the population that previously had direct access to natural resources—and thus to a food supply—now had to be fed by someone else, from somewhere else. Its colonized territories and African slaves provided the cheap source of labor and natural resources to sustain its factory workforce. During the industrial revolution, grains and tea were shipped from India to England while, at the same time, human beings were shipped from Africa to the Caribbean. As Patel says, “with only a twinge of guilt at the human cost wrought,
Britain was able to feed its working class” (Patel 2007:83); labor/joules from slaves in the plantations there provided an abundance of calories through cane sugar: a dense, easily transportable, white substance that supplied “nearly one-fifth of the calories” to the new British working class (Patel 2007:83). Ironically, the only English ingredients in the iconic British drink of tea with milk and sugar were the milk and the water. It was in fact the cheap energy and caffeine boost necessary for keeping factory workers going that turned tea into a British tradition.

Thus, the process of separating humans from their source of food production that began in England with the enclosure of the commons was accomplished by using foreign land and slave labor. However, the complete commodification of man and nature on a global scale was still limited by the ability to produce, preserve, and transport food. It wasn’t until after World War II that a new technology in both the transportation and the preservation of food revolutionized the way food is produced (Roberts 2008:39), enabling the commodification of man and nature to reach a global scale. Indeed, while sugar was the global commodity that allowed the industrial revolution to take off in England, it was only with the invention of jet planes that fresh produce could be transported seasonally between the southern and northern hemispheres (Chase-Dunn 2006), thus fundamentally changing man’s approach to food consumption and solidifying the presence of the market in economies worldwide.

2.5 The Chemical Turn
Of all the technological revolutions, the effects of the chemical one are often overlooked. Perhaps “this third revolution lacks the public recognition of its two predecessors… because it provoked so little resistance” (Roberts 2008:39). Ironically, it was the chemical weapons developed for making explosives and poisonous gases during World War II which changed the way we eat. As Vandana Shiva poignantly says, “We’re still eating the leftover of World War II” (reported in Pollan 2006:41). In fact, ammonium nitrate, a chemical used to make explosives, turned out to be an excellent source of nitrogen for plants. It was the US Department of Agriculture that took advantage of this discovery, leading the way in the conversion of warfare technologies to peacetime resources: an agricultural revolution was undertaken once a plant in Alabama switched its production of munitions into chemical fertilizers to be utilized in agriculture (Pollan 2006:41).

The new agro-technologies were developed at a time of blind faith in “a prosperity-creating scientific and technological progress” (Ullrich 1992:276), which accompanied the birth of the development paradigm. In the early 1960s, Modernization theory became the dominant school of thought in the United States (Bauzon 1992:36), and this has formed the basis for a comprehensive prescription for the modernization of “underdeveloped” countries (Spybey 1992). The intellectual origins of this school can be found in the evolutionary ideas of Charles Darwin, as well as in the economic ideas of Adam Smith and John Maynard Keynes. The evolutionary bent of this school matched the liberal democratic framework in the West, which saw itself as the apogee of civilization (Bauzon 1992). Without question
the pioneer, and perhaps most influential work of modernization theory is *The Stages of Economic Growth* (1960) by Walt W. Rostow, followed by Organsky’s *The Stages of Political Development* (Organsky 1965), and by the 1966 socioeconomic-political “phases of modernization” schema of Cyril Black (Almond 1987:440).

Rostow, an economic historian and adviser to the US government, developed a blueprint for exporting capitalism to all countries. According to his theory, it is possible to identify all societies as lying within one of five categories of economic development. These categories are: (1) the traditional society, (2) the preconditions for take-off, (3) the take-off, (4) the drive to maturity, and (5) the age of high mass-consumption.

The “take-off” is the stage that Rostow identifies with the industrial revolution. For this stage to occur, it is necessary that the proportion of net investment to national income outpace the population pressure, producing a distinct rise in real output per capita. Rostow places the “take-off” stage in England between 1783-1802, and identifies the problem with traditional societies as one in which modern sciences and technology are either not available or are not regularly and systematically applied, thus limiting the flow of resources and placing a ceiling on the potential for growth.

It is in this context that one must understand the enthusiasm for the new agro-technology when it began to be applied to the agricultural systems in poor countries. Since modernization theory is based on an assumption that history is linear—in other words, that all human civilizations progress in the same way—it therefore stands to reason that the history of the Western countries represents the future of the less developed ones. Science and technology were the reasons for the superiority of the West
and, thus, they must be the keys to prosperity and development in the poor countries, as well.

The chemical revolution in agriculture was the most far reaching change in the production of food since the invention of agriculture itself, as “the peasantry, which had formed the majority of the human race throughout recorded history, had been made redundant by agricultural revolution” (Hobsbawm reported in Weis 2007:24). From 1950 to 1997, 25 percent of the world’s rural population migrated to the slums of the megacities in the Global South (McMichael 2009:38). In 2007, for the first time in history, more than half of the human population became urbanized.

If urbanization in the Global South is simply viewed as a historical process akin to the one undertaken by Victorian England, one may fail to understand the magnitude of the phenomena. In 1900, only 13 percent of the global population lived in cities, whereas at the time of this writing, more than half of it does (Brown 2008:27). As Mike Davis points out, the scale of urbanization in the Global South dwarfs its European counterpart: “London in 1910 was seven times larger than it had been in 1800, but Dhaka, Kinshasa, and Lagos today are each approximately forty times larger than they were in 1950” (Davis 2006:2 italics in the original).

Indeed, the untold story of the Green Revolution belongs to the masses of subsistence farmers who—unable to afford the machinery and agro-chemicals necessary to industrialize—were pushed off of their lands and into the swelling slums.
of urban areas, which did not have the necessary infrastructure to receive them\textsuperscript{10}. In essence, the famous agricultural revolution implemented in South Asia in the 1960s consisted of high-yield seed varieties, fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides imported from Western companies. This was helped by the fact that, in India, the memories of the 1943 famine were still fresh when Borlaug developed the first high-yielding varieties of seeds, and the government’s focus was on increasing agricultural production to keep pace with population growth.

Furthermore, social dislocation caused by the Green Revolution did not only affect farmers unable to compete in the market, but also the populations of entire villages were displaced to make room for the construction of large dams. In fact, the Green Revolution had introduced new varieties of seeds requiring large amounts of water, to satisfy which, it was necessary the construction of large-scale dams. The diversion of the rivers destroyed entire villages and displaced millions of people (Weis 2007:94-5), but it also gave birth to peasant mobilization and created a powerful social movement aimed at stopping the construction of dams. One of these movements opposing the construction of dams along the Narmada river, the Narmada Bachao Andolan, received international attention in 1993 when it was credited with successfully forcing the World Bank to withdraw funding for Sardar Sarovar dam.

\textsuperscript{10} The Worldwatch Institute reports that “in 80 percent of the studies of the Green Revolution over 30 years, the researchers who considered the equity dimension concluded that inequality increased as a result of the technological shift.” Worldwatch Institute, 2011 State of the World: Innovations that Nourish the Planet. Norton & Company: New York.
These rural social movement originating in the Global South, such as the Narmada, or the Chipko movement\(^{11}\), have been successful thanks to both, a global environmental network which draw attention to their cause (the Zapatista movement will become a master in mobilizing international support through transnational networking), and the ability to build a cohesive identity that could overcome class and ethnic differences (Basu 2010).

Many scholars have already pointed out (Kahn and Kellner 2007; Shiva 2000; Starr 2005) how today’s AGM movements have their historical precedents in Latin American, African, South and Southeast Asian movements, all of them fighting the modernization agenda written by the West and sponsored through the International Financial Institutions. As I will discuss in more depth in chapter 3, the fight against the industrialization of agriculture that spread globally during the 1960s is probably the single most unifying issue among activists from the Global South and North in the AGM. Indeed, the globalization and industrialization of food caused the de-peasantization (often forced) of the countryside. At the same time, as food turned into a global commodity, hunger and famines persisted and in some cases increased, causing widespread food riots and fueling anti-globalization sentiments.

During the 1960s, at the time of the Green Revolution, it was still commonly believed that famines struck because of a shortage of food. Thus, governments focused

\(^{11}\) The Chipko movement emerged in the early 70s in the Indian State of Uttar Pradesh to stop logging by the corporations.
on improving the production rather than the distribution side to solve the hunger problem. Starting from the 1970s it became apparent that the market, not the lack of food, caused famines. As the founder of Proshika recalls of his volunteer relief work during the 1974 famine in Bangladesh, “I saw in the market thirteen or fourteen people dead, dead bodies, but the market was full of food. It struck me; you know, famine as I understood earlier meant that there would be no food in the market, but here there was a lot of food and people just died” (Interview with Qazi Farouk Ahmed).

When in 1981 the first comprehensive empirical study on famines was published by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, his findings dispelled the notion that starvation occurs because of a shortage of food. Rather, he says, famines are caused by a lack of “entitlement” over an adequate supply of food. About the Bangladesh famine of 1974, Sen writes: “this [the famine] occurred in a year of greater food availability per head than in any other year between 1971 and 1976” (Sen 1999:165); rather than the lack of food, he says, it was the income deprivation of rural laborers that caused the starvation to take place.

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12 Although many anthropologists and economic historians had already pointed out that the root cause of famines was not a production problem, as Polanyi says, “the actual source of famines in the past fifty years was the free marketing of grain combined with local failure of income”; development agencies and government kept on focusing on the production rather than the distribution side.
2.6 The Countermovement: the Sixties

I was a student of Dhaka University from 1965 to 1970 studying chemistry; I was involved with student politics. . . . in 1969 we had a massive movement, I was participating in that movement, then there was a liberation movement in 71; I also participated in that, this participation in students’ movement set my mind in changing society for better. (Faruque)\(^{13}\)

And then, being an idealist even in my early years of youth, I spent them fighting social battles everywhere, at school . . . all the movements of the 1970s, the feminist one all of 1977, the fight for abortion, yes everything . . . I left home and immediately thought I’d be able to create a commune. I had friends with whom we had dreamt of starting a commune, we’re talking of 1977. (Iride)\(^{14}\)

Although in the industrialized countries the period after World War II had seen a general increase in the standards of living, along with a certain amount of political and economic stability, by the 1960s disillusion and discontent had risen as well, “the affluent society was seen as a shallow society where consumerism took the place of community. People no longer wanted more material goods but were seeking self-realization, and other forms of post-material values became more central” (Munck 2007 kindle loc.729-36). In addition, economic growth did not equally benefit different groups in society; on the contrary, the gains were limited to certain sectors of society, and also only in the advanced industrial societies (Harvey 1990).

\(^{13}\) Faruque, interview, January 8, 2008.

\(^{14}\) Iride, interview, July 12, 2007; translated by the author.
These inequalities produced in the face of rising expectations led the excluded and underprivileged to form strong social movements. It was, in fact, the exclusion of African-Americans from full participation in society that led to the Civil Rights Movement in the US. Soon, the demand for racial equality fueled the demand for gender equality; indeed, the Women Liberation Movement began from those very women involved in the Civil Rights Movement and spread quickly overseas. By 1968 the wind of discontent had spread across the oceans, and opposition to the Vietnam War acted as catalyst for social movements around the world. Groups and people participating in the different movements—women, labor, students, etc.—developed international links with one another, yet at the same time remained much localized. In the North as well as in the South some common ideological themes emerged; nevertheless, each movement “was located in political and economic processes shaped by the particular and different histories, and by the position in the world-system of the locales in which they arose and worked themselves out” (Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein 1989).

However, while the ‘68 protest called into question the direction of society, it did not propose solutions beyond the call for equality between gender race and classes, “they tended not to find solutions but to clarify problems” (Touraine 1971:251). In the

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15 The counter-culture movement is referred to as the “Sixties” in the US, and “the 68” in Europe. In this chapter I use the two terms interchangeably as my interviewee did.
Global North, women grievances’ allied and intersected with race, labor, and students’ grievances to form powerful coalitions. Meanwhile, in the Global South, opposition to the imperialist war fueled growing disillusionment and discontent after decades of broken promises of development.

In France, the students’ and workers’ unrest culminated in the general strike of May 1968, which almost brought down the de Gaulle government. In Germany, students fueled by the writing of the “critical theorists” Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and others took to the streets against the war in Vietnam, the Shah in Persia, authoritarianism and other issues. In Italy, students clashed with the police during the occupation of universities, and from there the unrest spread to factory workers in the north, leading to the so called “hot autumn” of 1969. The hot autumn protests escalated into bloody demonstrations and a decade-long string of terrorist attacks culminating in the kidnapping and assassination of the former Prime Minister Aldo Moro.

Although the winds of protest had started in the US with the civil rights movement, subsequently, were the events in Europe, especially in France, Germany and Italy that were making headlines. Still those societies were not the only ones invested by the winds of protest. It is a common misperception that the protest movement of the 1960s was limited to affluent societies. Indeed, as a few authors suggested (Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein 1989; Starr 2005), the protest surge of the late sixties had truly gone global, from the students’ uprising at Dhaka university
(recalled in the interview by the Proshika founder at beginning of this section), to the environmental movement in Thailand, as explained by a Thai ecovillager:

In Thailand in the 1970s there was a growing wave of students’ activism, the same as in America in the sixties and seventies during the Vietnam War, and from there, there were some activities carrying through. Even now there are some students’ activities in the universities. I mean the father of the movement is from that generation, I was active in the 1990s but it was the same movement from the sixties and seventies. In 1973 there was a big student uprising in the country and we kicked out the military; some energy came to the nineties. Environmental movements started from that. (Moo)\textsuperscript{16}

There are two common misperceptions about the so-called ’68 movement; first it is believed to have come and gone unexpectedly and relatively quickly (Gitlin 1987), and second, it is considered primarily a Western phenomenon. Munck (2007), for example, does point out the connection between the AGM and the 1960s, but sees this connection occurring only in the West.

Other scholars, instead, placed the emphasis on the novelties inherent in the “cultural revolt” of the Sixties, which, in their opinions, assumed different characteristics from previous social movements. According to Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein (1989) for example, “it was 1968 that institutionalized the new social movements” (Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein 1989:98). There are several characteristics that distinguish New Social Movements (NSM) from ‘old’ movements,

\textsuperscript{16} Moo, interview, January 15, 2008.
and that is the salience of identity formation and the roles of values and ideology (Castells 1997; Melucci 1980; Touraine 1977). Brand (1986), for example, sees NSM as a carrier of a critique to modernity and Western development. Melucci (1980) identify the power of NSMs precisely in their ability to redefine existing cultural and symbolic representation.

Therefore, the relation between 1968 and the current AGM lies, not only in the challenge to industrialization and modernity (hence the ability to re-conceptualize development), but also in the preeminence of identity, values, and ideology over class conflicts. In addition, by questioning the dominant paradigm of industrialization, modernization, and development, the contestation spirit of the Sixties prepared the ground for the cultural changes necessary for the birth of an environmental movement (discussed in the next section). Indeed, I would say that between the two there was love at first sight! Although, as an ecovillager in Findhorn recalled, the relationship had its ups and downs:

Back in the sixties there was the beginning of the green movement, and there was the beginning of the hippies of course, and also at that time there was the beginning of the spiritual movement. Then we sort of separated, you know, Greenpeace they became radical and true environmentalists. And we were standing against this thing. Then the spiritual movement just goes off and starts to create what it thinks is a dream and it’s more inward. And then we almost see ourselves somewhere in the seventies as a bit [like] protagonists, ah you’re just working with crystals, ah you’re just working with solar panels, you know, that’s not going to save the day. And then in the eighties all of a sudden we start to come together and we go, oh that’s interesting, I think that idea over there of solar panels is good, let’s adopt that. And they say, oh that’s an interesting idea, you know, Gaia, you know, there
is a living system, maybe there is some intelligence in there. And then
at the time of GEN in 1992 we came together and that was an
interesting conference in that it was the first conference in Findhorn
that was predominantly male and technical. And the biggest
transformation that happened in that was that they, I think, got the
understanding that it is also a social, and emotional, spiritual thing that
we could now work hand in hand, we have come to complement one
another and our languages are much more common. Some of the
language of physics was able to adapt in the sixties and the seventies,
and then of course physics today really helped the environmental and
the spiritual come together, that’s the phenomena that’s what changed,
so that’s what I see. (Gibsone)\(^{17}\)

Thus in the recollection of several AGM activists, the sixties seems to have
represented a turning point in the history of social movements, one that that laid the
foundation of the present AGM. In the words of one of the founders of the Los
Angeles Ecovillage (LAEV), the experience of the Sixties was, in fact, fundamental to
the development of the current strategies:

The coops and communities of the sixties and seventies were the
foundation of so many things that are going on today, everything in the
contemporary movement, in the contemporary organic food movement,
all of our technology, economically, socially, and ecologically, are
contemporary technology out of the sixties and seventies. A lot of
people say that the movement was a failure. It wasn’t a failure; it was a
raging, raging success. The appropriate technology came out of that
movement, in terms of solar, in terms of wind, in terms of water
technology, people were experimenting all kinds of things in those so-
called “hippy” communities, the social technology, consensus decision

\(^{17}\) Gibsone, interview, July 1\(^{st}\), 2008.
making, meditation, yoga, all that stuff grew out of that, the economic technology, community land trust, limited equity housing coops, and so forth, workers coops, all of that. (Arkin)\textsuperscript{18}

Thus, the “spirit of 1968” was never very far beneath the surface of events (Munck, 2007 Kindle loc910-13), and it found a powerful ally in the environmental movement.

2.7 The Environmental Movement

The environmental movement is a child of the sixties that has stayed its course. (Guha 2000:1)

It was, precisely, the chemical revolution and the industrialization of agriculture that spurred the birth of the modern environmental movement. In the early 1960s, at the peak of the enthusiasm for food monocultures—and thanks also to the power of DDT and other insecticides—one voice stood out to warn the public of the harm that was being done to nature. A well-known marine biologist, Rachel Carson, raised questions about the long-term effects of pesticides, and warned against the unintended consequences of the chemical warfare being conducted against bugs. In \textit{Silent Spring} (1962), Carson not only warned the public of a “future without the songs

\textsuperscript{18} Arkin, interview, August 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2008.
of the birds,” but also questioned the morality of our actions toward nature. “The question is whether any civilization can wage relentless war on life without destroying itself, and without losing the right of be called civilization” (Carson 1962:95).

The book’s merit was not limited to the strength of Carson’s scientific research alone. It was also a powerful narrative that caught the public’s attention. Suddenly, the scientific community, which had previously praised the work of Carson, subjected her to vicious attacks. Both the media and the corporations downplayed Carson’s research, questioning the reasoning of an “old and crazy spinster.” She was labeled not as a scientist, but rather—in the words of the president of Montrose Chemical Corporation—a “fanatical defender of the cult of the balance of nature” (Hawken 2007:54).

The collateral damage inflicted to nature by aerial spraying of DDT revealed by Carson was only one in a string of man-made natural catastrophes. The first man-made disaster happened in Japan. In the 1950s, in the modest fishing town of Minamata, on the Kyushu Island in the southern part of Japan, strange things started to happen. First, it seemed that the cats of the village had begun to “dance” and then collapse, dying. Next, the inhabitants of Minamata themselves began to drop their chopsticks, slur their speech, and shout uncontrollably. And then the women of the village gave birth to children who were severely deformed, blind, or deaf.

At first researchers were at a loss, then finally in 1959, they linked the events to a debilitating nervous condition caused by mercury poison. It turned out that a manufacturing corporation producing plastics had spilled mercury into the nearby
river; the heavy metal became incorporated into methyl mercury chloride, an organic matter that entered the food chain. Fish and shellfish in the bay had accumulated the toxicity that eventually poisoned the whole town. The corporation responsible for the spill, however, was not found guilty until 1970—which was also the time it took for the news to make headlines around the world.

During the time that Minamata residents were fighting against the corporation that had polluted their water, the world witnessed the first large environmental disaster caused by a commercial supertanker oil spill. On March 18, 1967; the Torrey Canyon sank along the coast of Great Britain, sending 119,000 tons of crude oil gushing out into the Atlantic. A few days later, the oil reached the coast, “triggering a massive environmental catastrophe including the death of over 25,000 sea birds” (BBC 2011).

Although prior to the oil crisis of 1973 natural resources had seemed plentiful and “only small think-tanks and obscure writers worried about whether they might ever prove exhaustible” (Gitlin 1987:13), these events started to shake the public’s confidence in the corporations’ ability to protect public health and the natural environment. In addition, as early as 1968, the sixties counter-culture critique to consumerism found a scientific rationale for its criticism, in the work of another biologist, Paul Ehrlich. In *The Population Bomb* (1968), Ehrlich warned about the unsustainability of consumerism in the face of an exploding world population. The book sold more than three million copies and became a popular bestseller.

Ehrlich was only the beginning. The counter-culture critique of industrialization, consumerism, and imperialism continued to find scientific rationale
for its arguments in biology, chemistry, and the earth sciences. The environmental movement that matured during the 1960s was different from the previous romantic ideas of nature and wilderness appreciation, not only because it called for alternative technologies, but also because it contained a new paradigm for science and politics (Jamison and Eyerman 1994:69). By the end of the decade the New York Times was writing: “Rising concern about the environmental crisis is sweeping the nation’s campuses with an intensity that may be on its way to eclipsing student discontent over the war in Vietnam” (Hill as reported by Clapp and Dauvergne 2005:52). Indeed, for the first Earth Day celebration on April 22, 1970, twenty million people took to the streets in one of the largest organized demonstration in the history of the United States.

Explanations for the rise of environmentalism have been dominated by the post-materialist thesis. Inglehart (1997) affirmed that the rise of environmental movements is the result of growing prosperity in the West. According to this view, the richer a society gets, the more its people—secure in their own survival—can afford to be concerned with non-material issues, such as global warming (Inglehart 1997:37). As long as societies remain poor, people will be primarily concerned with the satisfaction of material needs; however, as societies become richer and survival needs are taken care of, a shift in values occurs. Therefore, there is an intergenerational shift from materialist to post-materialist values that follows the level of economic development in a country. This, according to Inglehart, explains why post-materialist values typically become most salient in advanced, industrial societies.
In fact, since such post-materialist values cannot be found in societies that have not experienced increased levels of wealth (Inglehart 1997:46-7), non-materialist values can only be postmodern because they can arise only after the successful attainment of modernity (Inglehart 1997:339). Indeed, the postmodern worldview would actually collapse if the economic and technological foundations were to disappear. Following this thesis, Rootes argued that *Silent Spring* had an impact on the environmental consciousness of the people in the US and in Europe because of the existence of an “increasingly affluent and educated citizenry” (Rootes 2008:298), although he also recognized that mass environmental movements did emerge in the wake of the counter-culture movement of the sixties.

A critique to Inglehart’s proposition is that his theory cannot explain the rise of environmental movements in poorer societies. So and Lee (1999) have studied the rise of environmentalism in Thailand, and point out that the environmental damage caused by some fast-paced industrialization processes threatens human survival. Thus, environmental concerns become a livelihood issue and not merely a post-materialist concern. Consequently, scholars studying environmental movements outside of the West have claimed that, while post-materialism well-explains environmentalism in the West, it falls short of accounting for environmental movements in poorer societies such as Thailand (So and Lee 1999).

It appears that most of the literature on environmental movements places the modern concept of economics, in the sense of material needs satisfaction, at the center of the analysis. According to the dominant theories, people’s concerns about nature
and the environment emerge either because their material needs have already been taken care of—thus post-materialist concerns can be afforded—or because people perceive that the natural resources necessary to satisfy their needs are threatened.

Little attention has been paid to the claim that environmental concerns may stem from a holistic perspective, as described by one Thai ecovillager:

National resources don’t belong to the state only; they belong to the community as well. I organized the young people against the construction of a dam in the north of Thailand . . . that’s when my life changed, talking with the people, even the young people, and old people when asked if the government builds the dam what would you do, the old lady says she wouldn’t move anywhere, she was born here she wants to die here, this land is connected to her, and her eyes had tears, this made me feel that people are connected to the land, to the nature, which is different from the city people, they can move from the condominium any time if they have money, they never feel connected, they lost connections. That’s why I think ecology and spirituality is the same thing. (Moo)¹⁹

The interview excerpt above shows how current theories of environmentalism may have failed to appreciate the holistic perspective of people living in close proximity with nature, a theme discussed in the chapter four.

2.8 The Backlash: The Self-Regulating Market Goes Global

¹⁹ Moo, interview, January 15, 2008.
Globalization did not figure continually, comprehensively, intensely, and with rapidly increasing frequency in the lives of a large population of humanity until around the 1960s (Scholte as reported in Clapp and Dauvergne 2005:23).

The power of globalization to affect the capacity of the nation-state to act independently and autonomously, is one of the most contested and debated issues across several disciplines, ranging from economics to sociology. “Globalization Believers”—as Sorensen (2004) calls them—search for empirical evidence that the power of the state has substantially weakened, and that the economic and social world has changed in fundamental ways as a result of this phenomenon. Kobrin (1997), for example, points out that the dramatic increase in technology often diminishes the power of the state to control business transactions, and that transnational strategic alliances represent a fundamental change in the world economy. Besides the threat of fleeing capital and skilled labor, collecting taxes also became more difficult as governments have to deal with the “extraterritoriality” of new market exchanges. Modern technologies have created problems of definitions of “territoriality”; as Kobrin points out “if an Indian programmer located in Bangalore edits a program on a computer in New York, there is no question that economic value has been created. Did the transaction take place in India or the USA? Which jurisdiction gets to tax it or control it?” (Kobrin 1997:159).

Meanwhile, “Globalization Skeptics’” portray the state as retaining its role as the main actor. Gilpin (2000), for example, believes that economic globalization is limited, and that national governments have the power to reverse the process of
globalization just as they did after the World War I. The US economy, Gilpin asserts, is largely domestic driven, and labor globalization was greater prior to World War I than after it. In addition, the majority of the world’s population is excluded from globalization, since most of these processes occur in the industrialized and industrializing countries.

Whichever side of the debate one stands on, there is little doubt that the wind of economic liberalism that began in the Thatcher and Reagan era, and peaked in the 1990s with the establishment of the WTO has increasingly dismantled those very regulations of the labor market that Esping-Andersen had identified as decommodification elements won by the working class. Over the last few decades, economists have in fact called on politicians to ease the restrictions placed on the labor market, and to allow for more “flexible” contracts between employers and employees in order to reduce unemployment and free the economy.

But “flexible” in this case really translate into making labor even more subject to the forces of the market. Commodification is always a matter of degree, and higher economic insecurity combined with lower entitlements—in an economic system in which wage earnings from work are the dominant source of income—means a higher degree of commodification (Standing 2007). Despite popular protests, one country after another—even European ones with an entrenched welfare state—have made significant reforms to their labor laws. Germany has trimmed jobless benefits, and Belgium, France, and Spain have all reduced the minimum wage for young people (Economist 1997). In addition, France, Spain, and Italy have introduced fixed-term
labor contracts (Economist 2001a), and Italy has stopped tying wage increases to the inflation rate.

Such changes are not limited to Europe. While Japanese-owned companies limit their action to early retirement schemes and a freeze on new hires, companies with foreign shareholders have begun to shed workers. Nissan and Isuzu, for instance, laid off 9,700 workers between 2001 and 2004 (Renault controls 37 percent of Nissan, and GM almost half of Isuzu) (Economist 2001b). In other words, as Castells pointed out the “flexibility of work, and weakening of organized labor led to the retrenchment of the welfare state, the cornerstone of the social contract in the industrial era” (Castells 1998:337).

The 2008 American-born recession, once it reached the European continent accelerated the dismantling of the welfare state in its own cradle. A large public debt and slow economic growth made the Eurozone “periphery” nations especially vulnerable to international financial speculations. Greece, the Republic of Ireland and Portugal unable to borrow money in international markets received massive bailouts from the EU and International Monetary Fund under the pledge of drastically reducing their deficit by implementing major cut to social spending and through the privatization of state owned industries and assets.

Furthermore, cuts in social spending have not been limited to the weakest economies of Europe. Spain, for instance, in 2012 proposed the toughest austerity programs in its modern history and the response was a general strike with hundreds of thousands of people demonstrating in the streets. The UK in 2010 announced the
biggest cuts in state spending since World War II, which brought more than 250,000
people out to protest in London; the city biggest protest since the Iraq war (BBC
2012).

