Creating Intentional Communities

A B E S T P R A C T I C E S A N A L Y S I S
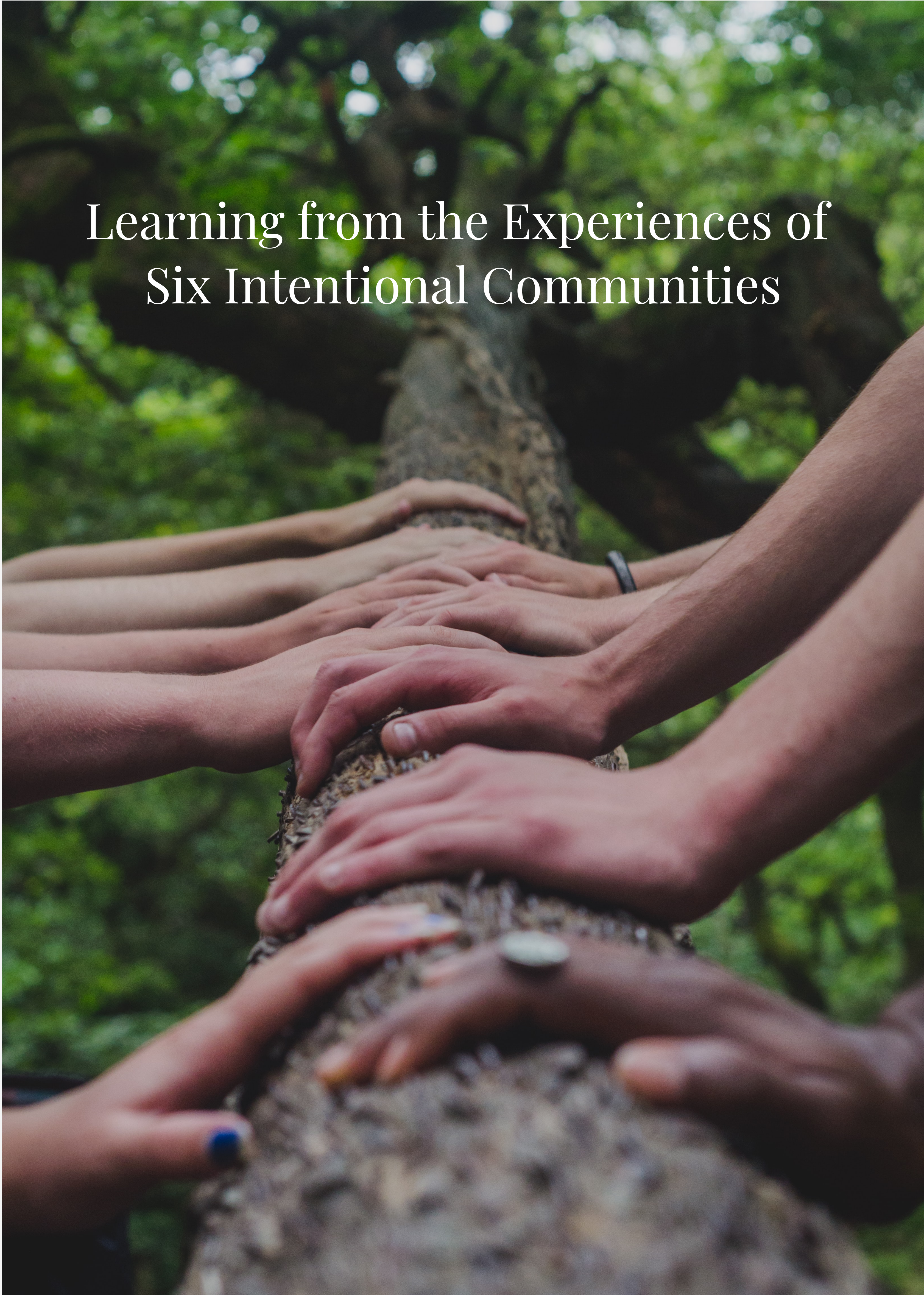
WAGENINGEN
UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

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Learning from the Experiences of
Six Intentional Communities

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
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01.

Intentional communities are "groups of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, cooperatively working to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values." **Small-scale, temporary inspiration communities** have emerged as a new trend in the field of ecological living and building. The **ecovillage** is one such configuration: a "human-scale, full-featured settlements in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development, and which can be successfully continued into the indefinite future."

02.

Existing good practices on (sustainable) community building and living are insufficiently researched and analyzed. By request of LiberTerra and the Wageningen University Science Shop this research aims to identify the **best practices** of community building with a focus on: (1) building a strong and flourishing internal community; (2) creating and sustaining relationships with the municipality (and other key stakeholders); (3) integrating communal living-working-learning into the larger community (e.g. the surrounding village).

03.

To this end, semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of **six different intentional communities**. The gathered data and the resulting analysis intend to build on two popular best practices analyses found in the literature. This report synthesizes the best practices critical for community success, shares the stories of the interviewed communities, and offers recommendations and suggestions that are hopefully helpful for the community building process (especially for those in the early stages).

04.

This report finds that a **well-crafted vision and mission statement** is critical to create a strong and flourishing internal community. The vision and mission statement should "describe the shared future your community wants to create; reveals and announces your group's core values; expresses something each of you can identify with; helps unify your effort; gives you a reference point to return to during confusion or disagreements; keeps your group inspired; and draws out the commitment of the people in your group."

05.

Use fair and participatory decision-making methods to greatly reduce power imbalances by spreading power equally among members and by offering a system of checks and balances. Explore among the plethora of methods available. These are the elements that are required for a well-functioning method that serves the community's purpose: (1) skilled facilitation; (2) a willingness to learn the process; (3) good communication skills; (4) (external) communication and facilitation training; (5) trust in the process and each other; (6) a willingness to let go of personal attachments and preferences in the best interest of the common mission; (7) a willingness to share power and guarantee equal access to power; (8) well- crafted agendas; (9) and, lastly, enough time.

06.

Learn to deal well with conflict. To limit (structural) conflict, make sure to set realistic expectations and to develop the ability for deep self-reflection. Create a system for conflict management before it arises. When conflict arises (as it inevitably will), use the following communication and conflict resolution strategies: (1) speak consciously; (2) write down communication and behavioral agreements; (3) frame conflict as a learning process that ultimately strengthens the community; (4) learn the fine art of giving and receiving feedback; (5) hold each other accountable; (6) write down conflict resolution procedures.

07.

Finding the right new people to join your community is one of the most important and most challenging elements to building a successful community. In this endeavor, the focus should be on making sure that the vision and values of the applicant align with those of the community, and on selecting for emotional maturity. Try to create a diverse group with a wide range of skillsets. Create and clearly communicate membership requirements to prospective members and make sure that you take the time to get the know the applicant deeply during your process. Also, trust your instincts, do not be afraid to decline applicants and dare to ask whether applicants can meet financial, labor, and behavioral requirements.

08.

Creating and sustaining good relationships with the municipality and other key stakeholders is critical to a community's success. Before deciding where to start your community, first see whether the local municipality is receptive to your ideas. When entering into negotiations, focus on creating win-win proposals.

09.

To establish and grow these relationships it is important to have a diverse team with a broad skillset and to ask for external help when you lack experience/ expertise in a specific area. The interviewed communities also stressed the need to be a reliable project partner, to be highly persistent, and to strongly believe in the worth of your project. Lastly, it is advised to