As we shall see, the so called “austerity programs” imposed by the IMF and
EU on the borrowing European countries appear to be no very different from the “old”
Structural Adjustment Programs that the World Bank and the IMF has imposed on the
countries of the Global South since the late 1970.

In fact, while in the Global North labor is re-commodified mainly by repealing
entitlements, in the South, where the large majority of people are still practicing
subsistence agriculture, the commodification take place through a mechanism similar
to the “enclosure of the commons” that occurred in England over two centuries ago.
Beginning in the late 1970s, all of the countries in financial trouble following the oil
crisis of 1973 fell, one after the other, into the trap of debt. During the Reagan and
Thatcher era, the IMF and the World Bank went through dramatic changes and
became the “new missionary institutions” to push free market ideology on the
reluctant poor countries (Stiglitz 2003:13).

The conditions for the IMF/World Bank loans called governments to
implement the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). Among the conditions

20 For an account of SAPs as viewed by the AGM’s activists, see Vandana Shiva, Stolen
Harvests, South End Press: 2005; Walden Bello, Food Wars; Peter Rosset, Food is Different,
imposed by SAPs were the removals of subsidies to farmers and the opening of the local market to foreign imports and to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). The rationale behind SAPs was that freeing the market would remove local inefficiencies and increase food security.

However, so far the result has not quite been the one expected. As discussed earlier, not only the restructuring of the world’s food system displaced (and continue to do so) rural subsistence farmers, but it also replaced staple food crops with export crops such as cotton, timber, pineapples, shrimps, and flowers. The developing countries thus turned from being self-sufficient to being net importers of food staples such as wheat. Many poor countries that suffered famines, such as Ethiopia, have actually switched land production from food staples to cash crops (Sklair 1995:128).

Beginning in 1976 and continuing to the present day, protests and riots in opposition to the World Bank and IMF policies have exploded in more than three dozen countries. Between 1985 and 1992 alone, fifty-six “IMF” riots took place in Latina America, the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East (Kahn and Kellner 2007:664). The implosion of the USSR in the early 1990s meant that the “Washington Consensus” could spread unopposed to every corner of the world (Bellah 1999; Reitan 2007).

Thus, when in the 1990s, the wave of commodification unleashed by the birth of the WTO, NAFTA, and so forth, reached also the populations of rich countries, it brought the social movements of the North and the South together. So when the Seattle 1999 events occurred, we had two players ‘coming out’: 1) the neo-liberal
global capitalism with its WTO “hegemonic vanguard party,” and 2) a New Social Movement (NSM), rooted in the counter-cultural movements of the sixties, which had now evolved and merged to form the AGM. Figure 1 summarizes the waves of commodification and decommodification discussed in this chapter.

The shift of activism from the national to the transnational level of contention which gave rise to the current AGM is the subject of the next section.

Figure 2 waves of commodification and decommodification

2.9 The Alter-Globalization Movement

Among the banners carried through the streets of Seattle in November 1999 some read: “no globalization without participation,” “WTO = capitalism without
conscience,” and “Another World is Possible.” It is estimated that at least 1,387 different groups were involved in the demonstrations and that the event was prepared by an information campaign with global scope (Della Porta and al. 2006:1). The hundreds of organizations representing a multitude of diverse interests appeared to have successfully built a common framework around their opposition to the WTO.

However, “the proclivities of activists to switch easily among issues, targets, and messages seem to raise questions about the stability of membership and the terms of unity” (Bennett 2005:208), which, as pointed out in chapter 1, has raised doubt about the existence of a “real” global social movement (Della Porta and al. 2006:233). Indeed, the many different names—“Anti-Globalization Movement,” “Global Civil Society,” “Global Justice Movement,” “New Global,” “The Seattle People,” “Anti-Global Capitalism,” and many more—testify to the fuzziness and lack of understanding of the phenomena of protests appearing at almost all the main international and governmental gatherings since that November of 1999, a fate that has been shared in the past by the “68 movement” (Della Porta 2005:177).

Supporters of the movement such as the outspoken, activist, and author Naomi Klein maintain that “it’s true that the mass protests in Seattle and D.C. were a hodgepodge of slogans and causes . . . it was hard to decode the connections between Mumia’s incarceration and the fate of the sea turtles. But in trying to find coherence in these large-scale shows of strength, the critics are confusing the outward demonstrations of the movement with the thing itself—missing the forest for the people dressed as trees” (Klein 2001:147).
However, we are still not clear on what the “thing itself” is, or rather, using Smith words on what is this “shared human identity” (Smith 2008) built upon, given the profound diversity of the people involved. According to Hardt and Negri (2005)—who became famous for their theory of Empire and of resistance to it—in order to understand the AGM we must use two new concepts: the multitude, and the common. The multitude is a concept used to express a social subject conceptually different from a social class, the people or the masses, as they explain:

The multitude is composed of innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity—different cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations; different forms of labor; different ways of living; different views of the world; and different desires. The multitude is a multiplicity of all these singular differences. (Hardt and Negri 2005:xiv)

Yet, also Hardt and Negri recognize that the multitude need a “glue” to hold it together, or what they termed “the common”: “internal difference of the multitude must discover the common that allows them to communicate together” (Hardt and Negri 2005:xv, italics in the original). "The common" is Hardt's and Negri's term of art, introduced in Multitude, to designate the shared and indivisible nature of human cooperation and coexistence. According to these authors, capitalism tries to eliminate and appropriate the common but it is unsuccessful because the multitude cannot be farther exploited. What it is interesting in their analysis is the production of the common, "What the multitude produces is not just goods or services; the multitude also and most importantly produces cooperation, communication, forms of life, and
social relationships. The economic production of the multitude, in other words, is not only a model for political decision-making but also tends to become political decision making” (339).

Smith (2008) also argues that the people involved in this movement has a shared human identity and a common vision based on inclusion and cooperation, and not, as commonly labeled by the media, just an “anti-globalization” spirit. A point supported by a Thai activist during an interview:

We are not really “anti,” we are for transformation, not really “anti,” we try rather to engage, for example with a business sector, we are a business ourselves, we set up a small company, a type of social venture we rather try to give a good example rather than being anti-somebody, although we have critical analysis, I would not put myself in the “anti” box. Definitely we share a movement for alternatives . . . we do so many activities to promote green marketing, social marketing, and green shop, we have a network of green movement and green consumers, we publish book on globalization, a critical approach to globalization. (Wallapa)21

Although at times there are activists who are vocal against globalization, we should also pay attention to what these activists mean by “against globalization,” as Sulak Sivaraksa, a leading Thai scholar-activist explained:

I am against globalization; globalization is more or less mechanization under American imperialism in cooperation with the multinational corporations. They control the world because they have all the

21 Wallapa, interview, January 18, 2008
weapons, all the money, control mainstream mass media, mainstream education, brainwashing people... I am against this globalization because makes people unhappy, people always aspire to more and more and... destroy more of the environment, that’s why, global warming and all sort of things I think this globalization is very dangerous, that’s why I am very much against and at the same time I look for alternatives... I am myself linking with the Future World Council which looks for something alternative to mainstream and look for a world hopefully where we can live more happily for the next several generations... I am always involved sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly. (Sivaraksa)²²

As the interviewee makes clear, he views this globalization the problem, by this meaning the control that the US and the multinational corporation exercise on the process. On the other hand, he himself has “globalized” in its quest for alternatives. As Smith points out, she found that the people and the organizations involved in the events she participated to, constitutes a loose globalized network “seeking more participatory and responsive forms of global policy” (Smith 2008:226). A finding that I found supported by the “globalization of social development” explained to me by an interviewee:

I was in Geneva leading a march of the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) against WTO. That was in 2000. I had been in the streets... we were saying that look, what the world needs was not the organization of capital and market, but globalization of social

²² Sivaraksa, interview, January 17, 2008
development. And that, in globalization there is no such thing as free market; the market is only free for capitalists. (Faruque23)

The advent of the World Wide Web poses new challenges as internet redefined the time and space in which social relationship organize (Hine 2000, p.83), and plays a particularly salient role in the organization of transnational movements. The globalization of social movements, which culminated in the Seattle’s protest in 1999, showed the need to understand the “relational mechanisms that are bringing together national actors in transnational coalitions” (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005 p.9).

23 Faruque, interview, January 8th, 2008.
CHAPTER 3 – “PATH TO FREEDOM”: PRACTICES OF DECOMMODIFICATION

Outline

3.1 Introduction

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3.3 COMMUNITY BENEFITS
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3.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, for nearly a century the process of the fictitious commodification of labor and land had been mitigated in part by the welfare
system—at least in the rich countries (Esping-Andersen, 1990), and in part by the lack of technology to fully control nature (Patel, 2007; Chase-Dunn, 2006). During the 1980s, the process of globalization and commodification sped up again (see chapter 2, section 8). In the Global South, the IMF and the World Bank imposed a series of conditions to grant loans known as Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). One of the consequences of SAPs was the acceleration of the industrialization and globalization of agriculture.

At the same time, citizens of rich countries, too, felt the expansion of the market as benefits offered by the state and by companies shrank. What was called “work flexibility” really meant higher economic insecurity, and, as Standing points out, the higher the economic and social insecurity in a country, the more labor is commodified (Standing, 2007:69).

This chapter discusses the practices of decommodification employed by the people and the communities I visited and listed in the Appendix 1. To carry out this analysis, I borrow Standing’s concept of Social Income and its related “formula” of decommodification:

\[ SI = SP + W + CB + EB + SB + PB \]

where SI is the individual’s total social income; SP is self-production (whether self-consumed, bartered, or sold); W is the money wage or income from work in contrast to self-chosen work done for its use value and work done in pursuit of self-chosen
goals\textsuperscript{24}; CB is the value of benefits provided by the family or local community; EB is the value of benefits provided by the enterprise in which the person might be working; SB is the value of state benefits, in terms of insurance or other transfers, and the value of social services; and PB is private income, gained through investment including private social protection.

In times of decommodification, W must shrink as a share of SI, and since I am looking at practices at the individual and community levels rather than at the state level or company level, this analysis of decommodification only examines increases in SP and CB.

### 3.2 Self-Production

It is not normal for humans to have to work eight hours a day, it is not normal for any animal because that’s the symbol of slavery… I started to come back and think about self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and come back to build my own hat with bamboo, I started my own garden, I started to do everything and then I spent less money, less and less and I

\textsuperscript{24}According to Standing, another aspect of work is “that in performing it the person has agency, a sense of self-determination and autonomy. By contrast, to a large extent, a worker required to perform labor lacks agency. He does what he is told, or tries to do so, or tries to avoid what he is supposed to do.”
have more than what I need… You only need [to satisfy] the four basic needs, food shelter, cloths and medicine. (Jandai)\textsuperscript{25}

Modernity and the development of the capitalist industrial system have increasingly been characterized by specialization and the division of labor. Marx spent most of his three volumes of Capital analyzing labor relations under capitalism, and he strongly sustained that the division of labor was the very essence of all that is wrong with capitalism. According to Marx, the appropriation of the labor of a man by another is the basis on which the product of one’s labor can be used as a means for enslaving him and all production becomes alienated production. The quote at the start of the chapter captures how this alienation is felt by members of the ecovillage movement.

Of course humans are rational creatures, and at times they have willingly parted with eight hours a day of their life in exchange of the comfort and security that the welfare state had provided, but as the neo-liberal wave of commodification began to squeeze more labor for less security and comfort, Marx’s thoughts resonate again, and an increasing number of people attempt to free themselves from the shackles of the market by going back to produce for themselves as Jandai explains:

I came back and I started to build it [a mud house] and after that I found that is so easy for everybody, because I built it alone for three months, I got a house. I spent only two hours a day, no more than that, so I started to realize how is not hard anymore, before something that is very hard for people, you need to work for, some of my friends are

\textsuperscript{25} Jandai, interview, January 2007.
teachers, they need to work for more than thirty years to pay for a house. I worked only three months, two hours per day, and I got a house. (Jandai)²⁶

From the building of mud houses in Thailand to the restoration of a medieval burgh in Italy, finding alternative to the market to put a roof over one’s head is surely the biggest economic saving one can aim to achieve. However, while building one’s own shelter is limited by skills or legal restriction, the production of food, whether self-consumed, bartered or sold, it appears to be a universal practice among the communities and organizations I visited. The remainder of this section will discuss the different ways in which forging a new (or in some way “old”) relation to nature, empower people to reduce their dependency from the market.

3.2.1 Subsistence Farming as an Act of Freedom

In The Age of Extremes, the eminent historian Eric Hobsbawm affirmed that the most fundamental change of the twentieth century has been the depeasantization of the countryside (as reported in Araghi 2000:158). Indeed, between 1950 and 1990, the percentage of the labor force employed in agriculture declined by 40 percent in the Global South and 33 percent in the Global North (Araghi 2000). I have discussed the depeasantization by displacement that occurred in the South as a result of SAPs. However, even those farmers who maintained ownership of their land—in the South

as well as in the North—lost control of “what they produce, how they produce, and for whom they produce [because these] are decided by the agrifood corporations” (Araghi 2000:151).

“Path to Freedom,” the title used in this chapter, has been borrowed from an urban homestead located in Pasadena, California. Jules Dervaes, the founder, explains the choice of its name in this way:

I call it Path to Freedom because I know growing my own food and becoming self-sufficient is not a one-time action. Nor is it a broad, easy, paved way. It is narrow, rocky, sometimes hard to find, and I must navigate around obstacles. It is a winding path, and I cannot always see the way ahead. [...] It is also freedom from prejudice, preconceptions, and the status quo. It is freedom to break out, to grow, to improve. It is the freedom to get daily bread from, to admit dependency on, and to become a student of nature. (Dervaes 2013)

Farming, especially in times of economic downturn, has always represented the ultimate “de-commodification” act, as the following author writes of the Great Depression that hit the United States in the 1930s:

One of the most striking characteristics of each “depression period” is the tacit acknowledgement of city dwellers that “the farm is the safest place to live” . . . so long as the income continues the employee is prone to quell what desires he may have for rural life and to tolerate the disadvantages of urban surroundings rather than to drop a certainty for uncertainty; but when hard times arrive and his savings steadily melt away he begins to appreciate the advantages of a home which does not gobble up his hard-earned money but produces much of its upkeep, especially in the way of food for the family. (Kains 1973)
In Europe, following the 2008 recession and the subsequent implementation of austerity programs, the hardest hit countries have seen an exodus of young people returning to the countryside. In Greece, for instance, unemployment among young people between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine reached 35 percent in 2012. But the agricultural sector added 32,000 jobs between 2008 and 2010, which were filled by Greeks rather than migrant workers from abroad (Donadio 2012).

In addition, this research found that AGM activists going back to the land not only decommodify themselves by turning to self-production, but also by embracing a model of simple living fostered by a connection with nature. This voluntary movement toward simplicity, discussed in chapter 2, appears to be a direct continuation of the anti-consumerism movement born in the 1960s. What was new in the communities I visited was their ability to mobilize themselves (seed banks, workshops, etc.), as well as their ability to mobilize community support for their life choices (CSA, Fair Trade, and so forth, discussed in the following sections). Peggy, one of the founders of Pun Pun, explained:

I started to realize that I wanted to actually farm myself, and not just be working on the activism side, and I started to really feel like although I feel that activism is necessary and important and we need it and we must continue to do it, I felt that the form that I was doing at that point was, um, it didn’t feel sustainable to me. The lifestyle I was living was still contributing to the ills that I saw in society, you know, by consuming, by, like I was giving back in to the political policy issues and education, and all of that aspect, but in my daily life I was not feeling like I was producing what I was eating, or significantly reducing my impact on the environment myself, so I started to feel like I wanted to change my form of activism to be more of a lifestyle that I
felt like I could also live with for a long time. Because I felt that the other lifestyle that I was living was good for me at that time, but was not sustainable for me, so, that was another aspect that brought me into farming, and then Jon and I got the land here together, and wanted to start with the intention of having an organic farm, and then a learning center where people could come and learn and we knew that we would teach earth and building, and organic farming, and all of these things, because that’s what we do, and then to focus most particularly on the seed center. (Reents)\(^\text{27}\)

The conventional development paradigm (discussed in chapter 3) has globally shaped an understanding of subsistence or small-scale farming as a mode of production belonging to a backward stage in the development process. Thus, subsistence farming is seen as unattractive work that all people want to escape from. In the United States, modern technology has substituted the people in the field with machines, and farmers make up less than two percent of the population (never mind that an unaccounted for number of legal and illegal migrant workers actually truly do the backbreaking work of picking fruit and vegetables for few dollars a day).

With the globalization of Western culture, the young people in poor countries, too, have pursued the dream of liberating themselves from working the land, although life in the city does not always turn out to be what they expected, as Jon Jandai himself experienced:

> I was born in a farmer’s family in the northeastern part of Thailand, and, like many people at that time, I moved to Bangkok to get a good

\(^{27}\) Reents, interview, January 12, 2007.
job, because not many people want to be a farmer, they want to work in the city, get more money. Like a lot of other people I was the same, I went to Bangkok and I tried to work, try to get more education. But the more I worked and studied, the more I felt life is harder and harder. I start to question myself a lot, why I have to do like this, why people develop like this, why life is so hard, why people do not want to be a farmer? And I started to learn to be a farmer again . . . after becoming a farmer I found is so easy to be a farmer because you work less and you have a lot of time, because I work only two months per year and I have enough rice to eat for the whole year and for selling too. I started to think life must be easy, it is not normal for humans to have to work eight hours a day, is not normal for any animal because that’s the symbol of slave, and then I started to come back and think about self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and come back to build my own hut with bamboo, I started my own garden, I started to do everything, and then I spent less money, less and less, and I have more than what I need. (Jandai)

Interestingly, for Westerners exposed to both cultures, the call of nature and the simple life has at times been an easier choice. Christian Shearer describes his choice to live on a farm:

The way I see it is just enhancing life. And that is enhancing life for us, and for anyone who comes here. And really, through whatever webs and trickle down, is enhancing life for everyone on the planet . . . just waking up in the morning and the first thing I look at and see is just the breaking daylight of the day, and hearing the bird singing . . . rather than dadada dadada [imitating the sound of an alarm clock], that alone brings much more value and quality to my day, and getting my hands in the dirt, turning compost, just the whole process. (Shearer)

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29 Shearer, interview, January 10, 2007.
Whereas in the Global South farming is often the only way to feed oneself, in the Global North concern about unethical and unhealthy industrial food production led to an appreciation for growing one’s own food and raising one’s own livestock. A Damanhurian explained her community effort to be self-sufficient in this manner:

We try to be more and more self-sufficient, so that we know that animals and plants have been treated with respect . . . I can’t go to the supermarket and nourish myself with a product that may be an animal, but has been processed by machines . . . it is also important to pay attention to the quantity and not to waste resources and not to take advantage of others’ lives. (Pooka)\(^{30}\)

While the choice to produce one’s own food is both an act of independence and an act of control over one’s own food supply, probably the ultimate fight for the right to practice subsistence farming is the one fought by indigenous communities around the world. In Bangladesh, the people in the Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) have been fighting for decades to keep control over their natural resources and farming methods. In 1997, a peace treaty was signed to end a twenty-five-year-long guerrilla war. The treaty recognizes CHT as a tribal inhabited region with a right to its own system of traditional governance. However, many human rights organizations claim that widespread human rights violations have continued, along with land disputes. The RDC director working with the indigenous people to halt the establishment of forty-two paper mills in the CHT explained the reason for their fight: “Indigenous people

\(^{30}\) Pooka, interview, July 11, 2007.
are forest dwellers, and as forest dwellers they have to maintain the forest, they know how to keep the forest intact, they use the forest, they are the children of the forest . . . it’s a very basic kind of cultivation, it does not create enough surplus to grow their economy, this is a kind of very basic economy.” So when the local government proposed a tree plantation to supply the wood pulp, they refused it:

> We don’t need this kind of trees, our livelihood is different, our birds like the kind of trees that there are here . . . if those industries are founded, paper industries producing tissues for the rich countries, that would perhaps create some kind of economic prosperity for them [the indigenous people], but they don’t want that, they want their environment . . . their economy is a subsistence economy . . . they are not ready to trade their environment for any other kind of economy. (Kamal)31

The degree of decommodification of any given individual depends on the level of the standard of living that he or she can achieve independently of his or her participation in the market (Esping-Andersen 1990:37). However, the idea of what constitutes a socially acceptable standard of living is culturally constructed. As Max-Neef (1992) reminds us, fundamental human needs may be universal, but satisfiers “are modified according to the rhythm of history and vary according to culture and circumstance” (Max-Neef 1992:204). As we discussed earlier, for Jon Jandai, for instance, the standard of living he achieves by producing his own food and building his own hut—i.e., simply having access to natural resources—is not only sufficient, 

31 Kamal, Interview, January 7, 2008.
but actually desirable. Indeed, before Thailand set itself to pursue a Western style of
development, Jon’s lifestyle was the norm, not only for Jon’s family (his father was a
farmer as well) but for the quasi-totality of Thai people.

3.2.2 Organic Agriculture: Breaking the Chains of the Market

Shortly after President Obama took office, the First Lady excited the
supporters of organic agriculture by starting an organic vegetable garden at the White
House and making it a highly publicized event. The reaction from the conventional
agriculture industry was swift: Mid America CropLife Association (MACA), which
represents the companies that produce the pesticides and fertilizers that underpin
"conventional" American agriculture, wrote a letter to Mrs. Obama urging the White
House to show official appreciation for the benefits offered by conventionally grown
food (see box 2).
March 26, 2009

Dear Mrs. Obama,

We are writing regarding the garden recently added to the White House grounds to ensure a fresh supply of fruits and vegetables to your family, guests, and staff. Congratulations on recognizing the importance of agriculture in America! The U.S. has the safest and most abundant food supply in the world thanks to the 3 million people who farm or ranch in the United States.

The CropLife Ambassador Network, a program of the Mid America CropLife Association, consists of over 160 ambassadors who work and many of whom grew up in agriculture. Their mission is to provide scientifically based, accurate information to the public regarding the safety and value of American agricultural food production. Many people, especially children, don't realize the extent to which their daily lives depend on America's agricultural industry. For instance, children are unaware the jeans they put on in the morning, the three meals eaten daily, the baseball with which they play, and even the biofuels that power the school bus are available because of America's farmers and ranchers.

Agriculture is the largest industry in America generating 20 percent of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product. Individuals, family partnerships or family corporations operate almost 99 percent of U.S. farms. Over 22 million people are employed in farm-related jobs, including production agriculture, farm inputs, processing, and marketing and sales. Through research and changes in production practices, today's food producers are providing Americans with the widest variety of foods ever.

Starting in the early 1900s, technology advances have allowed farmers to continually produce more food on less land while using less human labor. Over time, Americans were able to leave the time-consuming demands of farming to pursue new interests and develop new abilities. Today, an average farmer produces enough food to feed 144 Americans who are living longer lives than many of their ancestors. Technology in agriculture has allowed for the development of much of what we know and use in our lives today. If Americans were still required to farm to support their family's basic food and fiber needs, would the U.S. have been leaders in the advancement of science, communication, education, medicine, transportation, and the arts?

We live in a very different world than that of our grandparents. Americans are juggling jobs with the needs of children and aging parents. The time needed to tend a garden is not there for the majority of our citizens, certainly not a garden of sufficient productivity to supply much of a family's year-round food needs.

Much of the food considered not wholesome or tasty is the result of how it is stored or prepared rather than how it is grown. Fresh foods grown conventionally are wholesome and flavorful yet more economical. Local and conventional farming is not mutually exclusive. However, a Midwest mother whose child loves strawberries, a good source of vitamin C, appreciates the ability to offer California strawberries in March a few months before the official Mid-west
Farmers and ranchers are the first environmentalists, maintaining and improving the soil and natural resources to pass onto future generations. Technology allows for farmers to meet the increasing demand for food and fiber in a sustainable manner.

- Farmers use reduced tillage practices on more than 72 million acres to prevent erosion.
- Farmers maintain over 1.3 million acres of grass waterways, allowing water to flow naturally from crops without eroding soil.
- Contour farming keeps soil from washing away. About 26 million acres in the U.S. are managed this way.
- Agricultural land provides habitat for 75 percent of the nation's wildlife.
- Precision farming boosts crop yields and reduces waste by using satellite maps and computers to match seed, fertilizer, and crop protection applications to local soil conditions.
- Sophisticated Global Positioning Systems can be specifically designed for spraying pesticides. A weed detector equipped with infrared light identifies specific plants by the different rates of light they reflect and then sends a signal to a pump to spray a preset amount of herbicide onto the weed.
- Biogenetics allows a particular trait to be implanted directly into the seed to protect the seed against certain pests.
- Farmers are utilizing four-wheel drive tractors with up to 300 horsepower requiring fewer passes across fields-saving energy and time.
- Huge combines are speeding the time it takes to harvest crops.
- With modern methods, 1 acre of land in the U.S. can produce 42,000 pounds (lbs.) of strawberries, 110,000 heads of lettuce, 25,400 lbs. of potatoes, 8,900 lbs. of sweet corn, or 640 lbs. of cotton lint.

As you go about planning and planting the White House garden, we respectfully encourage you to recognize the role conventional agriculture plays in the U.S. in feeding the ever-increasing population, contributing to the U.S. economy, and providing a safe and economical food supply. America's farmers understand crop protection technologies are supported by sound scientific research and innovation.

The CropLife Ambassador Network offers educational programs for elementary school educators at http://ambassador.maca.org covering the science behind crop protection products and their contribution to sustainable agriculture. You may find our programs America's Abundance, Farmers Stewards of the Land, and War of the Weeds of particular interest. We thank you for recognizing the importance and value of America's current agricultural technologies in feeding our country and contributing to the U.S. economy.  

Figure 3 MACA Letter to Mrs. Obama - Continued
The above letter encapsulates the dominant paradigm of development: industrialize agriculture in order to feed the people while freeing them from the hard work of the land, and use pesticides and fertilizers to guarantee bountiful harvests and a secure food supply. Jeffrey Stier, the associate director of the American Council on Science and Health, expressing a belief common among the general public, went even further and said, “I think the Obama garden should come with a warning label. It’s irresponsible to tell people that you should have to eat organic and locally grown food. Not everyone can afford that. That’s a serious public health concern . . . People are going to eat fewer fruits and vegetables. Cancer rates will go up. Obesity rates will go up. I think if we decide to eat only locally grown food, we’re going to have a lot of starvation” (Burros 2009).

In 2011, a special report in the Economist reinforced the public perception that traditional, organic farming is a luxury for the rich when it said, “It can feed Europeans and Americans but cannot feed the world” (Economist 2011). The report also pointed out that concerns about taste, nutrition, and environmental destruction have no relevance when food is not available in the first place: “Michael Pollan’s The Omnivore’s Dilemma starts by asking: ‘What should we have for dinner?’ By contrast, those worried about food supplies wonder: ‘Will there be anything for dinner?’” (Economist 2011).

It is evident that the public discourse revolves around the belief that modern science and technology is the sine qua non for feeding the masses of the world. All farmers need is access to the latest technology (fertilizers, pesticides, machinery, etc.);
little or no attention is paid to the production, distribution, and control of those technologies. No reflections are offered on the connection between conventional agriculture and the market.

However, at a time when the price of food around the world is skyrocketing and the effects of climate change are jeopardizing the viability of more and more crops, the move of so many farmers in the Global South away from the commodity market to self-subsistence agriculture should, to say the least, raise some questions. It is precisely the rejection of market encroachment on the provision of the most basic of human needs—feeding oneself—that is the main catalyst for the practices of decommodification being carried out by all the communities I visited. The poorer the country in which these communities are located, the stronger the danger of market encroachment becomes, as Qazi Faruque of the Bangladeshi NGO Proshika explained:

By not using chemicals, you are actually getting disconnected from the world market, so you get situated into a local economy, but whenever you are using chemicals you get connected to a world economy and whatever happens to the oil in Iraq and the oil prices . . . But whenever you are not using them, you are insulated, so you have what you call, a freedom, or autonomy, locally based, and that is also a very important aspect, you know, you cannot get connected to a system where you have no control, so seizing the control, by not using chemicals, you are seizing the control to yourself, the farmers having the control, and that is why the farmers are doing this. (Faruque)

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33 Faruque, interview, January 8, 2008.
In Bangladesh, as in most other countries, the push toward the industrialization and intensification of agriculture originated in the 1960s with the help of a new technology called High Yield Variety (HYV), or the so-called “Green Revolution.” This technology consisted of three main components: (1) irrigation facility, (2) seeds with higher yield potential, and (3) chemical fertilizers and pesticides (Gain 2002:47). The story of the Green Revolution’s impact on Bangladesh was recalled in one interview:

In Bangladesh there was a big movement when it was part of Pakistan in the sixties, that is when they started to learn to use chemicals and it becomes easy because it looked nice, you just spray it, while organic method, the limits of it were there in traditional agriculture, so farmers were quite attracted to this. But the problems of chemicals . . . became obvious not after one or two years, but five, ten years later. Then farmers are ready to accept organic because they have seen . . . they are saying that even with the pesticide spray they are not able to control the pest, and the cost of these are increasing, so they are ready to take an alternative that will work, so, we have to provide training. (Faruque)\(^{34}\)

Initially, the government of Bangladesh massively subsidized the necessary inputs (fertilizers, pesticides, power pumps and tube wells), which are mostly imported from Western companies, while the Bangladesh Agricultural Bank (BKB) supplied the necessary cash credit to the peasants for buying the inputs from the market (Gain 2002:47). Over the course of two decades (1970-1990), the

\(^{34}\) Ibid.
intensification of rice production increased the country’s yield rate of that staple by almost 65 percent (Gain 2002:48). However, allocating all of the lands to the production of rice resulted in an increased dependency on imports for pulses (dry beans, dry peas, chick-peas, lentils, etc.), oilseeds (soybeans, grape seed, groundnuts, sunflower seed, etc.) and fruits, all of which remain unaffordable to poor consumers (FPMU 2008:18). The negative consequences of this were especially noticeable on the health of children and on pregnant and lactating women (FPMU 2008:18).

The environmental impact of the Green Revolution has also been catastrophic in other ways. Since HYV seeds have a much higher water requirement than traditional varieties, farmers have been forced to pump out groundwater at a much higher rate than it could replenish itself. Once the aquifers started to drop, arsenic compounds that had previously been submerged in groundwater began to be exposed to oxygen. It is estimated that some eighty million people now live in the arsenic-tainted areas (Gain 2002:237-8). In addition, to maintain a high yield rate, farmers are being forced to apply more and more fertilizers to the point where the cost is becoming unbearable and, as chemist-by-training Faruque argues, is ultimately bound to destroy the health of the soil:

Plants take their nutrients through microorganisms, they do not directly take them from soil, they have to be digested by microorganisms. So when you use chemicals, like chemical fertilizer, they are actually the killer of many microorganisms. And the soil PH, that is acidity, reduces, so therefore, the chemical fertilizer is actually reducing the balance in soil fertility. And then, if you are using pesticide, because the pests are there, but there are also predators that eat them up, and destroy them, and in nature there is a perfect balance in it. So,
whenever you use pesticide, you actually kill off more predators than pest, and the pest because of their quick life, twenty-one days, compared to three months for the predators, so they produce three generation against one generation of predators, so they can actually become immune to pesticides much faster. So whenever you are using pesticides, actually you are increasing pest attacks, because you give them strength. But when you stop using the pesticides, the balance comes back and there will be pests of course, but they will not be at the level where they can damage the crops. So, there is a science behind it, and we have practices that have been working perfectly for years and years. (Faruque)

To fend off the market and environmental destruction, NGOs are helping people to bring back organic farming

We had to re-train, but first of all we had to do a lot of research work, before we could recommend to people that the organic agriculture is better. And for that we did a lot of research ourselves . . . and then we had done another research with the Natural Resource Institute. And, we did comparative research on what is the effect of conventional agriculture, on soil, production economy, and in both counts soil was much better under ecological management, and then pesticides, what I have just told you, we have found out that nine pesticide sprays out of ten are useless, and sometimes, you can get better results by keeping the pests in the field. For example there is a pest…. that actually eat up the rice when it is green, and leaves before flowering, so they don’t damage any production, but farmers think, and scientists have always told them that you spray them off, kill them off, but we found that if you leave it in the field, then what they do is the pruning job for you and there are more for rice, so you better invite it. This kind of research we did, and then, the other aspect is the food quality, and what is that, by scientific measures, and all that. And then we communicate to

35 Ibid.
farmers because we have to be sure what we are saying is backed up by research and so we developed an extension of the methodology training system based on that and we have been training farmers. (Faruque)\textsuperscript{36}

One after the other the Bangladeshi activists told me the same story: “The so-called ‘Green Revolution’ using pesticides and fertilizers caused the destruction of villages and ecosystems . . . we lost land fertility and rice varieties . . . there were six hundred varieties of rice, now only eight or nine” (Shariar)\textsuperscript{37}. In the 1990s, ESDO worked for a year to convince the people in the rural village of Charhoga (about 7,000 residents) to phase out chemicals and work on a participatory model of development. First, ESDO worked with a core group of women, and then slowly the village came together. The community planted about 22,000 trees, then established domestic waste management and compost fertilizer units. In 2008, about 30 percent of the farmers began practicing organic agriculture for the first time (ESDO 2008).

Farmers in neighboring Myanmar had a story that sounded just like that of their Bangladeshi counterparts, as the Caritas Project Manager from Myanmar I met in an ecovillage training course in Thailand told me:

With Caritas we are trying to build some kind of ecovillages. Currently we are organizing the communities and in some places we have started sustainable agriculture projects, and yes those are the steps towards building ecovillages. In Myanmar many people use chemical things because they are just trying to follow a shortcut way. There are also

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{37} Shariar, interview, January 7, 2008.
many companies affiliated to the government that are promoting chemical fertilizers and encouraging people to use them, they may say like “if you use this fertilizer the yield becomes higher and higher” or something like that. The companies distribute the products to many places. They have factories in the country and one or two Western companies and many companies from China. The people also now realize that using that chemical fertilizer is not good for the long run because they face many problems, you cannot grow anymore without fertilizers, if this year you use this much, next year you need to use this much more. (Francis)³⁸

An article entitled “Going Organic” was given a full page in the Bangkok Post in January of 2008. The article reported a trend developing in the northeastern part of Thailand in which farmers were switching to organic agriculture to free themselves from the market. It reads:

Mr. Buppha grows twenty-nine varieties of native rice . . . like other farmers, he had grown Hom Mali rice to sell and the practice required him to rely heavily on insecticides and chemical fertilizers. The prices were regulated by market mechanisms. Low prices meant a severe blow to farmers like himself. Once he decided to turn to self-reliance farming and go organic in 1995, he picked up a native sticky rice variety . . . “growing Hom Mali for sale is all right if we get good prices. But when the price goes down we suffer . . . but we can grow native rice for our own consumption . . . by doing this we don’t owe any debts.” (Supawadee 2008)

³⁸ Francis, interview, January 15, 2008.
The consequences of the Green Revolution in Thailand were explained to me by one of the founders of Pun Pun Center for Self-Reliance in the countryside north of Chiang Mai:

In Thailand most people, a lot of people, have started out as farmers, and they just recently migrated to the cities, most people, in the city, if you ask them where they are from they are always from the rural area. They migrated . . . looking for work and money . . . I think that a lot of that is due to the Green Revolution, and how that changed agriculture in the world, and in Thailand, and monocropping with chemical use, and just selling it through the regular market where the middle man is getting most of the profit, you are not making so much money and if that is what you are doing, you are not feeding yourself either because you’re growing fields of corn and that’s sold to Europe for feed so that change, I think, is what forced a lot of people to go to the city. (Reents)\(^{39}\)

Twenty years earlier in the same region where Pun Pun is located (tambon Mae Ta of Chiang Mai), Pat Apaimool was the first farmer to stop growing monoculture cash crops and start polycultures organic farming to ensure food security. “For me por piang [sufficiency economy] is possible when we rethink our old ways and cut down our greed, when Nature is in good health and when we are willing to share what we have with others . . . the whole thing is about knowing ourselves, not exceeding our

\(^{39}\) Reents, interview, January 12, 2007.
capacity and not letting greed take over . . . It’s a way of life. A moral choice rooted in Buddhist teaching.”

When I was in Pun Pun, I also asked Jon Jandai why he chose to practice organic farming and renounced the use of fertilizers and pesticides, which would make his work easier. He said:

It’s not easier, people don’t think deeply. If you think deeply is harder, because it takes long time to work to make enough money to buy pesticides, it is easy when you use it, but is not easy when you buy to get the money to buy. It is the same for everything, not only farming. If you have a car, you think is easy when you have a car, you can go everywhere easily, but to think to make enough money to buy a car, how long it takes, some people maybe takes more than ten years to save enough money to buy a car, have a house. Normally you need more than twenty years here to get a house, because you need to think to work longer time and save money and buy it. But the way we do it here, we do it ourselves, it maybe takes a few days to build a house, but a few days don’t cost much money. (Jandai)\(^{41}\)

Jandai also explained to me that in Thailand the movement to go back to organic farming is very strong and multivariate, often influenced by Buddhist values:

At first they [people in the village] think I am crazy, and not just a little bit, and then after they see what happen, after they understand what happen later, many people follow. Like in my village now we have more than thirty families that join my organic group in northeastern Thailand. I just came back yesterday, I saw in the province there are

\(^{40}\) Pat Apaimool interview reported in Sanitsuda Ekachai “Por Piang is all about Handling One’s greed” Bangkok Post, January 17, 2008

\(^{41}\) Jandai, interview, January 12, 2007.
maybe more than four hundred people in the organic network where my family is right now. And now in my village they start to think about making “moral” rice is like to grow rice for sale, but organic is just a technique to grow without chemicals, but “moral” means we need to have moral in your life too. (Jandai)\(^{42}\).

Jon Jandai’s experience was not unique, as Pat Apaimool recalled: “When I said no to the old ways by giving up chemical farming and living a more simple life, people mocked me. But my decision paid off. No, I am not rich, but I have my freedom and a life of dignity back.”\(^{43}\)

From Bangladesh to Myanmar to Thailand, the story of conventional agricultural was one and the same: chemical inputs and monocropping tied poor farmers to the vagary of the market. Fertilizers and pesticides were introduced to increase yields and make farming easier, but the reality that farmers experienced was not quite the one expected. What “conventional wisdom” expressed by the *Economist* article “The 9 Billion-People Question” tends to ignore is the economic aspect of industrial agriculture. Conventional agriculture requires a cash economy to purchase the chemical inputs, the machinery, and the seed instead of relying on “free” natural processes of composting and seed saving.

\(^{42}\) Ibid.

\(^{43}\) Pat Apaimool interview, reported in Sanitsuda Ekachai “*Por Piang is all about Handling One’s greed*” Bangkok Post, January 17, 2008.
As a consequence, in the absence of other sources of income, farmers in the Global South became fully dependent on the global commodity market, experiencing a full commodification of their lives and communities. While their governments implemented laissez-faire economic policies through SAPs and the push to convert subsistence farmers into global commodity producers, the farmers themselves, unable to obtain protective legislation (e.g., raise the level of SB), took the only other route available to them: raising SP, and they did so in a way that would make them as independent as possible from the market, namely, by using nature to do the work that they would otherwise have to purchase on the market.

3.2.3 Composting: Bridging the Metabolic Rift with the Earth

As early as 1801 the Scottish agriculturalist and economist James Anderson published a pamphlet warning that the loss of natural sources of fertilizer was the cause of changes in soil fertility. During the nineteenth century the loss of soil fertility was one of the major environmental concerns together with the pollution of the cities. Anderson refuted the Malthusian idea that the shortage of food was caused by the demands of an increasing population, his approach was quite novel and antithetic to Malthus and Ricardo’s thesis that fertility is a property inherent to the soil, and thus mostly fixed (Foster 2009). Instead, according to Anderson, the division between town and country created an unsustainable agricultural system. In this system, food and fiber were transferred to the towns, but the nutrients were not returned to the land as in traditional agricultural systems. Rather, enormous amount of human manure ended up
as waste in the rivers (with dreadful consequences for the people living downstream) polluting water and cities.

Advances in chemistry helped to understand the loss of fertility. In 1840 the German chemist Justus Freiherr von Liebig identified the chemical elements of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium as essential to plant growth. Liebig himself was highly critical of the disposal of municipal sewage in the Thames. A sustainable agricultural system, he contended, necessitate the return of all organic matter to the soil.

The depletion of nutrients in the soil led to a rush to find new ways to replenish the soil. Indeed, the demand of capitalist agriculture for increased soil fertility led to new discoveries in soil chemistry (Foster 2009). A temporary fix to decline in soil fertility came from the discovery of high quality guano on the Chincha Islands off the coast of Peru. These islands happened to be home to several species of sea birds feeding on the large anchovies population. Thanks to the rich diet, the birds’ excrements were very rich in nitrogen and phosphorus. In addition, it rarely rained on these islands, thus, the guano deposit had accumulated for thousands of years creating mountains of bird droppings hundreds of feet high (Foster, Clark, and York 2010:355). These excrements turned out to be particularly valuable as a fertilizer and, since Peru was still in debt to Britain for loans taken during the war for independence from Spain, the sale of guano provided an avenue for Peru to pay its debt. By the end of the 1830s thousands of tons of guano started to be shipped to the UK, the United States, and a host of other countries. Guano became so important for capitalist
development that in 1856 the United States passed the Guano Island Act, allowing capitalists to seize any island or rocks with guano deposit (Clark and Foster 2009).

Despite the millions of tons of guano discovered, demand soon outstripped the supply and other solutions had to be found. In the 1840s it was finally discovered a way to make phosphate soluble and in 1843 the first factory for the manufacture of this “superphosphate” started production (Foster 2000:150). At first the fertilizer application boosted agricultural output, but it didn’t take long for the yields to drastically reduce again, since, as Liebig’s Law of the Minimum explain, soil fertility is always limited by the least abundant element (Foster 2000:150). Still, the biggest limiting factor remained nitrogen fertilizer; it took more than half century before the German chemist Fritz Haber would develop the Haber-Bosch process to synthesize ammonia from atmospheric nitrogen and hydrogen gasses.

According to Foster (2009), the work of Liebig and Anderson deeply influenced Marx’s understanding of capitalist agriculture and, although ecology has not been a central concern of Marx’s work, several scholars have today appreciated and resumed his theory of the “Metabolic Rift”. In Capital, volume 3, Marx wrote:

Large landed property reduces the agricultural population to an ever decreasing minimum and confronts it with an ever growing industrial population crammed together in large towns; in this way it produces conditions that provoke an irreparable rift in the interdependent process of the social metabolism, a metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life itself. The resulting of this is a squandering vitality of the soil, which is carried by trade far beyond the bounds of a single country (Marx as reported in Foster 2009:175)
Marx borrowed from Liebig the concept of Metabolism and then expanded it to include human relation to nature through labor:

Labour is first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature (Foster 2000:157)

What Marx wrote over hundred years ago is today more than ever a reality around the world. Thanks to technological advances chemists have been able to synthetize nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium (see chapter 2) and bring industrial monoculture to new level of intensity and expansion. However, as a déjà vu, at first, the fertilizer application boosts agricultural output, but after a few years the yields drastically reduce again, and capitalist agriculture abandon the exhausted land. The soil having been depleted loses much of its value, and often becomes the only land that subsistence farmers can acquire. This is how Peggy described the land when they first got it:

When we came on this land we started with nothing… there was nothing on the land, there were no trees, no anything, and we couldn’t walk through it because it was just thorny weeds. The soil was awful because it had been monocropped and eroded off, a few times, and then left…. That was what we could afford… but we also were glad about that, because what we wanted to do was to show farmers, show to average Thai villagers, or any other countries villagers that you can do this, you can change any piece of land into a place that can provide all your needs with doing the right things with it, and working with nature to produce. In order to do that we had to show them that we had the worst soil that you have ever seen and now we don’t really buy anything from the market…It gets better every year because the soil is improving from the compost and everything else, so we have rice and
fish, and duck eggs, and vegetables and fruit trees, and most of what you need. (Reents)\footnote{Reents, interview, January 2008.}

Only a few decades ago most of the land in Thailand was cultivated in polycultures by subsistence farmers. Today, farmers are lured into conventional agriculture by promises of high returns on the market. As farmers get in debt to purchase seeds, pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers on the market, just one failed harvest can bring them to bankruptcy and cause them to lose the land where they have lived for generations. Ironically, just replacing compost with chemicals makes up big part of farmers’ debt, since the cost of fertilizers often constitutes a large share of cash production costs (World Bank 2007:150). In Thailand, in particular, the cost of fertilizer amounted to 22 percent of the average farm expenditure in 1991/92 (UN 2003).

Just as traditional agriculture had done for millennia, every community I visited turned back to the old practice of composting organic matter to replenish the soil, and the results they reported were slow, but steadier and durable. As organic chemists are starting to understand now, a live soil does matter, and life depends on a host of other micronutrients besides nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium.

From the compost heap on the side of a courtyard of an urban ecovillage such as Los Angeles Ecovillage to the compost toilets on stilts of Panya project in the rural
countryside of Thailand, the practice of composting appeared to be universal among the communities I visited. The scale and motives are at times different, but they all found that working with nature, rather than dominating it, is a much more sustainable strategy in the long term.

3.2.4 Seed Saving: “Let’s Sow Our Freedom”

Seed is food, food is life, no seeds no life, no seeds no freedom, no seed no happiness, because your life depend on somebody else because you have no food. So it’s very important to have seeds. (Jandai 2011)

The fight over the freedom to own, save, and exchange seeds is probably the single most unifying issue among ecovillages and community empowerment NGOs across the Global North and South divide. The “battle” over seed ownership encapsulates nearly all of the issues dear to the AGM: food security, food sovereignty, biodiversity, and public versus private property, to say nothing of issues such as nutrition and taste. For most of human history, seeds belonged to the “common,” and farmers used to select, save, and exchange the seeds from their best plants.

Until the 1930s, farmers around the world were the main custodians of the reproduction principle of all domesticated plants. They decided what to plant, what seeds to save, and which to exchange. Seed exchanges were mostly regulated by customary norms generally operating on the principle of reciprocity rather than the market. Control over seeds started to change when a “life science industry” was born,
and inbreeding/hybridization separated the farmer from plant reproduction (Kloppenburg 2004).

By 1960, the industrialization of agriculture had taken root and, as discussed in chapter 2 and in the previous section, there were successes and failures that came along with it: the increases in yield on one hand, and the displacement of farmers and the loss of biodiversity on the other. According to a Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report, three quarters of agricultural diversity has disappeared during the last century (Guillet 2012).

But the worst was still to come for the small farmers. As biotechnology advanced, companies repeatedly tried to patent life itself. In 1980, a landmark Supreme Court case, *Diamond versus Chakrabarty*, granted a patent on a bacterium. This ruling opened the door to a flood of patent requests on genetic material and plants from seed corporations. Next, the Patent and Trademark Office (PTO) began approving patents for sexually reproduced plants—namely, patenting seeds. The industry consolidation that followed (see Box 3) led to a depletion of biodiversity (Barker 2012).
Table 1 World's Top Ten Seed Corporations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>2009 seed sales US $ millions</th>
<th>Percentage of global seed market</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monsanto (US)</td>
<td>7,297</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DuPont (US)</td>
<td>4,641</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syngenta (Switzerland)</td>
<td>2,564</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Limagrain (France)</td>
<td>1,252</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land O’Lakes/Winfield Solution (US)</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KWS AG (Germany)</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayer Crop Science (Germany)</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dow AgroScience (US)</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakata (Japan)</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DLF-Trifolium A/S (Denmark)</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total top 10</td>
<td>$20,062</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This short introduction sheds light on the attitudes that I encountered among activists during my research. In Damanhur, for instance, a woman mentioned her passion for seed saving as one of her reasons for participating in that community:

In particular, in the time I have spent at Damanhur I have been researching the ancient activities and varieties in plants at risk of extinction in order to salvage biodiversity at the agricultural level. This is the point we are starting from, and maybe we will reach wild plants . . . So this unites a concept tied to man as a guardian in alimentation . . . in the diversity of what we nourish ourselves with, which, in the end, is what is important for us. And on the other hand, there is the issue of nature tied to saving all these varieties which, due to the economics of multinational seed patents, are all being lost . . . for motives which have nothing to do with nature . . . In practice we are two or three people who deal with this [issue] and we have seed banks . . . We have accumulated so many contacts that we have begun to produce the seeds which our agriculture cooperative cultivated in Damanhur. Thus we have experience in how to do it in practice, and then we were able to put together many different types of seeds of these varieties, mainly
local varieties. Then, by word of mouth, sometimes there might come a villager from the valley or a Damanhurian who will bring me a jar with seeds. All of these seeds are then conserved with care so that the humidity will not cause them to germinate. When we do [germinate them] there is a whole labor devoted to reproducing the plant in order to ensure there is no crossbreeding. To maintain the seeds and keep them dry. (Alca)\textsuperscript{45}

In fact, saving seeds was one of the primary reasons that Jon Jandai founded Pun Pun in the first place.

Seed saving . . . is more important than building, because seeds disappear from this earth every day, and never come back, but the wisdom to build natural buildings is here all the time. So . . . seed saving is more important. That’s why I wanted to stop building and come back to farming. We bought this land, people came to help . . . what we are doing here is trying to save seeds, saving seeds is no my benefit, is for everybody, I cannot do it alone, so I need more help from people from outside. So that’s why I need to use the technology [the computer], to help protect the seeds, to keep the seeds alive. (Jandai)\textsuperscript{46}

As discussed in the previous section, in Bangladesh the Green Revolution meant the depletion of biodiversity, and the personal seed collection of farmers is disappearing as “improved varieties are sold in the market” (Akhter 2012). Since the 1960s, farmers have become increasingly dependent on seed companies for their seed supply. “The Seed Law was modified, enforcing compulsory registration of seeds, making it impossible for farmers to produce their own seeds. Thus, farmers were

\textsuperscript{45} Alca, interview, July 12, 2007. Translated by the author.

\textsuperscript{46} Jandai, interview, January 12, 2007.
forced to rely on the market seed supply” (Akhter 2012:96). However, imported seeds are much more expensive than local varieties, costing farmers up to ten times more money than their local counterparts, which they have lost control of, as the director of SEHD told me:

In this country six people work on an acre of land. So, everything is done manually, we have tractors, but in many places people still use plows with ox and horses. And the people, they understand that they are losing their seeds, their local varieties . . . in many places they want to get back their seeds, their varieties, but those have gone extinct, only to be found in the United States and Canada seed banks. (Gain)\(^{47}\)

The loss of biodiversity on the one hand, and the loss of farmers’ control over their own heritage seeds on the other, combined to spur the growth of a global social movement attempting to stop the “enclosure of the biological heritage of humanity by the biotechnology industry” (Pena 2013).

### 3.3 Community Benefits

The atomization of individuals in society is one of the salient characteristics of modernity and industrial capitalism, as a-matter-of-fact, the advent of the isolated

\(^{47}\) Gain, interview, January 7, 2008.
nuclear family is a fairly recent phenomenon. However, what is imagined as a natural evolution of society was, according to Polanyi, the deliberate act of the state to subject labor to the laws of the market. Guided by the ideology of economic liberalism the principle of freedom of contract was applied to “free” individuals from noncontractual relations, “in practice this meant that the noncontractual organizations of kinship, neighborhood, profession and creed were to be liquidated since they claimed the allegiance of the individual and thus restrained his freedom” (Polanyi 2001:171).

The shrinking of the welfare state and the last wave of commodification has witnessed the revival of non-capitalist market approaches. In an attempt to counter the forces of neo-liberal globalization, local and regional movements emerged to enable some degree of decommodification. Through a process of networking grassroots activists identified economic initiatives alternative to capitalism. Often called a community economy, or a solidarity economy, its purpose is to re-embed the economy in social relationship, making markets “a space of care as well as of consumption” (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013:104).

In this section I will explore the most common initiatives among the communities and organizations I visited, such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), Fair Trade, Sharing goods and services, and community currencies.

### 3.3.1 Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

I think that the community supported agriculture Earthshare, is trying to source our food locally, and that is then making us much more responsible and accountable for where our food is coming from, and if
The first Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) scheme was born in Japan in the 1970s. As discussed in chapter 2, Japan had been hit hard by one of the first cases of environmental contamination, the mercury leak that caused the poisoning of the people of Minamata. Thus, some consumers—especially in urban areas—were very anxious about the safety of their food. Teruo Ichiraku, a philosopher and the leader of the agriculture cooperatives, led the founding of the Japan Organic Agriculture Association (JOAA), a non-profit organization aimed at bringing together producers and consumers and expanding the organic agriculture movement. The association established the teikei (“partnership”) system, a direct distribution system in which both producers and consumers provide labor and capital to support their own delivery system.

The “teikei” philosophy extends beyond the agriculture technique employed, conventional versus organic, to encompass a moral attitude toward nature and the market as the Japan Organic Agriculture Association reports:

The basic function of food is to nurture life and so the basic function of farming is to feed the farmer's own family. To feed your family you have to be self-sufficient. You have to grow different items in an appropriate amount and raise some livestock. The scale of your management should not be so large. It is a sustainable way of farming

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with your own compost and livestock manure for fertilizer and seeds and livestock feed collected by yourselves. In the "teikei" system consumers (usually urban dwellers) are supposed to be supplied with a surplus amount of producers' crops and products. In a sense they belong to one big family in each case. Food is not supposed to be sold for a profit. As a matter of course, efficiency is not so important as with the manufacturing industry, and hazardous chemicals are not applied for mass production. The important thing is to draw natural productivity, making an ecological use of organic materials available in the locality for fertilizer. The agriculture should be full of vitality in harmony with nature. (JOAA 1993)

As it appears from the above description, the philosophy of “tekei” is not distant from the idea of *por piang* (sufficiency economy) discussed earlier in this chapter. In both cases, we find the root of the movement in the reaction to the commodification of food engendered by the chemical revolution.
To build a friendly and creative relationship, not as mere trading partners.

To produce according to pre-arranged plans on an agreement between the producer(s) and the consumer(s).

To accept all the produce delivered from the producer(s).

To set prices in the spirit of mutual benefits.

To deepen the mutual communication for the mutual respect and trust.

To manage self-distribution, either by the producer(s) or by the consumer(s).

To be democratic in the group activities.

To take much interest in studying issues related to organic agriculture.

To keep the members of each group in an appropriate number.

To go on making a steady progress even if slow toward the final goal of the convinced management of organic agriculture and an ecologically sound life.

Figure 4 The Ten Principles of "Teikei" 1978

In the United States, CSA schemes were first introduced in 1985 and have increased ever since. The concept of CSA is one of shared risk: the members agree to pay a subscription in advance, and if the harvest is bountiful they enjoy more food, while if there is a crop failure, they get less.

For consumers in the US, CSA membership is an affordable way to get fresh, organic produce in addition to knowing the source of the food, while for farmers it offers capital up front for facing seasonal expenses. Furthermore, farmers involved in
CSA schemes report that they find their farming activities more joyful and satisfying (Henderson 2000).

CSA schemes represent both self-production and a community benefit. The farmers directly produce their own food and are the ones to barter or sell it. In addition, as the name itself reaffirms, community is essential for the viability of the farm itself. It did not surprise me that nearly all of the communities in the Global North that I visited are part of a CSA scheme, either as producers or as consumers. What did surprise me was the discovery that this system is also growing in poorer countries such as Thailand, as this interviewee explained to me:

We formed a green consumer movement, we are a member of the CSA, we organize it. When we started we had first a family, then ten, then fifteen, then twenty, forty, sixty. Now, they have a couple you know that quit the urban life and then they lived with the villagers and tried to do the conversion from chemical farm to organic farm and they have a group of organic farmers together as a producer. And then she tries to link up with the consumers here in the urban area and we have families that want to subscribe, and we subscribe for the full year, every year we pay in advance and work on the budget, and then every week they deliver the vegetables or city families will deliver in Bangkok in order to deliver the baskets. (Wallapa)49

CSA schemes have generally been considered an example of market embeddedness. “The key objectives are to provide a greater return to the grower by

49 Wallapa, interview, January 18, 2008.
eliminating middlemen, and to bring producers and consumers closer together” (Jaffee 2007:23).

3.3.2 Fair Trade

There is a store of Indian things that I like a lot. I don’t buy some of the things because they are made using exploitative labor. Others have a certification that ensures that they are not made using the exploitation of women and children. Those are the only things I buy. (Alca)⁵⁰

The origins of the Fair Trade movement go all the way back to the post-war era, when Christian missionaries began importing handcrafts from impoverished communities in order to generate both employment and income. Ten Thousand Villages, for instance, was founded in 1946 and imports handicrafts to Canada and the United States from thirty-eight different countries. However, it has been only a little over two decades since the idea of Fair Trade was extended to food products.

The story began with coffee in 1988 and was the result of a partnership between indigenous coffee farmers from a cooperative in Oaxaca, Mexico, and the Dutch development aid organization Solidaridad. Under pressure from the farmers, Solidaridad created a label, Max Havelaar, which certified that the coffee farmers were paid a premium price that was considered a “fair return” on their goods (Jaffee 2007:13). In 1997, the Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO) was

⁵⁰Alca, interview, July 12, 2007 Translation by the author
established in Germany to unite the different initiatives and to harmonize worldwide standards and certifications. As of 2013, coffee is still the number one Fair Traded item, but many more products have been added to the list, such as bananas, cocoa, cotton, flowers, fresh fruit, honey, juices, rice, spices and herbs, sugar, tea, wine, and even gold and sports balls (International 2013).

It took over a decade for Fair-Trade coffee to reach the United States. However, once it did, it grew fast. Imports of Fair-Trade coffee went from 1.3 million pounds in 1999 to 45 million pounds in 2005. In other countries, other goods have been even more successful. Fair-Trade bananas, for instance, reached 50 percent of the market share in Switzerland (Jaffee 2007).

Just like CSA attempts to bring the producer and the consumer together, so does Fair Trade. Although the products have traveled long distances, Fair-Trade goods tell you a story about the farmer that grew the food, and the packaging itself—bearing pictures of the farmer or else the written story of the community—attempts to bridge the distance gap. Consumers of Fair-Trade goods do not choose their purchase on the basis of price alone. They may choose to forego a bargain at the supermarket in order to support a specific family or community that produces what they consume to pay a “fair” price for their labor. “In this sense, Fair Trade is about reinserting noneconomic values—morality, decency, sustainability, community—into market transactions” (Jaffee 2007:24).

Thus, if we understand the communities involved in the AGM movement as communities working, using Polanyi’s words, to re-embed the economy into society, it
makes sense that these communities would pay more attention when purchasing products that come from poorer areas of the world. During my research, in fact, I noticed that when it came to coffee and chocolate, stores inside the largest ecovillages in the Global North, Damanhur and Findhorn in particular, carried almost exclusively Fair-Trade-certified products.\textsuperscript{51}

In the Los Angeles Eco-Village, one of the residents has co-founded a Fair-Trade organic roasting company, and while I did not have a chance to interview residents in BedZED about their consumption habits, I was struck by the amount of Fair-Trade literature displayed in the main hall of the building.

Often, other communities did not preach the use of the goods, but merely utilized them in such a way that suggested what an obvious choice it is to them. For example, in Torri Superiore, I noticed that the residents gravitated toward the use of fair trade products in their day to day life. At Torri Superiore fair trade does not constitute a central pillar of the community – indeed one may not even notice their use of fair trade coffee and sugar unless they peered into to pantry - but it does play a role their attempt to re-embed the economy into society. The goal of the fair trade movement is to connect third-world producers with first-world consumers so that in

\textsuperscript{51} A wide range of almost exclusively Fair-Trade products was stocked in Findhorn especially, since in the UK in general there are a much larger variety of Fair-Trade goods available than there is in Italy.
buying or selling coffee or sugar, the economics of production and consumption are re-embedded in social relations.

### 3.3.3 Sharing Goods and Services

The types of benefits that come from living in a community are as different as are the communities themselves. These benefits range from sharing equipment to swapping services, to dedicating time to community services, and to building community gardens. Whatever one gets from the community, whether that be a ride to the airport or a power tool, it means that less money has to be earned to fulfill one’s needs. If the community is very small, exchanges such as the ones just mentioned occur on a daily basis without any official accounting. The larger the community, the more the people need to organize the exchanges.

Thus, in this section I will not focus on the communities that almost live together “under one roof” like extended families. By virtue and necessity of their small sizes, these communities do share most of their tools, equipment, and care for each other’s children or animals. At the same time, these small communities do not have the resources to provide for a wider range of services and goods within the community and often need to rely on the market.

Communities comprised of several households seem to have the greatest advantages. They can build larger insitutional support while at the same time retaining
the informal “taking care of each other’s children” of small communities. A woman born in the large community of Findhorn had this to say about her childhood:

I think I had a lot of freedom, and I could run around . . . everybody knew me and I was really held in the community, everyone was parenting me to some extent, everyone was involved in my upbringing, not just my mom and my dad. (Gabrielle)\textsuperscript{52}

In addition, these larger communities can pool together not only for watching each other’s kids, but even for things like building a school or a facility for the elderly, as was explained to me:

In Damanhur we share everything. For example, I do not have children, but even if just a bit, I support our school in Damanhur. At that time the school was planned, we looked at each other and decided that the school should not be paid for by the parents alone, but by everybody in Damanhur. Once we made this choice we never regretted it, the same was for the Health care center, and so on . . . the first thing that a Damanhurian learns is to find a balance between one’s own need and the community’s needs . . . I feel ownership for everything here because I contributed to building it . . . the same, is with the elderly, we have a place to host the elderly, they may be Damanhurians or just relatives of Damanhurians, our house was ideal for hosting the elderly because we have an eliport, so we took them, now there are four or five of them. (Bufalo)\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{52} Gabrielle, interview, July 1, 2008.

Car sharing is another benefit that can be practiced at varying degrees of formality. Torri Superiore’s website, for instance, states that they only own four cars for twenty residents. While they do not explicitly mention a car sharing program, they do informally share the few cars they have.

At BedZED, the implementation of a car club has actually been part of the development strategy. According to the local council regulations, in fact, a development of the size of BedZed is required to provide at least 160 parking spaces. In order to reduce car dependency, BedZED designers negotiated with the council to only provide 84 parking spaces and to institute a car sharing program instead. By forming a joint venture with SmartMoves, BedZED has set up ZEDcars. The service allows the residents to rent a car by the hour when needed, saving the residents the money that goes along with car ownership while the development simultaneously utilizes the area saved on parking space to create more living space instead (Desai and Riddlestone 2002).

3.3.4 Community Currencies

Without a doubt, the most encompassing forms of economic, social, and community building are social institutions that facilitate the exchange of goods and services within a community when money is in short supply. A variety of schemes were developed around this concept in communities around the world during the last decade of the twentieth century, such as Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS), local currencies, and time banks. Each of these schemes was created with a different purpose and design in mind.
Although a vast amount of literature has been already written about the scope and objectives of alternative currencies, this research would not be complete without reviewing the different practices adopted by the communities researched and specifically the reasons why a need for these alternative mediums of exchange arose in the first place.

Money in conventional economics is defined as a medium of exchange, a store of value, and a unit of account. In contemporary societies, all of these functions reside in a single national currency (Seyfang 2013). Community Currencies (CC) are not meant to replace the national currency; rather, they are supposed to overcome the limitations imposed by the formal market economy. CCs not only enhance the economic sustainability of communities, but improve social relations and promote environmental sustainability within those communities as well. “In short, decommodification is any political, social, or cultural process that reduces the scope and influence of the market in everyday life” (Vail 2010:313).

There are two main features of CCs. First, they create a local circuit of economic exchange that prevents an outflow of cash from the community, thereby supporting local businesses and services. Second, CCs are not inherently expansionistic, and are therefore more congenial toward sustainable development. In

54 “An ecological critique of modern financial institutions indicates how a debt-based system of money creation relies upon an ever-expanding economic system, to allow the repayment of loans with interests” Rowbotham, 2008, as reported in Seyfang and Longhurst, “Growing green money? Mapping community currencies for sustainable development.” Science, Society
addition, as Starr points out, “community currencies and public markets are a means of popular economic education, in which modernized people learn old techniques of local production and trade and become empowered to make decisions about relationships between the economy and social issues” (Starr and Adams 2003).

The idea behind LETS is to be able to exchange goods and services locally without needing to use the national currency (Williams 1996). Michael Linton proposed the idea in the 1980s, and from the 1990s onward the concept was developed in different forms, first in Canada, then in the UK and other countries. Today there are as many different types of LETS as there are communities.

Time banks are a type of community currency that employ time credits for the work that is put into neighborhoods in order to promote mutual help among residents. In some cases, particularly in times of economic difficulty, time banks have even been supported by local authorities.

The larger communities that I visited adopted a variety of community currencies. Tables 1 and 2 list the CCs adopted along with various other decommodification strategies implemented.

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CHAPTER 4 – SHIFTING PARADIGMS: FROM GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT TO GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS

Gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages; the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage; neither our wisdom nor our learning; neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country; it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile (Robert Kennedy, Address at University of Kansas, March 18, 1968)

Outline

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4.1 Introduction
Measuring the development of a society in terms of Gross National Product (GNP) is a Western invention—one that had a significant role and unintended consequences in the construction of a new paradigm of development. GNP methodology was developed in the US and the UK during the Great Depression. President Roosevelt’s government used GNP statistics to justify and implement policies that were directed at bringing the US out of the decline. This statistical tool did not attain global use as a measure of economic progress, however, until the Bretton Woods Conference of 1944, in which the leaders of the 44 allied nations agreed to foster economic cooperation and trade in order to recover from the war and speed up economic progress (Costanza and al 2009). Thus, it was only after World War II that GNP “became standard measures for ‘development’ in national income accounting” (Clapp and Dauvergne 2005:84).

As GNP ranking “uncovered” new poor countries around the world, development studies flourished, and the Western ideology of development came to dominate the international financial and political institutions. Both the IMF and the World Bank design their policies solely on the basis of this indicator (Daly and Cobb 1994).

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55 GNP measures marketed economic activity from domestically owned assets. GDP measures marketed economic activity from domestically located assets (R. Costanza., Ecological Economics 51 2004, 139-155).
The concept of development per se assumes the principle of the linearity of history. Arturo Escobar (1995) questions the whole concept of development by contextualizing it within the overall space of modernity as a cultural and historical construct. For Escobar the problematization of poverty following the failure of the first US plan for international economic development implemented after World War II is the consequence of the professionalization and institutionalization of the field development, which in his words is:

A historical construct that provides a space in which poor countries are known, specified, and intervened upon. To speak of development as a historical construct requires an analysis of the mechanisms through which it becomes an active, real force. These mechanisms are structured by forms of knowledge and power and can be studied in terms of process of institutionalization and professionalization. (Escobar 1995 p.45)

By this process the scholars of the West have deprived each culture of its own history. For example, the industrial revolution and its subsequent economic development are no longer seen as particular changes rooted in a specific cultural tradition, but are rather the necessary course of history: the desirable and unavoidable “stages of growth” (Rostow 1960) that some countries are just slow to undertake.

Economists perceive themselves as the neutral planners of history. They supposedly

56 Emboldened by the success of the Marshall plan, Truman launched the Point Four Program, which was aimed at providing technological skills, knowledge, and equipment to poor nations around the world.
give recipes for following the “right” course of history since “people’s welfare can be bracketed for a while, even if hundreds of thousands might die. Hail the market” (Escobar 1995:58).

Escobar’s critique is not limited to the ideological rim, but it goes further to analyze the institutional practices of development. Discourse, political economy and institutional ethnography are woven together. Hence, Escobar employs Foucault to show “how discourse works, how it produces ‘domain of object and ritual of truth’… the development discourse has crystallized in practices that contribute to regulating the everyday goings and comings of people in the Third World” (Escobar 1995:104). The preeminence of income-related variables in the assessment of development encapsulates all the dimensions of the dominant paradigm of the West and modernity; “everything revolves around the reduction of the good to the question of how much” (Latouche 1993:195).

It is in this context that one must understand the importance of GNP as a mechanism of domination—a mechanism which, by measuring as positive growth anything that is exchanged on the market, encourages even the commodification of nature and of human labor. By measuring the socioeconomic progress of a society with this system, Western economics pushed all societies to sell everything on the market, turning even sacred places and social relationships into commodities.

Since yardsticks of progress and human development orient the goals of a society, a development paradigm that intends to move beyond the primacy of the economy in society must be able to rely on indicators able to measure non-economic
factors that enhance the well-being of a society. If GNP alone does not measure the well-being of a society, what does? This chapter reviews some of the alternatives to GNP that have attracted international attention. I discuss how GNH came to be the primary measure that best fits the idea of society proposed by the AGM, and how it has been embraced by ecovillages around the world.

4.2 Human Development Index

“Development: Which Way Now?” reads a title on The Economic Journal. As early as 1983, the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen denounced the limitations of conventional development theory. Sen writes: “the real limitations of traditional development economics arose not from the choice of means to the end of economic growth, but in the insufficient recognition that economic growth was no more than a means to some other objectives . . . it is important to note in this context that the same level of achievement in life expectancy, literacy, health, higher education, etc., can be seen in countries with widely varying income per capita” (Sen 1983:753).

Traditional development theory, dominant since the 1950s, assumed that “all the peoples of the earth were to move along the same track and aspire to only one goal—development” (Sachs 1999:3), and, as Sen highlights, that economic growth equals development. While Sen does not deny the importance of economic growth in improving people’s life, he points to the “concentration on national product, aggregate income and
total supply of particular goods rather than on ‘entitlements’ of people and the ‘capabilities’ these entitlements generates” as a major thematic deficiency (Sen 1983:754).

Sen’s capability approach shifted the perspective of the development discourse from one of economic growth to one of human development one. Development, he writes, “must go much beyond the accumulation of wealth and the growth of gross national product…. Development has to be more concerned with enhancing the lives we lead and the freedom we enjoy” (Sen 1999:14). Freedom is not only enhanced by increases in wealth, but also by social arrangements that guarantee access to essential services such as education and health care. Furthermore, it requires the elimination of any form of oppression such as discrimination on the basis of race, gender or religion.

Sen’s critique of GNP as a sole measures of progress and well-being was instrumental in pushing for the elaboration of a more “satisfactory yardstick of socioeconomic progress” (UNDP 1991:15). Thanks to his work and to his collaboration with the Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq (founder of the Human Development Report), the UNDP moved to question the validity of GNP as a sole measurement of development; “for too long, the question has been: how much is a nation producing? Now the question must be: how are its people faring?” (UNDP 1991:13). In 1990 the UNDP proposed a new way to measure human development: the HDI, which along with GNP, takes into account two social indicators, namely, longevity and knowledge. The HDI measure is constructed utilizing the real GDP per capita to account for living
standards; life expectancy at birth to account for longevity; and by combining adult literacy with mean years of schooling to account for knowledge.

Although HDI has been adopted by the UNDP and is based on relatively widely available and reliable data, GNP and GDP still “tend to dominate national and global economic policymaking” (Clapp and Dauvergne 2005:87). At the same time, HDI has also been criticized by ecological economists for failing to take into account environmental degradation, as well as by the government of Bhutan and social activist groups for ignoring the spiritual and cultural aspects of wellbeing of individuals and communities.

4.3 Genuine Progress Indicator

The need to improve measures of development is one of the priorities of ecological economists (Herman Daly, John Cobb, Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, etc.). According to ecological economists the emphasis on economic growth placed by GNP/GDP measures ignores the biological limits of the planet. Furthermore, GNP and GDP may actually account as positive additions environmental degradation like pollution because of the economic cost involved in cleaning up an oil spill or toxic wastes, or resource extraction like deforestation, simply because these goods and services are exchanged on the market. Daly and Cobb eloquently describe the limitation that GNP poses on policy making:
For example, a developing country may obtain 6% of its GNP from timber exports. Perhaps 2% of that is based on sustained yield exploitation and the remaining 4% is based on deforestation. The maximum sustainable consumption has been overestimated by 4%, not even counting the loss of unpriced natural services of the forest. That may sound small, but in an economy whose conventional GNP was growing at 3%, a 4% reduction is the difference between growth and decline, which makes a very big qualitative difference in a nation’s perception of itself and its policies, and, indeed, of its leaders… no politician wants to be known as the minister under whom the country went from growth to decline in one year. (Daly and Cobb 1994: 71)

In addition, ecological economists point out the confusion and actual contradictions that the terms “sustainable growth” and “sustainable development,” used interchangeably, create. According to Daly and Cobb, “growth” and “development” should indicate two different processes, the former a quantitative process, and the latter a qualitative one. The distinction is fundamental for ecological economists because infinite growth will eventually hit the limit of a non-growing earth, and therefore, such a model is unsustainable. This distinction is also important because it directly refuses the assumptions of infinite growth on which mainstream economics is based. Indeed, the debate between the two schools of thought is exemplified in the Simon-Ehrlich bet over the scarcity of the globe’s natural resources. The economist Julian Simon posited that resources are not necessarily finite in an economic sense since old resources may be recycled and new technology constantly develop new alternatives, whereas ecologist Paul Ehrlich, sharing the same view of ecological economists, argued that resources would dry up, pushing prices upward. Although the ten year bet on the direction of natural resources prices was won by Simon (in 1990 the price of the five metals chosen,
adjusted for inflation, were below the 1980 price), to date the debate as not yet been settled.\(^57\)

Ecological economists understand human consumption as inescapably limited by the capacity of the biosphere to support life, i.e. the total world product of photosynthesis. In other words, ecological economics “combines ideas from the physical sciences and economic models to include the notion of physical limits, which involves changing our measures of “progress” and the methods we use to promote it” (Clapp and Dauvergne 2005:11).

Hence human economy can only appropriate itself of resources on a proper scale relative to the ecosystem; in other words, human population times the per capita resource use rate. The concept is similar to the ecological footprint analysis developed by Wackernagel and Rees (1996) and now widely used around the world as an indicator of environmental sustainability.\(^58\)

In 1989 Daly and Cobb first proposed a way to measure the economy that would take sustainability into account, the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW). Since 1989, ISEW has undergone several revisions by both the original authors and other economists as well; the contemporary variant, the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), is

\(^{57}\) The five metals chosen were chromium, copper, nickel, tin, and tungsten.

\(^{58}\) Ecological footprint calculates to the amount of biologically productive land and sea (cont.) area necessary to generate the resources consumed, and to absorb and render harmless the waste produced, by a human population.
now fairly well known and widely used by governments and non-governmental organizations worldwide. GPI uses the same personal consumption data as GDP, but it makes adjustments to account for income inequality, it adds the value of housework and volunteer work, and it makes deductions for the cost of crime and environmental degradation (Costanza 2004). The GPI constitutes a huge step forward from the GNP because it does take into account social welfare and natural capital alongside of economic growth. However, many social activists involved in the AGM feel that there is still something missing, that human welfare and happiness includes respecting and fostering different identities, indigenous traditions, and local knowledge, which the development indicators developed in the West have yet to take into consideration. Some social activists I interviewed pointed to the idea of GNH, put forward by the king of Bhutan, as a better measure that encapsulates the real goals and values a society should strive for to reach the true well-being of a community.

4.4 The Birthplace of Gross National Happiness: the Kingdom of Bhutan

There cannot be enduring peace, prosperity, equality and brotherhood in this world if our aims are so separate and divergent—if we do not accept that in the end we are people, all alike, sharing the earth among ourselves and also with other sentient beings, all of whom have an equal role and the state of this planet and its players. (Crown Prince Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. Address to the 2004 GNH conference).
The tiny kingdom of Bhutan, on the Himalayan range, is inhabited by about eight hundred thousand people whose life is still guided by religious beliefs and practices. It has never been colonized and was all but closed to the outside world until very recently. More than 90 percent of the population still lives in the countryside and practice subsistence farming. Cooperation rather than competition drives Bhutan’s social cohesion at the village, district, and national level alike. On the national scale, a collaborative system arose in 1961 when development work in the country began: the government provided funding for materials and the citizens who would be using the intended facility—be it a school, an irrigation channel, or some other public utility work—contributed the labor. This communitarian and non-market driven approach is a fundamental part of village life as well; when a villager has to undertake a building project or a harvest, the community gets together to help him. Similarly, when a member of one family dies, the other families in the village collectively assist the deceased’s grieving relatives by providing money, food, emotional support, and religious services during the adjustment period. There are no industries with the exception of a few hydropower stations, and Bhutanese citizens have one of the lowest per capita income in the world (PPP US$1,969 in 2003). However, thanks to the collaborative way of life, there is no destitution in Bhutan, which may in part explain

59 In comparing standards of living across countries, economic statistics must be converted in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms to eliminate differences in national price levels. *Human Development Report* 2005 p.216.
why a 2006 study on “happiness” ranked Bhutan the eighth happiest country out of the 100 countries surveyed (White 2006).

Since 1998 a National Assembly with representatives elected from village constituencies run the legislative branch of the government. In 2005 a commission drafted a constitution approved by national referendum in preparation for the transition to a constitutional monarchy. In December 2006, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk abdicated in favor of his son Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, and in 2008 Bhutan held the first democratic election to vote for the representatives to the new two-chamber parliament.

The concept of GNH was first enunciated in 1972 and then expressed in the current form in the late 1980s, by the fourth King of Bhutan, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. When in the 1980s modernization and the Western idea of economic development knocked on the little kingdom’s door, the King became concerned that Bhutan’s spiritual values and culture would be wiped out by “values that were defined by factors external to Bhutanese society and culture” (Ura and Galay 2004:vii). Then if GNP was meant to measure Western style development, Bhutan committed itself to developing a measure that would be more amenable to measuring a Bhutanese style of development, in other words a “framework within which to think about the Bhutanese national project of development” (Ura & Galay 2004:vii). The GNH should take into account that the well-being of a society is founded on four pillars: 1) Sustainable and equitable socioeconomic development; 2) Conservation of the environment; 3) Preservation and promotion of culture and heritage; 4) Good governance.
As discussed above, the importance of sustainable and equitable socioeconomic development and of a healthy environment is also emphasized by ecological economists and has been included in the construction of the GPI measure. Thus both GNH and GPI are committed to taking into account economic redistribution alongside economic growth, attributing value to leisure time, and to the socioeconomic contribution of housework and families in addition to social and environmental capital. They both also value biodiversity, and the conservation of the environment is considered essential to allow for future generations to meet their needs as well.

However, while GNH and GPI share the belief that economic growth is inseparable from social and environmental wellbeing, GNH goes further. The third pillar of GNH emphasizes that well-being and happiness can only be understood as a shared pursuit; thus the preservation and promotion of culture and heritage is seen as the fostering of meaningful interdependence through the preservation of indigenous cultures. Good governance, the fourth pillar, refers to the need for a government to reflect the will of the people, but also to the need to mediate between freedom and equality, private and public domains, and secularism and politics (Thinley 2005).

The goal of creating the conditions to pursue GNH, as well as the specific commitments needed to achieve it, is expressly stated in the constitution of Bhutan. Box 5 reports a few selected articles from the constitution:
Article 3: Spiritual Heritage
1. Buddhism is the spiritual heritage of Bhutan, which promotes the principles and values of peace, non-violence, compassion and tolerance.
2. The Druk Gyalpo is the protector of all religions in Bhutan.
3. It shall be the responsibility of religious institutions and personalities to promote the spiritual heritage of the country while also ensuring that religion remains separate from politics in Bhutan. Religious institutions and personalities should remain above politics.

Article 4: Culture
1. The State shall endeavour to preserve, protect and promote the cultural heritage of the country, including monuments, places and objects of artistic or historic interest, Dzongs, Lhakhangs, Goesndeys, Ten-sum, Nyes, language, literature, music, visual arts and religion to enrich society and the cultural life of the citizens.
2. The State shall recognize culture as an evolving dynamic force and shall endeavour to strengthen and facilitate the continued evolution of traditional values and institutions that are sustainable as a progressive society.
3. The State shall conserve and encourage research on local arts, custom, knowledge and culture.
4. Parliament may enact such legislation as may be necessary to advance the cause of the cultural enrichment of Bhutanese society.

Article 5: Environment
1. Every Bhutanese is a trustee of the Kingdom’s natural resources and environment for the benefit of the present and future generations and it is the fundamental duty of every citizen to contribute to the protection of the natural environment, conservation of the rich biodiversity of Bhutan and prevention of all forms of ecological degradation including noise, visual and physical pollution through the adoption of environment friendly practices and policies.
2. The Royal Government shall: (a) Protect, conserve and improve the pristine environment and safeguard the biodiversity of the country; (b) Prevent pollution and ecological degradation; (C) Secure ecologically balanced sustainable development while promoting justifiable economic and social development; and (d) Ensure a safe and healthy environment.

The Government shall ensure that, in order to conserve the country’s natural resources and to prevent degradation of the ecosystem, a minimum of sixty percent of Bhutan’s total land shall be maintained under forest cover for all time.
3. Parliament may enact environmental legislation to ensure sustainable use of natural resources and maintain intergenerational equity and reaffirm the sovereign rights of the State over its own biological resources.

4. Parliament may, by law declare any part of the country to be a National Park, Wildlife Reserve, Nature Reserve, Protected Forest, Biosphere Reserve, Critical Watershed and such other categories meriting protection.

Article 8: Fundamental Duties

1. A Bhutanese citizen shall have the duty to preserve, protect and respect the environment, culture and heritage of the nation.

Article 9: Principle of State Policy

1. The State shall endeavour to promote those conditions that will enable the pursuit of Gross National Happiness.

2. The State shall endeavor to develop and execute policies to minimize inequalities of income, concentration of wealth, and promote equitable distribution of public facilities among individuals and people living in different parts of the Kingdom.

3. The State shall endeavour to achieve economic self-reliance and promote open and progressive economy.

4. The State shall endeavour to ensure the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holiday with pay.

5. The State shall endeavour to ensure the right to fair and reasonable remuneration for one’s work.

6. The State shall endeavour to promote those conditions that are conducive to co-operation in community life and the integrity of the extended family structure.

7. The State shall strive to create conditions that will enable the true and sustainable development of a good and compassionate society rooted in Buddhist ethos and universal human values.

The State shall provide free access to basic public health services in both modern and traditional medicines.
Even a cursory reading of the US constitution and of Bhutan’s constitution from the selected articles above immediately reveals startling differences. As a matter-of-fact, Bhutan’s constitution’s articles on spiritual heritage, culture, and the environment, are not only absent from the US constitution, but they are also ignored by most modern constitutions. Interestingly though, we can instead recognize in the articles on the Environment and State Policies inclusion of principles very similar to those promoted by the ecovillage movement (see Box 6).

4.5 The GNH Movement

I see it [GNH] as a criticism to the mainstream, it is also ecovillage based on the micro level. Ecovillage is also questioning about that, the mainstream development, the mainstream globalizing, and GNH, it is the same thing it is questioning at the macro level. It is the same thing, but in different levels. And the people at the community we are talking about not just the materials, not just about the money, things like that, which is also GNH against the GDP, the GDP is just counting the money and things like that which is not true. In reality our human have more than money, or just only material focus. That I think is the link between these two: it is to question the development paradigm. (Moo)\(^{60}\)

For many social activists committed to re-embedding the economy in society, GNH represented a much awaited vision for a holistic development program that

\(^{60}\) Moo, Interview, January 15, 2008
balances economic growth with the needs, aspirations, and religious values of the whole community, and respect for the physical environment. The concept of GNH filled a void in the critique of development theory, not only because the emphasis on economic growth was modified towards sustainable socioeconomic development, but also because the environment and cultural values were recognized as important for individual self-fulfillment, as well as for the cohesion and common good of communities. The growing movement against the globalization of the western model of development is currently rallying around the GNH concept; as a prominent Thai social activist invited to the first GNH conference explained:

First of all, Bhutan is a Buddhist kingdom that just opened its country, so I was very concerned; we were a Buddhist kingdom, and we opened our country 150 years ago, and we went wrong, we blindly followed the West. That’s why I went to Bhutan and I talked to the people of Bhutan; of course, you have to open your country, but be careful, look at our example, it is a bad example. So that’s how I got involved, and then when they started the GNH idea I supported them. I think that people should look more for happiness, not for Gross National Product. The West wants you to buy more products. The West doesn’t know how to define happiness. As you know, when the Americans drafted the Declaration of Independence, they say men are created equal, in pursuit of liberty, and in pursuit of happiness, but they didn’t know what it was. So they say in pursuit of wealth, so wealth equates happiness you see? So I think we should look for something beyond the Western concept . . . wealth should be under happiness, not happiness for wealth. (Sivaraksa)\(^6\)

\(^6\) Sivaraksa, interview, January 17, 2008.
After the 2004 Conferences on GNH in Thimphu, academics, public intellectuals and social activists from around the world kept up the discussion, and are contributing to the development and operationalization of this concept. The conference was especially successful in bringing attention to the GNH model, and it turned out to be an important focal point for social activists, and a forum of discussion for the development of alternative measures of well-being other than the GNP. Scholars and organizations working for the GPI index also embraced the new concept with enthusiasm, and the GPI Atlantic offered to sponsor the second international conference in Halifax, Canada, the following year. In 2007 the GNH conference was sponsored and hosted by a few Thai NGOs who have become very active both in promoting GNH as a new paradigm of development, and in running courses on “ecovillage” living: bringing together the macro and the micro dimension as an activist explained. Thailand is a particularly interesting country because it is itself relatively poor, and facing the social and environmental consequences of rapid urbanization and industrialization. Thailand’s open door to FDI and western influence has caused both horizontal and vertical inequality in development, meaning the wealth gap has increased both between geographic regions and between classes. The abrupt changes have increased conflicts, environmental degradation, and unsettled rural communities, giving strength to the anti-globalization voices and searches for sustainable alternatives as Sivaraksa explains:

I am against globalization; globalization is more or less mechanization, is also under American imperialism in cooperation with the multinational corporations. They control the world because they have
all the weapons, all the money, control mainstream mass media, mainstream education, brainwashing people…I am against this globalization because it makes people unhappy, people always aspire to more and more and… destroy more of the environment, That’s why, global warming and all sort of things. I think this globalization is very dangerous, that’s why I am very much against it and at the same time I look for alternatives. (Sivaraksa)\textsuperscript{62}

The lure of a Western-style life attracted many young Thais like Jon from the countryside to Bangkok; however, once in the city they were faced with a reality different from what they had envisioned:

I was born in a farmer family in northeastern Thailand and, normally, like many people at that time, I moved to Bangkok to get a job. To get a good job because not many people want to be a farmer they want to work in the city, get more money, and like a lot of people, I was the same. I went to Bangkok and I tried to work, tried to get more education. But the more I worked and studied, the more I felt life is harder and harder. I started to question myself a lot, why I have to do like this, why have people to develop like this, why life is so hard, so I decided to leave. (Jandai)\textsuperscript{63}

What Jon went through fully describes how a misrepresentation of development creates illusions and faulty expectations. While Jon was able to change course and rebuild his life, many others lose confidence in their traditional way of life, and are not capable of getting out of the capitalist race. It was with the intention of enabling people to make choices based on the full range of information, to make

\textsuperscript{62} Sivaraksa, interview, January 18, 2008

\textsuperscript{63} Jandai, interview, January 12, 2007.
people really “free” to choose, that social activists mobilized to fill an institutional gap. One ecovillage resident explained one of these strategies:

Traditional villages also are in transition; for example, some people never drank Coca Cola. When they heard more, they saw advertisement, they felt like they wanted to try, the village people see modernization, they want to modernize, but the city people they are living modernization, they want to have a simple life. Usually this is a contradiction but also we use to organize a solidarity walk to bring these people together. The village people want to become modernized and the city people they want to come to have a simple life. We organize the trip, the walk for the city people to visit the communities and then have dialogue. Why the people in the city want to have simple life? Why the people in the communities want to have a modernized life? It is a dialogue for learning and sharing and becoming friends, and some of them even still keep in touch. This kind of thing, we are very much based on the community of learning; we can create this from tragedy to opportunity, to create a platform of learning. (Moo)⁶⁴

Activist and author Helena Norberg-Hodge has been a pioneer of the approach described above, an approach that she calls “reality tours,” which often are intended to compensate for the partial representation of western culture that the media offer to traditional communities. Over twenty-five years ago she founded an organization, the International Society for Ecology and Culture (ISEC) to provide information and cultural exchange to the people of Ladakh, a Buddhist community on the Tibetan Plateau in northernmost India. As part of cultural information, ISEC sponsors community leaders to travel to the West and witness the sides of the western lifestyle

⁶⁴ Moo, interview, January 15, 2008.
that multinationals and media do not show; a Ladakhi says, "spending time in the West showed me a side of Westerners I never imagined. I found that they have lots of money but they don't have time for each other. Many of them are looking for community and a life closer to nature—a Ladakhi lifestyle!" (Tonyot 2013).

4.6 Another World is Possible . . . And We Are Doing It!

Gross National Happiness is to question at the macro-level GNP, ecovillage is at the micro-level, at the community level. GNP is only counting the money and things like that, which is not right; in reality we humans have more than money. (Moo)65

“We can do it, we will do it, and we are doing it!” is the rallying cry of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN). The “ecovillage” model revolves around three dimensions: a cultural-spiritual, a social-economic, and an ecological one. The ecological dimension stresses people’s connection to the living earth; among other things, it promotes a low-impact living, earth restoration, and protecting and encouraging biodiversity. The social-economic dimension emphasizes community life, participatory governance, holistic and preventive health practices, promoting unending education, and providing meaningful work and sustenance to all members. The cultural-spiritual dimension encourages personal growth and spiritual practices,

65 Moo, interview, January 15, 2008.
promotes harmony with nature by respecting the Earth and all living beings on it, and foster cultural expressions of human’s connectedness with nature (Jackson and Svensson 2002).

Ecovillages are found in a variety of settings, and their diverse modes of organization are seemingly infinite. A survey of GEN’s list reveals a preponderance of intentional communities in the Global North as opposed to traditional villages in the Global South. Most of the communities I visited are, in fact, intentional ones, since creating an ecovillage in the rich countries is indeed a challenge—one that requires the participation of actors on several levels, from real estate investors to local governments.

GEN developed a definition broad enough to fit all of these communities as it states: “an ecovillage is an intentional or traditional community using local participatory processes to holistically integrate ecological, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of sustainability in order to regenerate social and natural environments” (GEN 2013). A more detailed description of the four dimensions of an ecovillage developed by GEN is reported in Box 6: social/community, ecological, cultural/spiritual, and economic.
Community means:

- Recognizing and relating to others
- Sharing common resources and providing mutual aid
- Emphasizing holistic and preventive health practices
- Providing meaningful work and sustenance to all members
- Integrating marginal groups
- Promoting unending education
- Encouraging unity through respect for differences

Ecology means:

- Growing food as much as possible within the community bio-region
- Supporting organic food production there
- Creating homes out of locally adapted materials
- Using village-based integrated renewable energy systems
- Protecting biodiversity
- Fostering ecological business principles
- Assessing the life cycle of all products used in the ecovillage from a social and spiritual as well as an ecological point of view
- Preserving clean soil, water, and air through proper energy and waste management
- Protecting nature and safeguarding wilderness areas
- Fostering cultural expression

Cultural and spiritual vitality means:

- Shared creativity, artistic expression, cultural activities, rituals and celebrations
- Sense of community unity and mutual support
- Respect and support for spirituality manifesting in many ways
- Shared vision and agreements that express commitments, cultural heritage, and the uniqueness of each community
- Flexibility and successful responsiveness to difficulties that arise
- Understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all the elements of life on earth and the community’s place in and relation to the whole
- Creation of a peaceful, loving, sustainable world

Economic vitality means:

- Keeping the money in the community
- Circulating it through as many hands as possible
- Earning it, spending it, and investing it in member-owned retail and service businesses
- Saving it in home-grown financial institutions

The ecovillage of Damanhur, a 30-year old flourishing eco-society in one of the richest areas of Europe (see description in Appendix 2), is an interesting example
of GNH on the ground. Selected articles of Damanhur’s constitutions are listed in Box 7; in these, the reader can find a great deal of similarity with the constitution of Bhutan.

- The Citizens are brothers and sisters who help one another through reciprocal trust, respect, clarity, acceptance, solidarity, and continuous inner transformation. Everyone is committed to always giving others opportunities to aim higher.
- Spirituality, research, and, ecology inspire all relationships with the environment, also through the use of appropriate technologies, useful in improving the quality of life. Every Citizen lives in communion with nature and the subtle forces which inhabit it. Everyone is committed to respect and preserve resources and avoid, as far as possible, forms of pollution and waste.
- Damanhur promotes and supports research both in science and art; it fosters and encourages continual experimentation of both the physical and the non-physical, as long as it is expressed in a harmonious form. All Citizens constantly improve their education and widen and deepen their knowledge in the fields of research, art, work, and leisure activities (From the 1998 Constitution of the Federation of Damanhur)

As we can see from a comparison of the two constitutions, there are significant analogies in the area of the environment, culture, and spirituality. As far as the environment is concerned, in addition to the need for sustainability and harmonious relations with nature, both Bhutan’s and Damanhur’s constitution emphasize the duty of each citizen to protect the environment and avoid all forms of ecological degradation.

Also, both constitutions place emphasis on spirituality, cooperation, and mutual support. However, whereas in the constitution of Bhutan Buddhism is
explicitly declared as the spiritual heritage of the country, in Damanhur there is no official religion but rather a suffused spirituality interwoven with ecology. In-fact, a central point in the philosophy of Damanhur is the sacralization of nature; nature is a living thing, to be respected and protected, and it is important to live in contact with it. Spiritual growth for the Damanhurians means assuming responsibility for the environment and for society, and along the path of inner growth, Damanhurians acquire an animal name to connect to other species and to be its symbolic witness; at a further stage of inner development a name of a plant is added to strengthen the connection with the natural world (Merrifield 2006:131-4). Thus, both constitutions stress the necessity of harmonic relations with nature, as well as the importance of a spiritual dimension for the individual and society’s well-being.

Up to this point I have explored and discussed the search for new ways to measure success and development that scholars, activists, and sometimes countries have undertaken. GNH has appeared as a promising new way to guide the development of sustainable societies. However, by introducing non-quantifiable variables in this index we are presented with a whole host of new problems discussed in the next section.

4.7 GNH’s Operationalization Problems
The challenge of measuring GNH is something that both the King and the officers in the government of Bhutan know all too well. It is exactly in light of this daunting task that the Centre for Bhutan Studies sponsored a conference on GNH in Thimphu, the Bhutanese capital, in 2004, inviting academic scholars and social activists from every corner of the world to discuss the issue and propose solutions. Specifically, the conference listed three goals: 1) to promote the concept of GNH abroad and to create an environment in which exchange of concepts and information about practice could take place. 2) To involve policy makers in the discussion of GNH, with special concern for the link between the concept of GNH and the development of actual policy. 3) To develop and explore mechanisms for the operationalisation of GNH and for practical indicators. (Ura & Galay 2004:viii-ix)

The four GNH pillars are intended to guide policies so as to create the conditions that would enable every citizen to pursue happiness (Thinley 2005); in fact, GNH’s objectives appear similar to Sen’s idea of development as ”the expansion of the ‘capabilities’ of persons to lead the kind of lives they value—and have reasons to value” (Sen 1999:18). According to Sen, the area of policies that contribute to expanding capabilities are (1) political freedoms; (2) economic facilities; (3) social opportunities; (4) transparency guarantees; and (5) protective security (Sen 1999:38). Political freedoms for Sen refer in general to the political entitlements derived by democracies, such as freedom of the press and the ability to choose among different parties. A measure of political freedom has been developed by Freedom House, an international non-governmental organization advocating political freedom and the
expansion of human rights, which publishes annually an assessment of Perceived Democratic Freedom. The GNH pillar “good governance” has not yet been articulated; however, Bhutan’s newly established constitution does affirm the principle of democracy, freedom of the press, and freely elected political parties.

Sen’s “economic facilities,” “social opportunities,” and “protective security” seem to be closely aligned with the first pillar of GNH, sustainable and equitable socioeconomic development, as reflected in the Article 9 of the Bhutanese constitution. In particular, Sen emphasizes the importance of carefully considering the distribution of the income generated by growth, rather than simply focusing on the aggregative number; access to education and health care are also necessary to expand “capabilities,” both directly, by avoiding morbidity and premature death, and indirectly, by allowing more effective participation in the political and economic life of the country. In addition, Sen stresses the importance of providing a safety net to avoid abject poverty and hunger, suggesting, for example, the adoption of unemployment benefits and hunger relief funds. These last two policies are not explicitly stated in the GNH or in the constitution, and may be an area of consideration in developing a GNH measure.

Freedom House has been criticized for being too dependent on funding from the US government, and therefore for being biased toward countries that are friendly toward the US. However, the point here is that measures for political freedom are feasible even if the current ones are imperfect.
Lastly, Sen includes the need for “transparency guarantees” in order to foster a sense of trust and to prevent corruption and financial irresponsibility; an international non-governmental organization, Transparency International, has published an annual Global Corruption Report since 1995 and has influenced international institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations to recognize corruption as a main obstacle to development. The transparency element has not been so far dealt with explicitly by the proponents of GNH, and this may be also an area that deserves more attention for the successful development of a new paradigm.

Thus far, it appears that the idea of GNH has included most of the policy areas identified by Sen as conducive to expand “capabilities.” Indeed, GNH presents in many ways an even more ambitious project. The five areas of policies spelled out by Sen as the foundation pillars of human development are for the most part already included in the GNH. The GNH in addition identifies two more foundational pillars, conservation of the environment, and the preservation and promotion of culture, both of which are at the very core of sustainable development, and of protecting indigenous cultures, issues dear to most groups involved in the AGM.

The very concept of sustainable development as formulated in the 1987 Bruntland report, i.e., development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Clapp and Dauvergne 2005:61), is clearly expressed in all the points of Article 5 of Bhutan’s Constitution; in particular “Every Bhutanese is a trustee of the Kingdom’s natural resources and environment for the benefit of the present and future generations,”
explicitly calls for intergenerational equity. However, a common critique of ‘sustainable development’ and ‘intergenerational equity’ is the fuzziness of the concepts and the difficulty of assigning values to phenomena with unknown consequences, therefore making them difficult to quantify and measure it\(^\text{67}\). On this issue, ecological economists working on the GPI have found innovative solutions and achieved a fair amount of international consensus both in the academic world as well as in the arena of social activism. The architects of GPI have assigned economic costs “to air, noise, and water pollution, lost farmland, wetlands, and forests, depletion of oil reserves, as well as carbon dioxide and ozone damages” (GPI 2006), thereby creating the ability to put a number next to the erosion and degradation of the natural capital of a country. Other variables constructed for the operationalization of GPI can also be successfully borrowed to measure progress along the first GNH pillar, sustainable and equitable socioeconomic development. In fact, the social domain part of the GPI has introduced variables that accounts for the benefits of “volunteer work, higher education, and parenting as well as the costs of crime, inequity, commuting, and auto accidents” (GPI 2006); whereas the economic domain takes into account both human and natural capital, thereby including the ability of development to be sustained in the long term.

\(^{67}\) For arguments on the lack of objective economic data on “sustainable development” and environmental degradation, see B. Lomborg “Cool It: the Skeptical Environmentalist’s Guide to Global Warming,” Knopf Publishing Group 2007.
Thus it appears that there is enough data available, as well as some consensus in the academic community, to be able to agree on the possible operationalization of the first, second, and even the fourth pillar of the GNH. Much more complicated, however, might be the operationalization of preservation and promotion of culture, and the issue, as Sen’s notes, is not trivial:

It has been argued by some that economic development as we know it may actually be harmful for a nation, since it may lead to the elimination of its traditions and cultural heritage. Objection of this kind are often dismissed on the ground that it is better to be rich and happy than impoverished and traditional. This may be a persuasive slogan, but it is scarcely an adequate response to the critique under discussion. Nor does it reflect a serious engagement with the critical valutational issue that is being raised by development skeptics. (Sen 1999:31)

The government of Bhutan certainly deserves praise for having paid attention to the unintended consequences that economic development often have on the traditional cultures. Steps such as guaranteeing access to traditional medicines alongside the western ones, goes a long way in showing appreciation for local knowledge and culture. Nevertheless, it is not clear that, apart from providing funds to support traditional arts and maintaining monuments—already pledged in the Bhutan’s Constitution—governments should be the guardian of traditions. Ultimately, as Sen points out, “it is the people directly involved who must have the opportunity to participate in deciding what should be chosen” (Sen 1999:31). Even so, the preservation and promotion of culture is a delicate and complex issue, not only because the long term well-being of a community may conflict with an individual’s
short term satisfaction, but also, and especially, because the power of “culture producing” empires such as Hollywood undermines the “real” freedom to choose the life you value. As Peter Evans (2002) rightly points out, the power and dominance of cultural models sponsored by the multinationals unconsciously shape the preferences of what individuals choose to value; citizens of industrializing countries are often manipulated into preferring a western style of consumption and development. Indeed Evans pinpointed one of the main concerns of AGM activists when he says: “Centralization of power over the cultural flows that shape preferences is a more subtle form of “unfreedom” than those which Sen highlights, but no less powerful for being subtle. Institutional strategies for facilitating collective capabilities are as important to the expansion of freedom as sustaining formal electoral institutions” (Evans 2002:59).

What Evans calls “centralization of power over the cultural flows” becomes in the words of a prominent Thai social activist “forced assimilation through the structural violence of social institutions” (Sivaraksa 2008:26); in addition, Norberg-Hodge, one of the founders of GEN, echoes Evans’ concerns, asserting that millions of people all over the Global South do not get a fair representation of the Western culture: instead “all they can see is the material side of the modern world—the side in which Western culture excels. They cannot so readily see the social or psychological dimensions—the stress, the loneliness, the fear of growing old. Nor can they see environmental decay, inflation, or unemployment” (Norberg-Hodge 2003:116-7).
For the activists of the AGM the speed and means of corporate driven globalization do not allow time for people to adjust and reflect; people either succumb to the western ideology or feel threatened and react on the basis of an identity which is “often based on declaring what I am not, rather than what I am” (Sivaraksa 2008:26), opening the door to identities’ crises and conflicts. Thus what for mainstream development economists may appear as a trivial issue, namely the preservation of local cultures, is for the AGM activists a crucial one, one that only a GNH model of development attempts to take into consideration. It is in this light that we can understand the interest and enthusiasm that the GNH model has spurred among AGM activists.

4.8 Concluding Thoughts

For over half a century GDP has been the standard measure of progress that a development paradigm born in the West has imposed on non-western countries through the policies of the international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. In the last two decades, many voices, including the ones of Noble laureates, have risen to criticize the exaggerated emphasis on growth and the disregard for the human condition.

Significant improvements have been made with the human development paradigm by putting the human and social being at the center of development policies.
The GPI model moved further by including the environment into the equation and by pointing out that resources are limited and infinite growth on a finite planet is an oxymoron. But it was the “pre-modern” kingdom of Bhutan that promoted a holistic idea of development encompassing all the dimensions of the human being, social, economic, cultural and environmental. It is not surprising then that the AGM embraced the concept and used it as a platform to mobilize people around it. The idea, dear to environmentalists, of safeguarding biodiversity in the natural world is extended to human world. To protect traditions and cultures that do not possess the necessary money and technology to resist the Western cultural “machine” becomes a mission for social activists; something akin to saving species in danger of extinction, i.e., saving humanity from monoculture.
CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSIONS: UNDERSTANDING THE ALTER-GLOBALIZATION MOVEMENT

I never differentiated between activities that might be called "spiritual" and those that might be termed "secular." After a few years I came to recognize that our efforts weren't only about planting trees, but were also about sowing seeds of a different sort—the ones necessary to give communities the self-confidence and self-knowledge to rediscover their authentic voice and speak out on behalf of their rights. Wangari Maathai (2010)

What I think has been the benefit [of the movement] is that we are all committed to expanding public awareness about living more sustainably, and every ecovillage I am familiar with is a center of education and training. This is the benefit . . . It is so successful that it has a life of its own and nobody controls it anymore. (Arkin)

Outline

5.1 Changing the World without Taking Power
5.2 De-commodifying Lifestyles
5.3 The Ecological Self
5.4 Concluding Thoughts

68 Arkin, interview, August 2, 2008.
5.1 Changing the World Without Taking Power

Polanyi explained the rise of the welfare state as the consequence of a countermovement in society aimed at checking the excessive influence of the market. The people most affected by those changes organized in the form of labor unions, cooperatives, and other associations to force the state to mitigate the excess of the market.

However, with the expansion of neoliberalism in the 1980s, the power of the nation state began to weaken vis-à-vis the expanding role of the International Finance Institutions (IFIs) later joined by the WTO. The IFIs opened up markets for transnational corporation, often limiting and encouraging local governments to provide coordination, and ammunition wherever and whenever resistance appeared. In chapter two, it was discussed how, assuming a leading role in the implementation of neoliberal reforms, the IMF and World Bank required “… governments to make major economic policy changes in return for receiving… financial assistance from these institutions”, enabling non-democratic entities to exert extraordinary amounts of power over sovereign states (Harris 2008:85).

Even democratically elected governments are left with no choice other than carry out the requirements of neoliberalism: “The state has to guarantee, for example, ____________________________

the quality and integrity of money… set up those military, defense, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets” (Harvey 2007:2). While it is an exaggeration to say that today the nation state is irrelevant, it is apparent that the governments, at least in part, became the agents of the IFIs in charge of guaranteeing the institutional framework that make free markets and free trade possible (Harvey 2007:2).

As the weakened state is no longer in a position to meet the demands of its citizenry, it became no longer effective, as it was instead in Polanyi’s time, for citizens to appeal to governments to ensure protection from the vagary of the market. Since there is little power left to governments, engaging in a power struggle with the state becomes futile.

Indeed, in today’s globalized world, what has changed “is less the fundamental dynamics of markets than the venue of their regulation . . . markets are global . . . but we have no global government” (Kuttner 2000:153). The absence of a global government in the presence of a global market economy has thus deprived global citizens of their ability to counterbalance the power of the market through the traditional avenue of the state. It is in this context that the last wave of decommodification must be understood. Whereas the first wave of decommodification was attempted through the increase of SB (State Benefits), leading to the birth of the welfare state. Today, the most feasible route to diminish the individual dependence on
the market appears to be increasing CB (Community Benefit) and SP (Self-Production).

The communities and individuals examined in this research appear, in fact, to have opted out of this seizure of power as a strategy. They seem to work instead toward a “revolution of everyday life” (Katsiaficas 1997). As Starr points out, “activists who meet their needs through alternatives or reduce their needs in advance of systemic change are practicing a form of ‘prefigurative’ politics, which embody the movement’s vision as if it were already achieved, thereby calling it into being” (Starr 2005:141).

However, once individuals and communities began to engage in these forms of decommodification, other changes take place: as consumerism loses its attraction and nature is rediscovered, new identities emerge.

5.2 De-commodifying Lifestyles

The market tells us to do everything, but we never listen to ourselves, what do we need, what is freedom, nobody understand the meaning of freedom in the same way, different people have different ideas, so the movement in Thailand is just to encourage people to come back to yourself, to understand what really you need now, you only need the four basic needs: food, shelter, cloths, and medicine… Come back to
simplicity so you consume less, whenever you consume less everything will be good. (Jandai)\textsuperscript{70}

As Giddens (1991) makes clear, we cannot fully understand the working of the current economic order unless we understand how commodification influences the project of the self and establishing of lifestyles “the project of the self becomes translated into one of the possession of desired goods and the pursuit of artificially framed styles of life… appearance replaces essence as the visible signs of successful consumption come actually to outweigh the use-value of the goods…” (Giddens 1991:197-198).

As it was discussed in the previous chapter, consumption through the market place, rather than the actual use-value of the goods, after World War II became the standard measure of progress embodied in the GNP. Once the measure of success of a country became determined by the ability of its citizens to consume goods and services, it became only question of time for consumerism to become the yardstick of success of the individual self. As Jandai points out (quote above), the market dictates our needs, but satisfying these artificial needs often cost our freedom, the freedom to choose what we really value. Once the individual is removed from the artificially framed lifestyle suddenly encounter another self as Gabrielle describes:

\textsuperscript{70} Jandai, interview, January 2008.
Going there [Ladakh] when I was 19 really helped me to understand how amazing it is that you can live simply on very little food, and not so much choice, and how beautiful that can be... I felt I needed something that was more at the forefront of change, and more authentic, and more connected with the holistic thing of working with the land, working with people, working with yourself, and living in a community, that whole holistic approach. (Gabrielle)\textsuperscript{71}

If with the creation of the welfare state the individual was enjoying the benefit of consumption without being fully commodified. The second wave of decommodification questioned the market construction of the self and searched for alternative ways of life, as one activist explained:

more and more people feel that their life became too materialistic, so more and more people come back to live in a more simple way, so there are many intentional communities... also ecovillages, some are based on living in a simple and sustainable way, some on spirituality... I think is the same... ecology and spirituality are the same thing, I don’t see as separate, but make people more humble, make the people see the truth. (Samboon)\textsuperscript{72}

Thus, if modernity’s construction of the self, centered on appearance and the conspicuous consumption of material goods, the decommodification wave which question the centrality of the market and of material consumption requires a new construction of the self.

\textsuperscript{71} Gabrielle, interview, July 5\textsuperscript{th}. 2008.

\textsuperscript{72} Samboon, interview, January 15, 2008.
5.3 The Ecological Self

Castells makes it clear that identity is the construction of meaning from cultural attributes and shared experiences (Castells 1997:7-9), and that:

The reconstruction of society’s institutions by cultural social movements . . . seems to require a long march from the communes built around resistance identity to the heights of new project identities, sprouting from the values nurtured in these communes . . . Examples of such processes, as observed in contemporary social movements and politics, are the construction of new, egalitarian families; the widespread acceptance of the concept of sustainable development, building intergenerational solidarity into the new model of economic growth; and the universal mobilization in defense of human rights wherever the defense has to be taken up. For this transition to be undertaken, from resistance identity to project identity a new politics will have to emerge. (Castells 1998:352)

It is through the prefigurative politics of the revolution of everyday life, and the everyday practices of the reappropriation of nature and of reestablishing “the commons” that a common identity emerges. As Thomashow explained, even simple acts such as recycling deepen the sense of the commons:

Through these [recycling acts] actions and discussions, the community develops a shared awareness of the commons. In the case of recycling, the commons represents a community’s understanding of what to do with their “collective” waste. By understanding that waste is an aspect of the commons, it is clear how the recycling process can have a long-range impact on many aspects of community life . . . For the environmentalist, it is through ecological metaphor, the practice of subsistence, stories of working the land, the search for ecological identity, and the commitment to place that these communities of memory can be sustained. This is how the spirit of place and the notion
of bioregionalism are most closely tied to community life. Third, the idea of the commons necessitates the conception of ecological communities. This is the interconnected lattice of habitats and species, including human ecological practice, the impact that humans have on the earth, as well as the ways in which landforms, climates, soils, flora, and fauna affect humans . . . Ecological identity broadens the concept of community so that it stretches beyond the limited sphere of human relations . . . what people have in “common” with other members of an ecological community is the process of living together in a habitat. (Thomashow 1995:94)

It is the construction of this ecological identity that is capable of forging a “durable alliance that reconciles the often conflicting interests of people in the Global South with those in the Global North” (Block 2001:xxxviii). And in the process, as Wangari Maathai says, “The environment becomes sacred, because to destroy what is essential to life is to destroy life itself” (2010).

5.4 Concluding Thoughts

Cultural movements may be more powerful than political movements in that they question the existing social relations and instrumental rationality of the dominant society. The French school, starting from Castoriadis ([1975]1987) and continued by Touraine (1977), elaborated on the creation of a world of meaning and of the social imaginary. Castoriadis stressed the primacy of culture with his notion of *l’institution imaginaire de la société*, according to which each society produces its own
“construction” of the world. In other words, each society has a distinctive way of understanding itself: its history, activities, and environment. Then, according to Touraine, the cultural construction of a society may be transformed by the emergence of a social movement, since social conflicts involve not only the competitive pursuit of collective interests, but also the reconstitution of a socio-cultural identity. Most interestingly, for Touraine, social movements “express conscious contestation over the ‘self-production of society,’ by which [Touraine] means the work society performs on itself by reinventing its norms, institutions, and practices” (Peet and Watts 1997:244).

This work has attempted to show that it is through the decommodification of man and nature that a new socio-cultural identity is emerging. Although the spontaneous uprising of the movement originated as a reaction to neo-liberal policies, a new –using Castells term –project identity emerged. Thus, the AGM is a cultural movement questioning the current neo-liberal order, and proposing and alternative social imaginary. The question that arises from this study is whether these new forms of meaning and knowledge that the AGM is producing will contribute to the demise of the modern “development” paradigm, as hypothesized by several scholars (Escobar 1992; Evans 2005).

If on one hand this study sheds some light on the concrete ways that communities around the world work to rescue man and nature from the global commodity market, on the other hand it raises many more questions than it could answer. Will a paradigm shift in Western natural sciences be a sine qua non for the movement to succeed? Does this movement provide any viable alternative paradigm?
Is one form of spirituality and/or religion more conducive than others to “eco-village” living? Do the major monotheistic religions have to embrace and support the “ecological self,” or can ecological practices succeed notwithstanding other otherworldly beliefs? Only time and ongoing research will tell.
## APPENDIX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY THE AUTHOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Visit</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Proshika Research and Development Collective</td>
<td>Winter 2008</td>
<td>Chairman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Society for Environment and Human Development</td>
<td>Winter 2008</td>
<td>General Secretary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environment and Social Development Organization</td>
<td>Winter 2008</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Secretariat</td>
<td>Winter 2006</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>BedZed (GEN)</td>
<td>Summer 2008</td>
<td></td>
<td>Guided Tour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Auroville (GEN)</td>
<td>Winter 2007</td>
<td></td>
<td>Visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Damanhur Eco-society (GEN)</td>
<td>Spring 2006, Winter 2007, Summer 2007</td>
<td>Founder and 15 participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Torri Superiore (GEN)</td>
<td>Spring 2006, Summer 2007</td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>Findhorn (GEN)</td>
<td>Summer 2008</td>
<td>Director of GEN and 2 residents</td>
<td>Ecovillage design course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Pun Pun (GEN)</td>
<td>Winter 2007, Winter 2008</td>
<td>2 of the founders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Panya Project (GEN)</td>
<td>Winter 2007</td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wongsanit Ashram (GEN)</td>
<td>Winter 2008</td>
<td>Founder and 3 participants</td>
<td>Ecovillage design course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Garden of Fruition (GNH movement)</td>
<td>Winter 2008</td>
<td>2 founders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>Arcosanti</td>
<td>Winter 2006</td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>Guided tour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Los Angeles Ecovillage</td>
<td>Spring 2007, Summer 2008</td>
<td>Founder and 1 resident</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 2: DESCRIPTION OF SITES VISITED

**Bhutan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Eastern Himalayas between China and India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of Government</td>
<td>Constitutional monarchy since 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Project</td>
<td>Development of a GNH indicator alternative to GDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>725,296 (July 2013 est.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita (PPP)</td>
<td>$6,800 (2012 est.) world ranking: 142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bhutan is not an ecovillage. Rather, it is a Buddhist kingdom turned constitutional monarchy (as of 2008) that is landlocked between China and India in the Himalayan mountain range. Despite the fact that it is a country and not an ecovillage or an organization participating in the AGM, visiting Bhutan was an important part of my research in that it is the birthplace of Gross National Happiness.

The kingdom of Bhutan lies at the eastern end of the Himalayas, just south of Tibet. It is characterized by mountains and valleys reminiscent of Switzerland, and the two countries are often compared because of their similar sizes. However, Bhutan has only one tenth the population of Switzerland—less than 800,000 in 2011 compared to just under 8 million in Switzerland in the same year—and its geographical footprint is only slightly smaller.

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I visited Bhutan in January of 2006. The country had recently opened its doors to the rest of the world, and I was keen to experience it before the influences of Western cultures transformed it. At the time, these influences had not yet expanded beyond a few internet cafés, some English-language programs on television channels (the first television broadcasts were initiated in 1999), and the early construction stages of some modern buildings and hotels. Bhutan has a policy of allowing only low numbers of high-value tourists into its borders, with the expectation that these visitors will have minimal impact on the country’s environment and culture.

Independent travel is not permitted in Bhutan. Thus, I was required to purchase a full visitation package, which included lodging, most food, a driver, and a personal guide to escort me wherever I wanted to go. Also included in the price of the package was a $65-per-day royalty that was specifically designated to go toward free education, free healthcare, and the alleviation of poverty.

To understand the challenges posed by the configuration of the territory, suffice it to say that the highest peak in Switzerland (4,600 meters) is lower than the ones my plane had to navigate in order to land in Paro. Guiding an aircraft into Paro is, in fact, one of the most difficult and dangerous landings in the world. As I flew into Paro Valley, I had the sense that the plane’s wings were nearly touching the high mountains on either side of me, which explains why only a few specially trained pilots can navigate past the high mountain peaks safely, and even then they are only able to do so in daylight. Built in 1982, the Paro airport was, at the time of my visit, the lone
airport in the country, and only one airline, the Bhutanese national airline Druk Air could fly there. Between 2009 and 2013, three more domestic airports were inaugurated and one private airline was launched. However, domestic flights have not been reliable because the new airports are often closed for security reasons, or have not started commercial operations yet. The only other way to enter the kingdom, at the time of my visit, was by land at Phuntsholing on the Indian border.

The altitude in Bhutan ranges from 180 to 7,550 meters above sea level, a fact that makes communication between the country’s twenty districts—known as dzonghags—very challenging not only by air, but by land as well. Its mountain terrain and winding roads restrict the average speed of vehicles to less than forty kilometers per hour, and notwithstanding the country’s small size, in 2006 it took easily an entire week to travel from Bhutan’s capital to its easternmost edge.

My guide and driver met me at Paro airport. From there, we drove to the capital of Thimphu, which is connected to Paro by a sixty-five kilometer-long narrow mountain road, a drive that would normally take one-and-a-half hours. However, in my case, the drive took much longer. The high, winding mountain roads were approximately a car-and-a-half wide, and were not lined with guard rails. Even though I sat on the innermost side of the mountain road, I was still terrified by the altitude, afraid that a wheel of the car could easily slip over the edge of the road. Whenever we came across a car traveling in the opposite direction, passing one another took up every physical inch of space: the side of the oncoming car brushed the slope of the mountain; our car tires touched the edge of the cliff, and the side-view mirrors in
between came lightly into contact. I continuously pleaded with the driver to slow
down to the point where he must never have reached the forty kilometer maximum
speed, because our drive took nearly three hours.

Roads in Bhutan are built slowly and mainly manually, stone by stone.
Bulldozers could easily be brought in from India, but the people would rather not use
them. During an informal meeting with the director of sustainable development in
Thimphu, he explained to me that building roads with large machines would be very
destructive to the environment. When you build a road, you interfere with the life of
many other sentient beings, and the Bhutanese try to do it in the least invasive way
possible.

With all these ethical and physical challenges, it is understandable that the
eastern part of Bhutan had so few roads built at the time of my visit. As for the rest of
the kingdom, keeping roads from destroying the existing natural ecosystem resulted in
winding routes that had as many as seventeen curves per kilometer. Nevertheless, the
roads that did exist were well maintained. Some of that maintenance is performed by
the Indian Border Roads Task Force. The rest is taken care of by the National Work
Force, a somewhat rare countrywide network employing many laborers who live in
buildings along the roads and who repair those roads constantly.

Owing to the scanty road system, the districts, or dzonghags, are not reliably
connected to one another or to the world at large. Language is one example of this
disconnect. Because of the geographical isolation of the dzonghags, dozens of
different languages have flourished in Bhutan over time. Many of those are now on the
verge of extinction, and attention is being called to the need to preserve the old oral traditions (Yeshi 2013). In 1971, Dzongkha was chosen to be the official language out of the eighteen total dialects spoken in the country, in large part because it was one of the few that had a written script.

Thimphu is famous for being the only capital city in the world without a traffic light. Instead of employing this “new” technology, the city takes pride in the fact that traffic police direct passing vehicles using a dance-like movement of their arms and hands while standing in kiosks at the main intersections. At one point, my guide explained, a traditional Bhutanese version of a traffic light was erected in the main intersection, but the people didn’t like it. They complained that the light was too impersonal. Bhutanese officials agreed, and in the end they decided to take it down.

Between 2006 and 2013, Thimphu more than tripled its population, growing from fewer than 30,000 to more than 100,000 residents in under a decade. At the time of my stay, the main plaza—the city’s Clock Tower Square—was undergoing renovations. The square has an amphitheater shape to conduct events and activities. Traditional Mani Lhalhor (prayer wheels) line one side of the square and people take their time walking along and turning these gigantic wheels at all hours of the day.

Most people were dressed in the traditional garb: the men in long robes tied around the waist by a cloth belt, called gho; the women in dresses printed with traditional patterns, known as kira. Public officials and employees, including my guide and driver, were required to wear these traditional garments during work hours. The younger generation, meanwhile, seemed to prefer Western clothing and enjoyed
hanging out at the handful of internet cafés, rather than spending their time pursuing Bhutanese traditions.

Fast urbanization and lifestyle changes have brought about a significant amount of tension and contradiction in Thimphu. One issue exemplifies this more than any other, and that is the relationship that the inhabitants of the city have with dogs.

Not long ago, Thimphu was a small village, and at the time of my visit it was still a city of dogs. Strays wandered everywhere—around temples, courtyards, office buildings, and so on—yet none of them were aggressive. Despite the perpetual presence of these animals, the city did not smell like them, and the streets were not dirty. Until recently, the concept of rounding up the strays to put in pounds was not even conceived of; any inconvenience they caused was merely a part of coexisting with the natural environment.

As the city grew and a modern lifestyle began to take hold, some of the residents became increasingly intolerant of the growing population of strays. Bhutan’s daily Kuensel (until recently the only newspaper in the country), began regularly reporting the problem of the increasing dog population in the city, going so far as to call for the resignation of certain officials because of their inability to rein in the problem. Interestingly, one of the main concerns of some of the citizens who object to the strays is that tourists may pass judgment about letting stray dogs run around in the streets. In the newspapers forum, one of the commentators wrote:

In thimphu I am so scared to walk outside during the evening and morning. You will see groups of these canines chasing you or someone. And you cannot have sound sleep. There are lots of these dogs barking
almost throughout the night. I am sure this gives tourists quite a bad impression and at times must be feeling quite disturbed too.

In Bhutanese culture, dogs are considered to be high on the reincarnation ladder, immediately below humans. Dogs hold a prominent place in Bhutanese folklore. In one story, when the gods grew angry at the greed of humanity and threatened to withdraw the natural bounty of the earth, dogs interceded on the humans’ behalf, begging the gods to leave behind some form of sustenance for all living things to share. The gods accordingly left some resources behind for the dogs, the substance of which became the food source for modern-day humanity. Dogs are also said to help humans through the dark parts of the afterlife, guiding them to the light with the glowing tips of their tails.

The strains between Bhutanese tradition and modernization are well expressed by another commentator:

I know 95% of us are farmers’ son or daughter. So that way those animals were our friend once upon a time when we were struggling. And today when you are gainfully employed and enjoying the improved living standard in the city, you started talking about pounding, capturing, sterilizing and ultimately finishing them. We human can be that ungrateful, selfish and cruel. (Kuensel 2013)

The last commentator in the forum adds: If we are Buddhist, let’s all come forward and adopt the stray dogs, the problem will be solved. (Kuensel 2013)

When, spurred by Western concerns about noise at night and the spread of rabies, the government began to rid the capital city of stray dogs, the people were
outraged. Then the government struck a compromise with the citizens: rather than kill or remove the strays, it merely sterilized them and let them be. However, as the Kuensel article shows, as of 2013 that measure had not resolved the situation.

Crime may be the next issue that the country will have to confront as it opens to the world. In 2006, there were no safety concerns since crime was nonexistent. I realized that when I went to visit some monasteries one day. Just before we entered the first one, it occurred to me that I had left my backpack—which contained my brand new laptop—in the unlocked car. I stopped and told my guide that we had to go back. Surprised, he asked me why. When I explained the situation, he smiled and assured me that there was no need to go back and retrieve the backpack; a tourist getting robbed was literally unheard of. After we returned an hour later, the backpack was in fact still where I had left it. Although as of 2013 the crime rate is still low in Bhutan as compared to most other countries, it has increased every year since the time of my visit, with a 55.8 percent increase reported in the capital city—a situation that has led to the opening of a fourth police station within city limits (Bhutanese 2013).

*Chortens* or *stupas* (cover photo) were the most common architectural sight in Bhutan. Stupas are small shrines built to house sacred relics. Prayer flags were also present in abundance on the hillsides, offering prayers for the benefit of all nearby sentient beings. But the sight that most tourists come to admire is the peak of the highest mountain in Bhutan: Jomolhari. The locals consider Jomolhari to be sacred because they believe it to be the home of a goddess. Although it is possible to trek at the base of this sacred mountain, climbing to the summit is not permitted. Some
Western climbers would pay a fortune to do so. However, the Bhutanese government made the decision not to open the landmark to tourists out of respect for cultural tradition.

While in Bhutan, I also visited a local farm. In 2006, 90 percent of the country’s population lived on subsistence farming, and the majority of the farms were narrow strips of land terraced on hill slopes. Leaving the car at the road, we crossed a creek on hand-laid wooden planks onto the expansive property, which included terraced rice fields and an orchard of fruit trees. Although the landscape of rural Bhutan is normally lush and green, in January the scene was dry, gray, and brown.

The farmhouse itself made a sharp contrast to the colorless landscape. More decorated than any global equivalent (though typical of Bhutan itself), it did not fit the image of its Western counterpart. It was two stories tall with the addition of a loft, the latter of which served the purpose of regulating the temperature of the house. Architecturally, it bore a strong resemblance to the buildings in the city and elsewhere in the countryside. The white stucco of the exterior walls was chipping, and the brown wooden trim around the doors and windows was carved and painted with traditional motifs in blues, greens, reds, yellows, oranges, and gold. The lower floors of the farmhouse, which rested on a stone foundation, were devoted to the granary and the stable. Above it were the living quarters.

Inside, the rooms were simple and well kept. There was an entry with a wooden staircase, a small kitchen with some simple appliances, a main living area, and a Buddhist altar. The altar stretched from floor to ceiling and was carved in
elaborate detail and painted in red, green, gold, and other primary colors. The living room seemed to be a companion to the altar room. The walls were covered with mandalas and thangka hangings. Colorful silk fabrics hung from the eaves of the ceiling, and intricately woven wool rugs covered the floor. Apart from a few select religious artifacts, such as drums and a water jug, there were very few material possessions in the house. Rather, pride, time, and effort seemed to have been taken in the design and decoration of the house itself.

Outside in the large courtyard, cows, horses, dogs, cats, and chickens coexisted without incident. Clothes hung from a line suspended between a tree and a stone wall. A stack of gathered wood stood not far off from a basic, tin-roofed stable for the cows. The atmosphere outdoors was quiet. Now and then a dog barked in a distance, and the effect was the sort of sound that Westerners associate with birdsong. Other than that, the only sounds were the clopping of pack mules being led down the nearby road, the trickling of the creek, and the occasional rushing of the wind.

The universality of the traditional, intricate, and artistic architecture in Bhutan—whether found in the country or in the city—contrasted markedly with the general lack of material possessions. This suggested to me that although the Bhutanese were not rich in a monetary sense, they were rich in time, architecture, and religion, as evidenced by the ubiquitous care and attention to detail that went into decorating farmhouses and government buildings alike. Nor did a lack of riches ever appear to translate into abject poverty, as I observed no beggars during my time there.
Another area in which the Bhutanese seemed to be “rich” was with regard to social relations. In order to survive in such rough terrain, a high spirit of cooperation seemed to have developed. The local communities were in effect compelled by circumstances to establish strong relationships to help one another with collaborative efforts. With villages so isolated from one another and no workforce available to hire, a strong tradition of reciprocity has become a *sine qua non* in the Bhutanese way of life.

Bhutan’s social cohesion happens at the village, district, and national level alike. On the national scale, a collaborative system arose in 1961 when development work in the country began: the government provided funding for materials and the citizens who would be using the intended facility—be it a school, an irrigation channel, or some other public utility work—contributed the labor. This same concept is a fundamental part of village life as well; when a villager has to undertake a building project or a harvest, the community gets together to help him. Similarly, when a member of one family dies, the other families in the village collectively assist the deceased’s grieving relatives by providing money, food, emotional support, and religious services during the adjustment period.

Given its small size and population, Bhutan has been extremely wary of being swept away culturally by the modern world, hence its enforced cultural rules and regulations. However, these acts of self-preservation have resulted in a struggle to balance the rights of minorities with the building of a national identity. Ironically, while Bhutan’s government is fighting to protect its culture from modernization on the
grounds that its values and diversity have a right to exist in the world, it is in fact simultaneously limiting diversity within its own borders.

Human rights organizations have repeatedly denounced the government’s treatment of Lhotshampas, one of Bhutan’s three main ethnic groups. In the 1980s, the Lhotshampas, who are of Nepali origin, began to be perceived as a threat to the political order when they reacted to a series of measures that had been passed for the purpose of discriminating against them—one of which was that Nepalese could no longer be spoken in schools. The protestors were branded as “anti-nationals,” and they either had to seek refuge abroad or were imprisoned. The Lhotshampas were forced to leave Bhutan in early 1990s and the kingdom’s struggle to strike a balance between national values and diversity continues.

Notwithstanding these missteps, Bhutan has made a significant contribution to design an alternative model of development. In a gathering of the United Nations in July of 2011, Bhutan introduced a proposal to include “happiness” in the holistic approach to development. The resolution was sponsored by sixty-eight member states, and was adopted unanimously without a vote, thereby officially placing “happiness” on the United Nations agenda.
Figure 8 Stupas outside Thimpu
The first ecovillage I visited was Arcosanti in the southwestern United States. My research was in its early stages and I was a bit disappointed when I arrived in Arizona to find that this world-renowned establishment was nothing more than a pinprick of civilization in the middle of a vast, featureless desert.

Arcosanti is one of the four founding grandfathers of the ecovillage movement, along with Auroville in India, the Farm in Tennessee, and Findhorn in Scotland. The mastermind behind it was the world-renowned Italian-born architect Paolo Soleri (1919-2013), who started the community in 1970. Soleri’s aim was to prove that, using a combination of architecture and ecology that he termed “arcology,” a civilization could flourish without having a negative impact on the earth. Unfortunately, by the time I arrived thirty-five years later, only 1 percent of Soleri’s utopian city had been built, and its would-be citizens seemed to spend the bulk of their time selling bells in an attempt to collect enough money to pursue the project further.

But although Arcosanti was disappointing at first glance, it did provide an important cornerstone to my research. While the handful of scattered domes and structures were not enough to give it full ecovillage status on its own, the spirit that it
awakened at its conception in the 1970s proved to be a remarkable catalyst for the
ecovillages of the alter-globalization movement.

When Soleri announced his undertaking to construct Arcosanti in the middle of
the Arizona desert, his call was answered by an outpouring of young people and
volunteers who were eager to help him build a prototype town to serve as a model for
future developments. As of 2013, seven thousand volunteers have resided in
Arcosanti over the years, helping to build Soleri’s utopian city. This, in effect, is proof
that there was, and still is, a hunger that has thus far spanned two generations for the
ideals that Soleri was working for, such as community and sustainability. Thousands
of people were drawn to this alternative vision or model of life; one that fostered
humanity and that respected the environment. In this sense, Soleri was the pick that
struck the underground well of water and caused it to flood to the surface in a spring
of action and enthusiasm. Many of those who participated in or were inspired by
Arcosanti later went on to build other ecovillages around the world.

The agricultural program at Arcosanti supports four areas of food production:
open field, garden, orchard, and greenhouse horticulture. Garden and field productions
cover fourteen acres of land, and much of the produce grown by the ecovillage is
organic. Three experimental greenhouses have been erected for the purposes of
horticulture and research. The greenhouse structures themselves are constructed at a
sloping angle in accordance with the architecturally energy-efficient goals of the
ecovillage as a whole. Volunteers participate in sustainable agricultural activities
including weeding, watering, seed starting, harvesting, composting, caring for livestock, and tending to the vermiculture system.

Despite its stunted overall growth, Arcosanti is not entirely bereft of the goals it originally set out to achieve. The arced structures that have been built attempt to harness the power of the sun in new and innovative ways. A small café in the main building serves only organic produce. After Soleri passed away in 2013, a community of about eighty residents still continued to live in the ecovillage, striving to continue Soleri’s dream of building a model of urban development that is both socially and environmentally sustainable.

**Arcosanti Highlights**

**Social/Community**
- Community kitchen
- Community recreation areas
- CSA

**Ecological**
- Composting and vermiculture
- Small livestock
- Use of both passive solar and photovoltaic panels

**Economic**
- Supporting local food producers
Figure 9 Gallery and coffee house in Arcosanti
The second ecovillage on my list of destinations was Torri Superiore in Italy. As a country, Italy possesses the eighth-largest economy in the world. Although the average per-capita income of Italians is lower than that of North Americans and of their European neighbors to the north, there is a large income differential between the northern and southern parts of the nation.

In northern Italy, where both Torri Superiore and the other Italian ecovillage I visited—Damanhur—are located, the general economic conditions are comparable to the richest areas of Europe (Dalmazzo 2009), with the per capita income being 40 percent higher than it is in the areas to the south. The counter-culture movement reached the Italian peninsula at the end of the 1960s; during which time a number of alternative communities were set up that still exist today.

I began my journey in Italy thinking that, as my country of origin, it would be the easiest one to navigate. However, I soon discovered that the path to the isolated community of Torri Superiore—located about 250 miles southwest of Turin in the foothills of the Maritime Alps on the French-Italian border—was not as straightforward as I had hoped. Taking a winding mountain road that was supposed to
be the shortest route to the village, I quickly found myself lost in the foothills. At one point I even crossed over into France by mistake and had to retrace my steps. I eventually made it to the little town of Torri and followed the directions that were supposed to lead me to Torri Superiore, but even then, there were no ecovillages in sight. It was nearly nightfall by the time a passerby pointed me to some kind of “comunita,” as he called it, which resided in a burgh clustered way up on the hill.

When I reached the entrance of what looked like a medieval fortress, the only evidence for what lay within was a plate on the wall marked “Associazione Culturale.” Unsure if I had found what I was searching for, I made my way up a flight of steep stone steps until, through an open door, I saw a woman on her hands and knees repairing the floor of the room within. I asked her if I was in the right place, and she confirmed as much in English. She explained that she was a temporary guest volunteer and directed me to go up one more flight of stairs, where I finally found a permanent resident who could arrange for my stay.

A part of Torri Superiore’s economy relies on guest volunteers—travelers who participate in communal activities and chores during their stay in exchange for room and board. In my case, rather than volunteering, I had established contact with one of Torri’s founders through a series of email exchanges and had arranged for a paid stay there. My room was a standard example of Torri Superiore’s housing space: very simple and reminiscent of monastery rooms, but with all the necessities of modern life, including a full bathroom. The towels and bedding were worn but clean, and the
relative lack of interior décor seemed almost intentional so as not to distract from the peaceful and relaxing view of the valley below.

At dinnertime I went down the steep external staircase and ended up lost in the labyrinth of Torri Superiore. On the ground level, the village covers a small area that does not exceed 30 by 50 meters, but in actuality it has eight levels of floor space that equal 3,000 square meters, all told (Torri 2011). The three main buildings contain 160 rooms, which are connected by an endless series of winding hallways, staircases, and terraces. I attempted to make my way through this maze, but kept wandering around in circles that took me back to the common laundry room. This loop seemed destined to be endless until someone finally rescued me and led me to the dining hall.

Meals are served three times a day in a large room with vaulted ceilings and exposed stone walls. Three long tables are set up, one for the self-service buffet, and two for residents and guests to be seated. Meals are a community event, with designated times during which food is set out and all are invited to partake. At the end of the meal, food scraps are disposed of in a bucket rather than in a garbage can, since food residuals, as well as kitchen scraps, are used as animal feed or are composted. The compost is then used as an organic fertilizer in the vegetable gardens and orchards that produce much of the vegetables, fruits, and olive oil consumed in the ecovillage.

Everything about Torri Superiore spoke of a relaxed lifestyle. In contrast to other ecovillages I visited, I witnessed no restrictions regarding things such as pets, alcohol, meat, fish, or smoking. Travelers lodge in the ecovillage for a wide range of reasons, from research to vacation, and the seating arrangement was such that one was
almost forced to meet new people. One night, for example, I found myself between two Germans that I had never yet laid eyes upon. The man was an engineer who was visiting Torri Superiore while he worked on a renewable energy project. He was also involved in securing GEN’s small yearly grant of 100,000 Euros from the European Union—money, he explained, that was vital to keep GEN functioning. In fact, GEN was created in 1995 by a “seed group” of ecovillages, and Gaia Trust\textsuperscript{74} committed to cover the expenses of the project for three to five years (Jackson 2000:76), after which GEN had to find ways to raise the funds for its operational expenses on its own.

The woman, by contrast, was a permanent resident at the ecovillage. Her story was fascinating. She had been living in Berlin during the Cold War, and she had always been involved in progressive causes. As she recalled her participation in tearing down the infamous wall, her voice still held the emotion and enthusiasm of that historic moment. She and her husband had lived in a few other intentional communities before falling in love with the relaxed Italian lifestyle of Torri Superiore, where they had decided to settle.

After dinner, many visitors and residents wandered out onto one of the nearby terraces to continue the social hour. I joined a few residents there one evening to informally inquire about life in the community. One young man, a new resident, cited

\textsuperscript{74} Gaia Trust is a cooperative entity with charitable objectives founded in 1987 by Ross and Hildur Jackson.
Torri Superiore’s simplicity and community living preferences as being deciding factors in his choice to live there. Many residents do hold jobs outside of the community, while also contributing to the essential duties of the ecovillage and to the restoration of the compound. However, their lodging expenses, below current market rates, somewhat compensate for the extra work.

Torri Superiore as a community was born with the intent of restoring the stone buildings (thought to date back to the thirteenth century) in which it now resides. In 1989, a non-profit association was established for the restoration of what was then an abandoned medieval burgh. In the 1990s, a community of about twenty people began to take up permanent residence in the areas that had been restructured. The residents who live there today are mostly Italians or Germans, and turnover is high, so the adult population is still limited to about twenty.

The next day I strolled around outside the compound and observed life around the village. A dozen baby goats were playing rambunctiously on a hillside. Torri Superiore raises free range chickens and goats from which they make their own cheese. Around the valley there are a number of organic permaculture gardens and orchards that cover most of the residents’ needs for fresh fruit and vegetables, though these resources are not always enough to feed guest workers and boarders during the
summer months. Olive oil is also produced in Torri, and the surplus is sold or bartered outside of the community\(^\text{75}\).

One work exchange volunteer told me of an experience he had that exemplified the culture and values of the ecovillage. In late November, two months after the grape harvest, volunteers and residents at Torri participate in bringing in the olive crop from the neighboring acres of land. The ecovillage keeps 60 percent of the resulting oil and gives the landowners the other 40 percent. In the foothills of northern Italy, the olive trees are old and very well developed. This volunteer remembered harvesting olives with his peers from nine in the morning until noon, at which time they sat down near the top of the hill for lunch. “I realized that I was drinking wine that came from the valley below and eating bread baked fresh yesterday evening, with oil made from the olives I myself had picked two days ago, along with fresh cheese that was also from the ecovillage,”\(^\text{76}\) he reminisced, recalling how at that moment he was pervaded by a sense of well-being, feeling the interconnection between community and nature.

This sense of well-being proved to be an ongoing theme for the volunteer during his stay at Torri Superiore. He cited the relaxed atmosphere and the changing

\(^{75}\) In addition, the community makes its own bread, pasta, goat cheese, yogurt, jam, honey, and ice cream. All other purchased food items must be organic and local.

\(^{76}\) Volunteer Torri Superiore, interview, January 15, 2009.
variety of tasks that he was asked to perform as key factors that contributed to his state of mind and to the similarly relaxed attitudes of other volunteers and residents around him. “On an average day, I would wake up and help to set up breakfast in the B&B, or else I’d assist in the fields, shoveling compost for instance. Then I’d take a couple hours off, and then I’d go back to do something else in the fields, like weeding or transplanting seedlings. After that I’d have another couple of hours off before it was time to help with dinner. It was very relaxed. You were always free to have your siesta, or to pause and drink your coffee.”

The same volunteer emphasized the disparate mindsets between Torri Superiore and the traditional Western models, particularly that of the United States. “[In the US], it’s work hard play hard. In Torri Superiore, they get work done, but they make no distinction between play and work. Work is play; play is work.” He cited the building of a new tower using locally sourced stones to support his point. “The volunteers and the residents were taking turns building this tower, and as they worked they were laughing and joking around with each other, stopping to take breaks . . . If they had to do it all day long maybe their attitudes would have been different, but they only worked on it a couple hours at a time. Nobody ever did anything for eight hours a day. There was always a rotation of tasks, so that made the tasks more fun.”

At Torri Superiore I met with my original contact there, one of the women who founded the ecovillage’s restoration project and who later participated in the development of GEN as its secretary. For years the headquarters of GEN’s European branch had been located on site at Torri Superiore. Although she was keen to hear
about my project, she dissuaded me from trying to conduct formal interviews with the residents. She explained that the community had recently received bad press. Although I am a researcher, not a journalist, the accumulation of bad experiences had created resistance and hostility toward anyone who appeared to be investigating their lifestyle. She did, however, encourage me to visit Damanhur, a larger ecovillage located about three hours north of Torri Superiore. That is a place, she said, that you must see. So I heeded her advice, and made it the next stop on my route.

_Torri Superiore Highlights_

**Social/Community**

- Community meals
- Community projects such as building restoration
- Workshops, yoga, and other courses
- Consensus decision making

**Ecological**

- Permaculture organic gardens and orchards
- Free range small livestock
- Homemade food preservation
- Composting and recycling
- Natural building materials and insulation
- Solar water heaters
- Compost toilets

**Cultural/Spiritual**

- Cultural association for restoration of historical buildings
- Cultural center for sustainability, cooperation, and solidarity; open also to non-residents

**Economics**

- Ecotourism
- Bartering of goods and services
- Support of local economy

Figure 10 View of Torri Superiore
Damanhur

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community/Organization</th>
<th>GEN Ecovillage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Northwestern part of Italy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year Founded</td>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Project</td>
<td>Spiritual community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residents/Scope</td>
<td>600-800 residents</td>
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The ecovillage of Damanhur is located in the Piedmont region about thirty miles north of Turin, a region that boasts one of the highest per capita incomes in the world. My search for Damanhur, located in the Valchiusella Valley, proved to be an even greater challenge than my journey to Torri Superiore had been. It was February in the subalpine range, where night comes early and is blanketed with a dense fog. At eight in the evening, all the stores are closed and no northern Italian can be found hanging around outdoors. Moreover, the road signs are notoriously bad in Italy, and the small towns that I was driving through did not even appear on my map. I was finally forced to stay the night at a hotel, postponing my quest for Damanhur until the following day, at which point the hotel receptionist was able to point me in the right direction again.

Unlike Torri Superiore, Damanhur is a large, well-known (although not always loved) and established community in the area. In the daylight, I found that it even had its own road signs. Once I reached the upward-sloping road that led straight into the ecovillage, I couldn’t miss it: long rows of hedges with tall flags waving in the wind directed my gaze to the bold Damanhur sign hanging above a large electric gate. The person at the booth behind the gate immediately warned me of the no-smoking policy
that is strictly enforced throughout Damanhur (outdoors included) before directing me to the welcome office. There, a meeting was promptly arranged for me with the public relations representative, Gufo, whose name comes from the Damanhurian tradition (see chapter 3) of taking one’s first name from an animal (“gufo” means “owl” in Italian). Gufo was a young woman, very likeable, nicely dressed and with a sweet smile. When during my follow-up visit I asked Gufo (whose name did not sound very nice in my opinion, nor did it match her persona) whether she had ever been sorry to let her real name go, she replied that she didn’t mind. “It is like a game which consists of connecting with another species; that’s why it is an animal name. I felt it was natural, just like among other populations, such as the Native Americans. There is the tradition that the life changes you are going through inside are also mirrored in something outside.”

The visitor office where I met Gufo was located within a large compound that included the reception, some shops, a restaurant/bar, a health center, a Damanhurian bank, and machines to exchange money (Damanhur has its own currency; the “credito”). On the top floors of the main building were rooms for guests, students (they also have their own “university”), and researchers such as myself. From the welcome office, I could see the open temple and, behind it, the first house of the community, Damjil. In addition to the amenities listed above, Damanhur also has a

77 Gufo, interview, July 9, 2007.
constitution, schools—from nursery to junior high—other holistic health centers (the founder of Damanhur, Falco, advocated a vision of health that did not involve the aggressive treatment of disease), and several economic activities including the production of organic food and a daily paper. In 2003, Damanhur acquired a nearby former Olivetti factory that had been abandoned for twenty years, and transformed it into an art, commercial, and convention center.

Damanhur was founded in the late 1970s by Oberto Airaudi (“Falco”—falcon, for Damanhurians—who passed away in June of 2013) and a small group of people interested in esoteric philosophy and meditation. Valchiusella Valley was deemed to be the ideal site to start the community because the group believed that the land rested upon synchronic lines of energy that skirt around the earth. They settled there with the intention of spending more time together in the pursuit of their spiritual development, and soon after the idea to build something together was born.

In 1978, a small group of Damanhurians secretly began digging into the side of the mountain to build an underground temple, which they called the Temple of Humankind. They believed that the site would serve as an antenna for the energetic power of the earth to be broadcast worldwide. A team of people, none of whom were architects or engineers, set to work at night with only shovels and buckets with the intent of realizing this dream. The result was a marvelous, enormous work of dazzling architecture and design—one that also happened to be completely illegal. By the time their secret was given away in 1991, the Damanhurians had created such a fantastic
work of art that the authorities decided that rather than destroying it, they would aid in the preservation of such a wonder (Merrifield 2006:191-2).

Over the years, Damanhur has grown into a large and politically influential organization. The original group of twenty settlers has grown into a community with a steady population of a few hundred citizens. Citizenship is granted after one year of residency, and the turnover, according to Gufo, is very low. As the community grew, its members found that their numbers were becoming too large to continue on as one cohesive social group, at which point Damanhur evolved into a “federazione di comunita” (a federation of communities). To date, there are over forty nucleo-communities in the ecovillage, each consisting of fifteen to twenty people living in a large house and sharing living expenses and social responsibilities (Damanhur 2011). Each nucleo-community likewise shares a project, the subjects of which can range from research on green technology to organic agriculture.

On the issues of sustainability and self-sufficiency, Damanhur is very advanced regarding energy, water, and food production.78 In addition, it has a seed bank and three companies working on bio-architecture and eco-building. In 1998, Damanhur joined GEN. In 2005, it received an award at the UN Global Human Settlement Forum for its expertise on renewable energy and natural building.

78 Damanhur’s website states its objective of self-sufficiency in food to be a priority. Presently, the ecovillage meets 50 percent of its needs in this area.
Notwithstanding all of these achievements, in recent years Damanhur has been the object of mounting criticism and scrutiny. Members that left the community claim that Damanhur has all the workings of a classic cult. Members were required to buy “Selfic” pieces made by Falco, for which they paid thousands of Euros a year directly to him. Before his passing in June of 2013, Falco had accumulated an enormous amount of wealth and he was at the center of an investigation for tax evasion.

Yet many of the Damanhurians I interviewed seemed to be genuinely working toward a sustainable future, and their focus appeared to be one of successfully building a community they could rely on in bad times and in good ones. The community had a facility to help members take care of their elderly parents, along with a school where the children were taught to have respect for nature. The school also had special programs that enabled Damanhurian children to have exchanges with children in poor countries. Therefore, although Falco may have used his charisma to his own advantage, the people that joined his community truly longed to build a better world, and it seems possible that—if they survive the loss of their leader—they will actually be in an even better position to achieve their dreams.

**Damanhur Highlights**

**Social/Community**

- Shared living spaces and resources
- Shared meals
- Center for holistic and preventive medicine

**Ecological**

- Organic gardening and orchards
- Support for local food production
- Extensive use of solar energy
- Seed bank

**Cultural/Spiritual**

- Creation of the Temple of Humankind
- Rituals and celebrations
- Shared beliefs and meditation practices

**Economic**

- Local currency and bank
- Businesses and cooperatives
- Educational courses

*Figure 11 Damanhur outdoor temple*
### Pun Pun Center for Self-Reliance

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<th>Community/Organization</th>
<th>GEN Ecovillage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>North of Chiang Mai, Thailand</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year Founded</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Project</td>
<td>Rural; organic farming and seed saving</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residents/Scope</td>
<td>15 residents</td>
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My first stop in Thailand was Pun Pun, an organic farm founded in 2003 by Jon Jandai, a Thai farmer, and Peggy Reents, an American-born woman who moved to Thailand to work on grassroots development projects. Pun Pun is located in the western half of the country, in the north part of the province of Chiang Mai. Although the farm is only about thirty miles from the city, it is in the middle of the countryside, and finding my way there required a drive that took over an hour. I arrived there to find not a fortified compound of modern technology, but the early stages of what is on its way to becoming an extended network of organic farms. Rather than dozens or hundreds of people clustered in a single complex, each farm—including Pun Pun itself—was home to only about ten people. Those people then supported and sponsored the farm next door, resulting in the beginning of a chain of farms and farmers that will ultimately become a sustainable network.

Jon Jandai, who hails from the northeastern part of the country, moved to the north of Chiang Mai to be a farmer again in 2003 with his wife Peggy, following his disillusionment with the imposition of Western values on human worth that seemed to be gaining increasing power in Bangkok. His farm quickly gathered support and speed, and before long more people had joined Pun Pun, while others gave rise to the
neighboring Panya Project, thus forming the first two links in the growing ecovillage chain. As Jandai explained, that was the idea. “We do not want to have a big community here . . . We want to have many communities instead of one big one . . . that’s why we support other people to have communities nearby. To have more is more stable. If you have ten, and one collapses, you still have nine; you can help each other more and more. I think it’s more sustainable to think like this.”

On a visit to New Mexico, Jandai visited a mud house, which he found to his liking. Upon his return to Thailand, he undertook to construct one himself. The project was so successful that he began to teach public workshops, which quickly grew in popularity. Five years later, they had expanded not only throughout Thailand, but into the neighboring country of Laos as well.

“I am a small person, I do small things. But I destroy less than other people,” Jandai told me during an interview on the terrace of his own clay house, which had taken him three months to build, working two hours a day. The terrace was a pattern of small, thin bricks, and the canopy above it was made of grass. Inside, the house itself was warm and inviting, with red brick tiles and a curved staircase leading up to a sleeping loft. A few simple, raised designs had been molded into the mud walls for decoration.

Pun Pun and the other ecovillages in Jandai’s network grow their own food, including rice and various types of fruit trees. Although the community practices composting and the culturing of microorganisms, Jandai explained that these were relatively new concepts. When he was growing up, he said, “They didn’t do anything
like that, because the soil is good; you [could] grow anything. And then, at that time, people didn’t grow for sale—just to eat. So people didn’t want to grow a lot . . . they didn’t need to make compost or anything. They just planted with rice and had enough rice to eat for the whole year. Even if you had more, you didn’t know where to sell it, because nobody buys it. Even now, many people still think in that way in the village.”

One concept that Jon Jandai stresses in his ecovillage network is that of deep thinking. The problem, he says, is that people in the modern world rarely stop to consider the full impact of their actions. His own house is one example. Whereas the majority of people in the West purchase homes that take several months to construct and decades to pay off, Jon himself was able to build a comfortable home for himself in a fraction of the time, for a fraction of the cost. The true value of technology is always fully considered before being implemented in Pun Pun. For instance, installing electricity in his house was a decision that was a couple of months in the making; before that, he and his wife used candles. And although he uses the Internet, he has pinpointed its value carefully, as well: it allows him to network with others to further the work of seed preservation. This underlying philosophy of deep thinking serves to connect Jon’s network of farms to the vision of the alter-globalization movement on both a theoretical and a practical level.

“The market tells us to do everything, but we never listen to ourselves. What do we need? What is freedom? Nobody understands the meaning of freedom in the same way; different people have different ideas. So the movement in Thailand is just to encourage people to come back to yourself, to understand what you really need.
You only need the four basic needs: food, shelter, clothes, and medicine. We need to make it easy for everybody [to have those things] . . . If you want to be happy, you need to have less material [items]. Happiness is light, it’s not heavy. If you consume less, everything will be good.”

As of 2013, Pun Pun has ten to fifteen residents and runs courses and workshops on community building and organic gardening, in addition to two organic restaurants that they have opened to encourage other local farmers to produce organically by guaranteeing them a customer base.

**Pun Pun Highlights**

**Social/Community**

- Shared meals every day
- Shared work in the gardens
- Hands-on educational projects

**Ecological**

- Organic gardening
- Natural building
- Seed-saving center
- Water-harvesting system
- Homemade natural products

**Cultural/Spiritual**

- Shared vision of sustainability through self-reliance

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Economic

- Food production
- Small livestock
- Restaurant
- Educational courses

Figure 12 Pun Pun earth building interior
The Panya Project

Community/Organization: GEN Ecovillage  
Location: North of Chiang Mai, Thailand  
Year Founded: 2007  
Type of Project: Rural; organic farming; permaculture courses  
Residents/Scope: 15 residents

The second farm in Jon Jandai’s ecovillage network, the Panya Project, was founded by Christian Shearer and Lee Laney in 2006. It occupies ten acres in the low hills of northern Thailand. At the time of my visit to the Panya Project in 2007, the population had not yet stabilized and ran between seven and twenty people throughout the year. As of August 2013, the village had five permanent staff and dorm rooms for up to twenty-four people at any given time. The ecovillage also offers several classes in permaculture design and practice.

Like Pun Pun, the Panya Project was situated on vast territories of green, sloping grassland. The only noises were the birds and the wind. The buildings were simple and functional; many of them were open-air in nature, with thatched roofs. Compostable toilets had been set up on stilts. One toilet was used for a certain period of time, then closed off to ferment for a fixed number of months, after which the resulting compost was used to help the growth of the trees on the properties. The pace of life was calm, slow, and soothing.

Shearer himself lived in the United States until age twelve, when he and his parents moved to Thailand. He spent six years there before moving back to the US, where he attended university and was on track to becoming a computer science
professional. Then, like Jon Jandai, he began having second thoughts. “I went through the process a lot of us go through and realized that maybe a forty, fifty, sixty-hour-a-week career wasn’t really what I wanted,” he explained.

Shearer began thinking about the subject in more depth, considering how he might be able to create his life in a different way. Finally, he wrote a seven-page proposal and sent it to fifty of his friends. “Why don’t we all chip in some money together to buy some land in Thailand, and we can use that land in whatever way we want, really, to bring a little more depth to our lives?” he said. “Working on this project together will inevitably help us learn more, help us grow more, help us continue our [social] processes that we are going through . . . our connections with other people, our learning about how we want to live.”

As a result of his proposal, twelve individuals in Shearer’s American social network agreed to participate in his project. However, Shearer did not know exactly where he and the others would put down roots in Thailand until his path crossed Jon Jandai’s. “A friend of mine told me that there was a natural building course going on in northern Thailand by a guy named Jon Jandai, and me and another member of the group went,” he recalled. At the building course, in addition to learning about the adobe building process, Shearer became friends with Jandai and his wife Peggy, whose community of Pun Pun had between five and twenty people at the time. “I was telling them about the project, and they said, ‘Well why don’t you do it here? We have land in this area; we would love to have an extended community with people that are sustainability conscious, and we can support each other in our work . . . so that, along
with the fact that it backed right up against a national park and that the weather [was good] . . . made this spot perfect.”

Because Shearer was not a Thai citizen, he was unable to purchase the land to start the Panya Project ecovillage on his own. To help him, Jandai himself took legal responsibility for the purchase of the land on Shearer’s behalf—an act that demonstrated a huge amount of trust in and collaboration between the new neighbors.

Initially, Shearer worried that twelve people would not be enough to sustain the new community from an economic standpoint. However, he soon discovered that this was not the case. “Every step along the way, we have learned more about being able to build our own houses, being able to [use] natural [resources]; all that stuff. It ended up costing so much less [than my original estimates] that we ended up being able to tell the members of the group that we were going to be able to return some money to them. So twelve people, in total, was more than enough.”

The core philosophy of Panya, Shearer stated, was about “enhancing life.” His definition of this goal primarily encompassed connectedness to nature, the personal development of spirituality, the utilization of sustainable practices, and the attainment of a free lifestyle. Before beginning the Panya Project, Shearer specifically studied permaculture, natural building, sustainable living, and “living simply.”

He described Panya as a setting in which everyone felt free to discuss spiritual beliefs, but which left its members to pursue their own ideas and philosophies on the subject rather than setting a common standard. The simple acts of waking up to the sound of birds and clean sunshine in the morning, as well as working the land with his
own hands, gave Shearer a deep feeling of connection to nature. The ecovillage practiced a cross between organic agriculture and permaculture. Finally, Shearer confirmed that the Panya Project ecovillage enabled him to live a lifestyle that offered a significant amount of freedom and flexibility: “I want something that is going to have me wake up in the morning thinking, 'All right, what am I doing today? This is what I want to be doing today!'”

The concept of simple living was intrinsic to Shearer’s philosophy for the Panya Project. “If you are attached to the comforts of Western life, if you are attached to having a couch, and being able to watch TV, and going out in the evening, and having a beer or two to relax, you are going to have to release some of those attachments and realize that it is [really about] internal things. It is not actually that you need a couch and a TV to feel relaxed.” Like Pun Pun, the Panya Project has grown in population and offers courses and workshops in permaculture and natural building.

**Panya Project Highlights**

**Community/Social**

- Community kitchen
- Shared meals
- Educational courses

**Ecological**

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80 Shearer, interview, January 10, 2007.
- Humanure composting toilet systems
- Earthen buildings
- Water-harvesting system
- Food forest

**Cultural/Spiritual**

Shared vision of simple living and self-sufficiency

**Economic**

- Courses and workshops

Figure 13 Panya compost toilets on stilts
Wongsanit Ashram

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>GEN Ecovillage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year Founded</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type of Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residents/Scope</td>
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The last of the ecovillages I visited in Thailand was Wongsanit Ashram. Located nearly an hour outside of Bangkok, Wongsanit was different from the other ecovillages I visited in that, as its name suggests, it was originally constructed solely to serve the purpose of an ashram. Established in 1985, it is described on its founder's website as “an intentional community for simple living and for engaging in social action and spiritual practice,” one that “seeks to develop and promote an alternative lifestyle that is grounded in Dharma, cultural diversity, and environmental sustainability.” Wongsanit Ashram is just one of many organizations founded by Sulak Sivaraksa, a well-known public intellectual in Thailand. “My foundation is a big umbrella, and under this umbrella we have the Spirit in Education Movement, we have Internationally Engaged Buddhist, we have all kind of organizations. I am myself linked with the Future World Council, which looks for something alternative to mainstream . . . I am also directly involved with the Schumacher College think tank,” Sivaraksa noted.

In 2007, Sulak’s Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation sponsored the third International Conference on Gross National Happiness—which Sulak chaired—in Thailand. I asked why he got involved with GNH. “Bhutan is a Buddhist kingdom
and just opened its country,” he told me, “so I was very concern. We were a Buddhist kingdom, and we opened our country 150 years ago, and we went wrong; we blindly followed the West, that’s why I went to Bhutan and I talked to [their government officials]. Of course you have to open your country, but be careful, look at our example, it’s a bad example. So that’s how I got involved, and when they started the GNH idea I supported them. I think that people should look more for happiness, not for Gross National Product.”

An engaged Buddhist scholar, Sulak founded the ashram at Wongsanit many years ago—long before the idea of ecovillages began to take root around the globe. GEN and Wongsanit Ashram connected only recently, and before long Wongsanit was chosen as a good site for ecovillage training courses—one of which I myself attended. In Sulak’s view, “We should think more of villages. Even in the urban areas, we should learn to imitate village lifestyle. In the urban areas you don’t relate to people; we don’t really connect here [in Bangkok].”

Arriving at Wongsanit was a challenge. The ashram is surrounded by canals on all sides, none of which are connected by bridges to the mainland. Accordingly, my taxi driver parked at the edge of the water, piled me and my luggage onto a wooden raft that was tethered to the bank, and proceeded to tug the makeshift ferry to the other side of the canal using a simple rope and pulley system that had been strung overhead. It took only a few minutes to reach the opposite bank, where a dock consisting of a small platform and a set of narrow wooden steps was waiting to receive us. I followed these steps into the village itself.
Right away, it was clear that Wongsanit Ashram had strong roots as a place of meditation. Peaceful and open, its buildings were positioned at intervals among the trees, which collectively gave the impression of a woodland setting. The roofs of the buildings were sometimes tiled, sometimes made of thatch or grass. Narrow red-brick paths lined with knee-high lanterns connected some of the structures. Scattered patches of greenery ran alongside them, neat but not so well kept that they seemed dominated by human control. A creek ran past nearby, and the warm weather was easily bearable.

With the exceptions of electricity and wireless internet, I saw no modern conveniences to speak of at Wongsanit. Although the toilets appeared to have been done in the Western style at first, they were flushed not with modern plumbing, but by pouring a bucket of water into the toilet bowl. Drinking water was captured in rainwater tanks. The food was local, mostly self-produced, and cooked from scratch. I was surprised to find that Wongsanit was not vegetarian: although I never saw red meat, they did serve some fish. We ate at long, low tables, sitting on woven straw mats. Afterward, each individual was responsible for washing his or her own dish and cup—a process that was also set up for maximum efficiency. Instead of running water, three different bowls were set out in advance: the first with soap, the second for an initial rinse, and the third for a final rinse. This system, though simple, accomplished the job nicely.

The sleeping arrangement at Wongsanit was likewise basic. During my stay, I was given my own little hut on stilts, which had enough space for two thin mats, a
mosquito screen, and some blankets. Given the hot weather, I wondered about the blankets at first, but they were there for good reason: during the night, the temperature plummets. As a means of fostering a healthy natural rhythm, the electricity at Wongsanit was cut off at ten o’clock sharp every evening. Then, at five o’clock in the morning, a gong sounded to wake the inhabitants up for meditation or yoga.

I visited Wongsanit to attend its weeklong course on ecovillage training. The class included participants from minority groups in the eastern and northern parts of the country, individuals from neighboring countries such as Myanmar and Cambodia, and people from Europe, New Zealand, and North America. I also noticed the exchange between ecovillages in that the group also included a teacher from North America and another from Findhorn in the UK.

The extent to which the residents of Wongsanit exist in harmony with their natural environment stood out in one way in particular. I learned after I arrived that those who live at the ashram jokingly refer to it as the “cobra farm.” This was due to the high population of native cobras inhabiting the area. When I asked how they coped with this aspect of daily life, they replied that they did nothing to control or interfere with the cobra population. Their reason was that the cobras had been there first, and as such they could not kick them out or kill them. Instead, they chose to live in harmony with the snakes, pointing out that as long as the people did not bother the cobras, the cobras seemed to see fit to return the favor.

Wongsanit Highlights
Community/Social
- Community kitchen
- Shared meals

Ecological

- Water-harvesting system
- Organic food production
- Natural building

Cultural/Spiritual

- Meditation practices
- Educational courses

Economic

- Courses and workshops

Figure 14 Wongsanit Ashram entrance crossing
**Proshika Center for Human Development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community/Organization</th>
<th>NGO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Type of Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residents/Scope</td>
<td>9 million people</td>
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</table>

If you want to reach the poor you don’t do it through an organization where the rich are controlling [everything], you got to have the poor controlling it, the women controlling it . . . and we tried to initiate that process. At that time, I must say, it was revolutionary. (Faruque)81

My experience in Bangladesh was different from its predecessors. Whereas in other countries I was able to investigate ecovillages by exploring them directly, in Bangladesh I was faced with a challenge. The conditions of the country made it very difficult to travel, and I found it impossible to venture out into the rural areas as I had done in my earlier research. In light of my inability to interact with the communities there directly, I did what I considered to be the next best thing: I talked to the central organizations that worked with and/or had founded them.

As a nation, Bangladesh is classified as a “food insecure” country based on data related to national food production, agricultural import and export, and the availability of calories and protein (Peterson 2009:213). Thus, empowering communities in Bangladesh means first and foremost to provide these communities with the ability to feed themselves. I could only imagine the poverty in the rural areas

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81 Faruque, interview, January 8, 2008.
by looking at the living conditions in Dhaka, the capital. As Mike Davis aptly describes them, “In Dhaka, it probably makes more sense to consider the non-slum areas as enclaves in an overwhelming matrix of extreme poverty” (Davis 2006:27). Yet Dhaka is one of the fastest-growing cities in the world. Its metropolitan area grew from fewer than half a million people in 1950 to over fifteen million in 2004 (Davis 2006:8) as waves of migrants from the countryside swelled the slums of the city. Every year, in fact, more than one million people lose their homestead or arable land due to river erosion; thus, migration becomes a survival strategy. Once in Dhaka, men look for jobs in rickshaw pulling or vending, whereas women work in food processing industries and in the garment industry (Siddiqui 2003:3). The working conditions in these factories are often appalling and unsafe, as the international community became aware in April of 2013, when the collapse of the Rana factory building killed 1,127 garment workers; mostly young women who “do backbreaking work in Dhaka for 12 hours a day [because it] is still better than being landless and hungry in a half-flooded village” (Goos and Hoppe 2013).

With this context in mind, I contacted four non-governmental organizations (NGO) active in the AGM and involved in building self-reliant and sustainable communities. The headquarters of these organizations are located in Dhaka, which provided an accessible avenue for conducting my research.

I began my inquiries with the Proshika Center for Human Development. The name “Proshika” is a Bengali acronym made up of the initials of three words: Proshikhan (training), Shiksa (development education) and Kaj (action). The
organization was founded in the 1970s by Qazi Faruque, a chemist by training whose experience as a volunteer during the 1974 famine changed his life course. During an interview Faruque said, “Poverty and famine is due to lack of purchasing power . . . poverty stays long and it does not get addressed because the people do not have a voice, so I instantly decided to work to increase these people income and to give them a voice . . . and then we had to get away from the conventional development paradigm . . . we will try to know what their priorities are, and how do they understand their problems, and what they want us to do for them rather than us telling them what they should do.”

Thanks to $100,000’s worth of help from a Canadian organization, Faruque was able to set up Proshika in 1976. Over the years, Proshika has helped hundreds of thousands of communities to organize themselves into samitis (primary groups), and to form groups of federations at the village and upazilla (subdistrict) levels with the aim of strengthening the human, socioeconomic, and cultural resource bases of the poor. As of 2007, Proshika claimed to have created 9.81 million employment and self-employment opportunities for the poor and to have brought over 1 million households out of poverty.

Faruque’s work often clashed with projects sponsored by the International Financial Institutions. In the 1990s, Proshika together with other NGOs led a successful campaign to stop the Flood Action Plan (FAP) project sponsored by the World Bank. In 2000, as elected president of the International Council for Social Welfare (ICSW), Faruque was in Geneva leading a march against the WTO. On the
subject of globalization he said, “It’s another name for spreading capitalism. And we
were saying that look, what the world needs was not the organization of capital and
market, but globalization of social development. The market is only free for
capitalists.”82

Proshika Highlights
Community/Social

• Organized country dwellers to form communities (samitis) to enhance their human and cultural resources
• Organized practical skills training

Ecological

• Organic agriculture program
• Social forestry program to plant, protect, and regenerate the forest resources
• Apiculture

Cultural/Spiritual

• Universal education program

Economic

• Microcredit
• Homesteading and small enterprise development
• Livestock, fisheries, apiculture, sericulture, and organic agriculture

82 Faruque, Interview, January 2007.
Figure 15 Dhaka street scene
I next met with Philip Gain of the Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD). Gain brought the necessity of defending the indigenous rights of the people of Bangladesh to my attention. According to the SEHD website, “The Society for Environment and Human Development works for human rights and environmental justice in Bangladesh through research, capacity building, and advocacy. Working closely with communities where the environment and human rights have eroded, SEHD gives the affected communities a voice through its publications, investigative reporting, training, and grassroots empowerment programs.”

Philip himself, the son of a small farmer, was raised in the village of Gopalganj on the coast. After attending high school in Dhaka on a government scholarship, Gain earned his degree in mass communications and journalism from Dhaka University. He immediately began to involve himself in human rights work with different organizations. “I always took an interest in reporting, and I was reporting human rights abuses,” Gain said. “I traveled a lot through the country, and I got to know what is
happening. This was from 1985, I started this kind of work. And in many places I saw the connection between human rights and the environment.”

SEHD’s operations began in 1993 and have since influenced thousands of lives. In 2009, it set up an organic farm in the small indigenous village of Rajghati. The twenty-eight families in Rajghati had once been completely dependent on the forest to sustain them, but were left without the means to survive following deforestation. SEHD intends to perfect their organic farm model in this village and then expand it to other victims of deforestation in neighboring communities.

SEHD facilitates a wide variety of training seminars and cultural programs to further its aims of achieving social and environmental justice. These include round table conferences, film and cultural festivals, study tours, and public training events for journalists. The organization furthermore advocates for underrepresented social groups at different levels of government, specifically targeting international financial institutions and government institutions that are responsible for the development and implementation of policies. SEHD works to raise awareness on a multitude of issues, including “the problems associated with the plantation economy and its effects on local communities and ecologies, indigenous peoples’ access to local resources, shrimp aquaculture, ecological farming, threat of coal mining, the rights of tea plantation workers, sex workers, and climate change issues.”

83 Philip Gain, interview, January 2007.
SEHD Highlights

Community/Social

- Organized the first Adivasi (ethnic communities) cultural festival

Ecological

- Organic farming training

Cultural/Spiritual

- Promotion of Adivasi culture

Figure 16 Food preparation in Dhaka
Research and Development Collective (RDC)

Community/Organization: NGO
Location: Dhaka, Bangladesh
Year Founded: 1996
Type of Project: Advocacy for the indigenous people of Bangladesh

The third organization I investigated in Bangladesh was the Research and Development Collective (RDC), run by Mesbah Kamal, who serves as the general secretary. Like SEHD, Kamal’s organization’s primary focus was to defend the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain their own manner of living in the face of encroaching Western views of economic success. The RDC’s mission statement is “to uphold the fundamental rights and human rights of the poor, marginalized, disadvantaged and the oppressed peoples, with special focus on Indigenous nationalities, Dalit communities, [and] Women and Children. RDC seeks to develop national harmony through ensuring justice and peace” (RDC 1996).

Kamal himself was first drawn to activism as a student at Dhaka University. He noticed that although the oppressed indigenous people of the country were trying to assert their identity and demand equal rights, they were meeting with significant resistance from the government. At the time, the constitution advocated a system that acknowledged only one language and one culture—effectively denying the multicultural nature of the country as a whole. To deal with the protestors, the state undertook a policy of ethnic cleansing, resettling around 400,000 Bengalis and committing any number of atrocities against the indigenous peoples. Kamal’s decision to become a social activist was a response to witnessing this oppression.
The RDC works predominantly with the indigenous populations of Bangladesh, the majority of whom are very closely associated with and sensitive to their environments. One such example is the indigenous group of forest dwellers. These forest dwellers, Kamal explained, were “children of the forest”: they knew how to maintain it, how to use it to serve their needs, and how to make and sustain natural habitats within its ecosystem. Although once a resounding majority in Bangladesh—97.6 percent indigenous versus 2.4 percent Bengalese in 1947—the indigenous population underwent a sharp decline between the years of 1978 and 1986. As of 2013, 50 percent of the region was Bengalese, and the other half was indigenous.

Kamal noted that the root of the cultural debate was fueled by a question of resource rights over forests and over land in general. At the time I interviewed him, for instance, the RDC was opposing a campaign to establish forty-two paper mills that would deplete the forests. Although the campaign proposed to replenish the forests by planting new trees, the replacement trees were not the same kind as the ones that would be chopped down. The indigenous people objected to this on the grounds that their livelihood was not supported by the new trees. “They are saying . . . we are not used to these trees, we don’t need these kinds of trees. Our birds like the kind of trees that are here, and many of them are already gone.”

Kamal emphasized that even though the program could potentially be advantageous to the indigenous groups from a purely economic standpoint, the environment itself was more important to them than strict economic prosperity. “They are not ready to trade their environment for any kind of economy,” he said. “Their
The economy is still a subsistence economy, and of course they want to progress, but they don’t want to progress at the expense of their environment.”

**RDC Highlights**

**Community/Social**
- Organized large and small mobilizations at local, regional, and national levels

**Cultural/Spiritual**
- Advocacy for constitutional recognition of the Indigenous People of Bangladesh

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84 Mesbah Kamal, interview, January 2007.
Finally, I interviewed Hossain Shahriar of the Environment and Social Development Organization (ESDO). According to the organization’s website, “ESDO is an independent and non-for-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of biodiversity, through working to achieve environmental and social justice. ESDO raises critical environmental awareness amongst the people of various regions in Bangladesh, and as our name suggests, we assist communities to achieve self-reliant and eco-friendly lifestyles through our capacity building initiatives.”

Founded in 1990, ESDO has assisted over 150,000 people in rural communities to conserve and rehabilitate their environments. The organization’s original purpose was to conduct comprehensive research on the adverse effects of the chemical polythene on the country’s environment and inhabitants. Its discoveries yielded substantial evidence that polythene damages “soil, water, the atmosphere, plants and animals, agriculture, health, and the economy.” ESDO’s subsequent campaign against this chemical was launched in 1992 and was so successful that it earned the organization international recognition. ESDO has also made significant contributions to the country in the areas of conservation, waste management, air pollution, social justice, education, and sustainable development.
Hossain held particular interest to me in that he was actively developing what he termed to be an ecovillage. Called the Environmental Camp for Nature Conservation (ECNC), the project was founded by Hossain and his associates in 1995. This “ecovillage concept” has been implemented in three locations as of 2013: Munshiganj in central Bangladesh, Rangpur in the northern part of the country, and Natore in the northwest region. The stated goals of the ECNC are “to conserve the environment of Bangladesh, to ensure progression of the socioeconomic situation of communities, to improve the health and wellbeing of community members, and to therefore eradicate poverty.”

Hossain and the ESDO work toward achieving the aims of their ecovillage concept in myriad ways. Using an integrative and holistic approach, the activists work first toward changing the behavior and attitude of the people to their surroundings, and second toward giving those residents the knowledge and skills they require to build a healthy livelihood within their natural environment. Activities such as adult literacy classes, health services, land rehabilitation training, and training in organic agriculture methods are offered to this effect. ESDO maintains that “the key to a sustainable life is about quality, not quantity” and that it is working to “reclaim the lost balance with the earth and within ourselves.”

While they all stressed different aspects of self-sufficiency and sustainability, Proshika, SEHD, RDC, and ESDO found common ground in their agreement that monocultures, conventional agriculture, and other forms of Western development have had a negative impact on Bangladesh as a nation. Whereas other cultures have called
organic agriculture a luxury that can only realistically be practiced by the elite, the leaders of these organizations viewed it as a pathway to freedom; one that would liberate the farmers from the capitalist market and enable them to hold on to their own land.

**ESDO Eco-Village Highlights**

**Community/Social**
- Community knowledge dissemination

**Ecological**
- Organic agriculture program
- Roadside plantation
- Training in sustainable land management and rehabilitation
- Waste management and compost fertilizer units

**Cultural/Spiritual**
- Adult literacy classes
- Capacity building programs

**Economic**
- Alternative income generation
- Information Communication Technology
Findhorn

Community/Organization: GEN Ecovillage  
Location: Scotland, United Kingdom  
Year Founded: 1962  
Type of Project: Semi-rural  
Residents/Scope: 500

In the summer of 2008, I flew to Inverness in the northeastern part of Scotland to finally visit one of the founders of GEN: Findhorn. Findhorn is one of the oldest and most successful ecovillages in the Western hemisphere. Its story began when Peter and Eileen Caddy and Dorothy Maclean moved into a caravan park in the nearby seaside village of the same name and started a vegetable garden. The story goes that Dorothy was able to connect with nature, and that the spirits told her how to make the most of their garden, which is said to have produced forty-pound cabbages and other dramatically oversized vegetables in an inhospitable environment.

Fast forward to 2013. Five hundred people were living on the site. A few are still in caravans, but many others had built houses. Some homes did not appear to be very different from the typical northern European wood house; others seemed to experiment more with straw bales, recycled materials, and renewable energy in their makeup. When you walk around Findhorn you can see an array of green building technology, such as turf roofs and solar photovoltaic panels. Certainly the most interesting sight for me was the cluster of homes made from whiskey barrels.

Findhorn is famous for leveraging technology as a means of making progress toward its goals and core values. It produces more energy than it uses from wind
power alone, and it sells the remaining energy to generate income for the community. Its biological water treatment system, “the Living Machine,” is state of the art, admitting sewage at one end and producing clean, microbe-free water at the other. In 2013, the community had furthermore raised sixty-one ecological buildings with features such as solar panels, super-efficient insulation, and locally grown and harvested timber.

I enrolled for a week-long “ecovillage experience course” that took place during the month of July. During my stay in Findhorn it was always terribly windy, a condition that I found bothersome as a visitor but that also made me appreciate the community’s ingenuity in turning the wind to its advantage. One of my teachers, in fact, proudly took us to see up close the four community-owned wind turbines capable of supplying more than 100 percent of the community’s electricity needs. Of course, this technology works in tandem with the fact that most of the buildings in Findhorn have reduced energy needs thanks to a high level of insulation and double- or even triple-glazed windows.

Findhorn has been able to create a thriving business from the wide range of educational courses offered at the ecovillage. Concurrently to the one I was taking, many others were in session, each with different emphasis—such as spirituality, community building, and so forth. My course had about a dozen participants, all of whom came from Western countries in Europe, Australia, and North America. In the mornings we had meetings and practiced community-building activities. These were
largely games and dances aimed at building trust among participants. The afternoons were dedicated to learning about the duties and work arrangements in the community.

Unfortunately, although participants paid a fairly large sum of money (something in the range of 600 English pounds) to attend these courses, Findhorn had adopted the practice of using the enrolled attendees as a cheap—or better, a paying—labor source for the community. Participants were assigned specific ongoing tasks such as weeding the gardens, peeling potatoes, or cleaning rooms, rather than receiving an introduction to the full range of needs and chores that a community needs to deal with—a range that I had assumed was what I had paid for.

Notwithstanding this pitfall, Findhorn has built a thriving community, experimented with a vast array of green technology, and developed a great organizational structure, which has allowed the community to grow and to manage hundreds of visitors each year. The common meals were served in a large, round building. Chefs were paid member-employees, but the chores in the kitchen and in the dining room were carried out by all of the attendees on a rotational basis. Inside the village there was also a convenience store with mostly organic items, either locally produced or Fair Trade certified, along with a café where one could buy a range of organic snacks and drinks. Another little wood house served as an exchange shop where people could drop off things that they no longer needed—such as clothes, books, toys, and so on—or just pick out and take home whatever they liked. The “shop” was clean and tidy and relied only on volunteers to organize it. No staff was needed to guard it since everything was free anyway.
During my time at Findhorn, I was able to tour the community, interview a few residents, and record my own observations of the ecovillage. One of the most revealing interviews I conducted was with a man named Craig Gibsone, an original activist from the sixties who was able to tell me the history of the ecovillage—including its relationship to the other major sustainable communities around the globe. Following the green movement in the sixties, he explained, spiritualists and environmentalists had gone their separate ways for a decade before reuniting again in the eighties.

Craig himself has been the cornerstone of permaculture development at Findhorn. “I am the voice,” he admitted. “I really feel that in a way, we have something to give to permaculture as much as permaculture has to give to us.” He acknowledged that permaculture is an integral part of ecovillages in general because “it is a good language, and it is a good way for people to design and understand the complexity of whole systems. Also, it’s a really great one for those who are not ready to embrace a fuller spiritual nature.”

Despite Craig’s work with permaculture, however, the practice had not yet assumed a dominant role in the ecovillage as of the time of my visit in 2008. As far as I could see, the vegetation at Findhorn had a neat and trim appearance. Craig allowed that permaculture is being approached cautiously by the members of the community, especially since most of the people who came to the ecovillage to volunteer were either traditionally trained gardeners or complete amateurs. Even though he had been practicing permaculture for a decade, Craig was only then beginning to have “open
days” for the community to come in and see his garden. Nevertheless, he was confident that the work he was doing would one day “go back through the landscape” of Findhorn, and he was conducting five or six different permaculture courses for guests.

Craig referred to the sustainable aspects within Findhorn collectively—not just its waste treatment facility—as being “a living machine.” He noted that the living machine had reduced the community’s footprint by 50 percent, and he was quick to connect this concept back to the esoteric aspect of the ecovillage. “The living machine, not many people would say it, but I would say it, is full of spirituality,” he commented.

Despite his long-term stay at Findhorn, Craig mentioned to me that he had only recently begun to build himself a house. When I asked if he had been living in common areas all these years, he responded, “Yeah! No money, no wages. Just building a community. We didn’t use [the term] ecovillage. We were building a community.”

In 1994, Findhorn launched EarthShare, a community supported agriculture scheme based on biodynamic and organic farming methods. The program was implemented in order to increase the self-sufficiency of the ecovillage and to enhance the quality of the food for residents and visitors. As of 2013, it spanned twenty-five acres over three different sites and supplied 140 individual households. EarthShare also works to raise the awareness of the dangers of GMO foods.

Findhorn Highlights
Community/Social

- Community spaces
- Shared meals

Ecological

- Organic gardening
- Extensive use of renewable energy
- Composting
- Green buildings
- Biological living machine

Cultural/Spiritual

- Shared beliefs and meditation practices

Economic

- Local currency
- Community Supported Agriculture scheme
- Businesses and cooperatives
- Educational courses
Figure 17 Findhorn windmills and green roof
Beddington Zero Energy Development

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<td>Residents/Scope</td>
<td>82 homes</td>
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</table>

Beddington Zero Energy Development (BedZED) is a mixed-use development located near Wallington in the south of London, about a thirty-minute train ride from Victoria station plus an additional few minutes’ walk. At the time of my visit, BedZED was the United Kingdom’s largest carbon-neutral development, comprised of affordable apartments plus office spaces, built on a brownfield site.

The development was completed in 2002 thanks to a three-way partnership between London’s oldest housing association, the Peabody Trust, the Bioregional Development Group, and Bill Dunster Architects, a green architectural firm. The eighty-two homes, as well as the office spaces and live-work studio apartments, are a mix of social rent and private ownership. At the time of my visit, in the summer of 2008, a two-bedroom flat was on the market for 250,000 pounds, about 10 to 15 percent higher than the regular market price. The initial higher cost, however, was supposed to be quickly recovered by savings in water and energy bills.

The first thing to catch my attention at a distance was the sight of what looked to be several rainbow-colored propellers jutting up from a series of roofs. When I drew closer, I saw that this was indeed the ecovillage. Indeed, the colorful protuberances on the roofs are the wind cowls, which have become a distinctive mark of BedZED.
Nor was its slightly futuristic architecture limited to the propellers. The buildings were arranged in rows, with so many windows and photovoltaic solar panels built into their south-facing sides that they gave the impression of being enormous greenhouses. By contrast, the north-facing sides sloped downward in a shape not unlike a ski ramp. The colorful propellers were furthermore situated among green-and-brown rooftop gardens.

Indeed, at first BedZED appears to be nothing more than an innovative, energy efficient architectural prototype. It is highly insulated (the wind cowls on the roof ventilate the airtight homes through passive heat recovery), produces most of its energy needs, recycles grey water, and has a biological “living machine” for the treatment of sewage. It is, in fact, possible to rent or buy a home in BedZED for purely personal preference, and/or the rational calculation of long-term savings, without being in any way interested in “greening” one’s own lifestyle. However, the structural setup and other incentive programs that I will discuss next are what characterize BedZED as an ecovillage.

The physical structure has been planned to be conducive to environmentally conscious behavior. All the kitchens are equipped with color-coded bins under the sinks for correct recycling; electric and water meters are displayed at eye level in a glass kitchen cabinet. Whenever residents use electricity or water in the apartment, the meters show them how much they are using. I found this to be an ingenious way to raise awareness about the day-to-day consumption of these resources.
In the two-story flat, both the kitchen and the living space were located on the second floor to maximize energy flow. The bedrooms and the bathroom were therefore downstairs. The south-facing windows did in fact turn the living space into a greenhouse in winter, which was also done on purpose to keep the apartment warm during the coldest months of the year. This has proven to be so effective, thanks to the airtight nature of the space, that residents rarely need to use their heaters.

All the homes have access to a terraced garden where residents are encouraged to grow their own produce. I visited the gardens located near the top of the building. The roof of BedZED is covered by a layer of soil and native plants that serves to insulate the building. Each flat at BedZED comes equipped with a small patch of grass and dirt on a terrace just below the roof line where the residents may grow vegetables if they choose to do so. A large number of residents do take advantage of this opportunity. At the time of my visit in 2008, 39 percent of residents grew some of their own food, and 86 percent bought organic produce. I was struck by the lengths to which the designers had gone to ensure that every apartment came paired with this gardening space. In cases where the plot was not directly accessible from the flat, little bridges had been constructed to connect people to their terraces.

To support residents who have a desire to grow their own produce and reduce waste, a community composting scheme has been implemented to convert kitchen scraps into fertilizer for the gardens. A local organic box scheme (similar to Community Supported Agriculture, CSA, in the US) has been set up to support local
farming. As in Findhorn, an on-site cloth and furniture swap shop lengthens the cycle of goods by encouraging second-hand use.

Where transportation is concerned, the development encourages bicycle use by providing storage facilities for bikes. At the same time, it discourages private cars by limiting parking space, sponsoring a car-sharing club, and supporting electric vehicles by providing charging stations. BedZED also has urban sustainability, meaning that its residents are able to take advantage of public transportation services just a few minutes away.

To increase social cohesion, there are shared spaces for common gatherings, including a community room and a common garden. During the early years, there was also a “lifestyles coordinator” who helped to introduce new tenants to a “green lifestyle” and who arranged social events. Although the development was still far from being a really cohesive and supportive community at the time of my visit, its residents nevertheless declared that they knew more of their neighbors’ names and faces (twenty on average, compared to eight in the surrounding area) in BedZED than they ever had in their previous neighborhoods.

The BedZED experiment has also had its share of problems. From a technological standpoint, the wind cowl, the sewage treatment plants, and the woodchip-fueled combined heat and power plant have all experienced breakdowns and malfunctions. The development has consequently often had to rely on the regular municipal services, a situation which has thus far prevented it from attaining its goals of self-sufficiency and zero-carbon emissions.
Nevertheless, even if these goals have not yet been achieved, the project has inspired both foreign governments and communities abroad to follow its lead, and the same green architectural firm that created BedZED has been hired to construct a number of other projects in rich and poor countries alike.

**BEDZED Highlights**

**Community/Social**
- Community area
- Community coordinator
- Nursery for children

**Ecological**
- Photovoltaic panels
- Biological water treatment
- Car sharing
- Green roofs
- Locally sourced building material from natural, recycled, or reclaimed sources
- Combined heat and power plant
- Rainwater recycling system
- Natural wind-driven ventilation
- Use of passive solar energy
Los Angeles Eco-village

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community/Organization</th>
<th>GEN Ecovillage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year Founded</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Project</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents/Scope</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Los Angeles, California is one of the wealthiest cities in the United States, but also a textbook example of the consumerism, pollution, and urban sprawl endemic in the nation. On the one hand, the city is famous for its Hollywood glamour and on the other, 22 percent of the population lives below the poverty level, and Los Angeles tops the list of cities with the worst air pollution in the country. Right in the middle of this metropolitan chaos, just outside of the city center, is the Los Angeles Eco-Village (LAEV). This ecovillage strives to bring community and sustainability to a city plagued by pollution, crime, racial tensions, and socioeconomic inequality.

I arrived at the Los Angeles Eco-Village in 2008, having signed on for one of the group tours that are held on a regular basis and open to the general public. The neighborhood that makes up the ecovillage spans about eleven acres, taking up two blocks off of traffic-heavy Vermont Avenue. Only two of the residential buildings in the neighborhood are actually owned by LAEV, and it was at the entrance of one of these apartment complexes that I was to meet the tour group.

I chose to arrive by car, but the street is well-connected to various public transport lines, making the ecovillage more accessible to those who opt out of operating a personal vehicle. As I pulled through the intersection immediately in front of the main building, I was struck by the same sight which tends to grab the attention
of most neighbors and visitors. A large, colorful, circular design is painted on the asphalt in the center of the crossroads, and further artistic embellishments attract attention to the crosswalks. It was later explained to me that the residents of LAEV had created this space as a part of their “traffic-calming” exercise, in which volunteers form a circle in the middle of the road and force oncoming cars to slow down as they pass through. All of this is part of LAEV’s campaign for alternative modes of transportation—the activity is meant to heighten drivers’ awareness of pedestrians and remind them to share the road with those who use alternate modes of transportation.

I entered the compound through a gate upon which hung a hand-painted sign inscribed with the friendly phrase “Welcome to Eco Village” and entered the lobby, which immediately struck me as out of the ordinary for an American apartment complex. What might have been empty, wasted space was made cozy and inviting by a group of couches arranged around a large coffee table. On tables and shelves along the wall there rested free books and other unwanted but still usable items, and I even noted a communal piano. This area is more than just a lobby for the community; it serves as a social space both for casual encounters and for arranged dinners and musical events.

It was here that I first met my tour guide, Lois Arkin, who also happens to be the leader and founder of LAEV. The origins of the Los Angeles Eco-Village are rooted in the Cooperative Resources and Services Project (CRSP), a “nonprofit organization [Arkin] founded in 1980 as a resource center for small ecological cooperative communities.”
Lois, who has a background in anthropology, initially became interested in the concept of ecovillages as way of integrating solutions for the social, economic, and ecological problems in American society.

As an anthropology major I had learned . . . what was destroying the planet, and destroying cultures, and I knew that wherever we went as a society, not only Americans, but other Western industrialized cultures shall we say, wherever we went we destroyed . . . I knew it was too late to just save indigenous cultures, but there were many cultures where people just needed to learn to take the best from the past and put it in with the possibilities of the future . . . my evolution toward ultimately starting an ecovillage had to do with my understanding of integrated planning that you had to totally integrate the social, the economic, and the ecological systems of a geographically discrete community. (Arkin)85

Within this context it seems clear that the multi-ethnic, working-class area where the ecovillage is now situated is the perfect location for her vision. However, its history almost took a very different course. LAEV began as a project that was meant to be built from scratch outside of the city limits, but after seeing the destruction caused by the LA riots in 1992, the founders decided to take their plans in a different direction. They realized that it would be more efficient and sustainable to utilize the infrastructure that was already present within urban Los Angeles, and that bringing their vision to the urban community would do more good than isolating themselves. The members of CRSP, Arkin’s co-op which was to become the financial backbone of

85 Lois Arkin, interview, August 2008.
the Los Angeles Eco-Village, decided to evolve their presence in the Koreatown neighborhood located between Bimini and White House Place, and in 1993 the ecovillage was formally established.

The main focus of the Los Angeles Eco-Village is creating a community-oriented culture, with a special emphasis on ecological sustainability. There are countless ways in which residents are encouraged to be involved with the development of the eco-village, and are supported in their individual endeavors towards cultivating sustainable habits. Throughout the course of the tour I saw for myself how the structure of the Los Angeles Eco-Village fosters a sustainable, community-oriented, and eco-conscious lifestyle.

The CRSP owns two residential buildings, and it works to ensure permanently affordable housing opportunities for people from all walks of life. To facilitate this venture, the Beverly Vermont Community Land Trust (BVCLT) was created in 2011 as an avenue for members of the ecovillage to become homeowners while ensuring that fair rates are maintained. The CRSP hopes to eventually purchase all the buildings within the neighborhood and incorporate all ownership into this model.

Although all residents who live along the two-block stretch composing LAEV are considered to be part of the community, the only way to officially become a member is to go through a selection process which grants residency in the main residential buildings. The entire community is involved in the decision as candidates attend meet-and-greets and participate in community life until they are accepted by a
group vote. They are then granted a provisional six-month residency before they are accepted as permanent members (again by group consensus).

As of 2008, there was a core group of thirty-five members who had been long-term residents and who were involved with the CRSP project, but the buildings—which are officially owned by LAEV—house many more residents. In addition, neighbors are considered part of the ecovillage and are encouraged to participate in community life through various events and projects. LAEV has an unofficial mission statement which unifies participants in their common goal of creating “higher quality life” and choosing “a lower-impact lifestyle.” Core members must attend mandatory potlucks and planning meetings, but community involvement is expected to grow much deeper than the basic requirements.

Residents are encouraged and supported at all levels to reach out to their neighbors and become involved in community building efforts. There are multiple easily accessible common areas throughout the compound. There is even a community room, which is essentially an unoccupied apartment complete with a kitchen and a full bathroom. The community room is open to the public and is used as a gathering place for meetings, movie nights, and study groups.

The Bicycle Kitchen is perhaps the most famous project that originated in the Los Angeles Eco-Village. Although no longer located within the compound, it was here that Jimmy Lizama was first given the space and the support to launch his non-profit. Lizama promotes cycling as an alternative means of transportation by providing lessons and tools for people to repair their own bicycles. He continues to reside and
participate in LAEV even after his operation has grown beyond the limits of its first home.

There are several areas throughout the LAEV complex in which all residents are encouraged to garden. The main courtyard is filled with fruit trees, and there are vegetable gardens growing in nearly every open space. Permaculture practices are promoted, and water-harvesting practices are employed to supplement garden water usage. A communal compost heap is set up for residents to toss their biodegradable waste, which is then used to fertilize the garden.

Currently there is no planning behind what is grown in the gardens, and this disorganization has caused some issues, such as the discovery that all the trees that were planted bore fruit during the same season, leaving the garden barren the rest of the year. Lois hopes that eventually they will find a knowledgeable volunteer who will be willing to step up and take charge of creating a more efficient garden space. In the meantime, she estimates that about twenty of the residents harvest 5 to 20 percent of their food from the garden.

Because of its urban location, the community does not have plans for complete self-sustainability. Instead, residents are encouraged to obtain their food from local, organic, and/or Fair Trade sources. In the same space where the Bicycle Kitchen was once located, a weekly farmer co-op delivers food and sells it directly to members of LAEV. In addition, one of the residents, Guatemalan-born Angel Orozco, who runs his own coffee shop, provides organic and Fair-Trade coffee to the residents in bulk quantities.
There are many other built-in examples of sustainability in the ecovillage’s infrastructure. When the buildings were originally renovated, all efforts were taken to ensure that materials were eco-conscious and ethically sourced. Every apartment is unique because tiles and materials were salvaged from garage sales and other sources. Renters who opt out of owning a car are granted a $25 discount on their monthly rate. Water-saving devices recycle out “gray water” for use in the gardens. These practices ensure that residents lower their ecological footprint and integrate sustainable practices into their lifestyle without even having to make a conscious effort beyond choosing to live there.

The population that lives outside of these refurbished main buildings is not integrated into the village in any formal manner. There is still a lot of work to be done to actually involve the entire LAEV neighborhood in the daily communal and ecological practices that are implemented in the main compound. However, efforts are being made to reach out, whether through building benches along the sidewalks for passersby to rest their feet, attracting attention through art and demonstrations, or promoting education through group tours such as the one I attended. There are future plans for further community involvement, such as a garden for school children that is to be built on a plot that had been recently purchased across the street from the main building. Eventually, CRSP hopes to purchase and develop the rest of the land as well, which it already considers to be part of its community.

LAEV Highlights
Community/Social
- Community potlucks
- Community spaces and garden

**Ecological**

- Organic food production
- Composting green waste
- Solar hot water system
- A demonstration gray water system

**Cultural/Spiritual**

- Educational workshops

**Economic**

- Time bank
- Supporting neighborhood-based eco-businesses

Figure 18 LAEV traffic calming
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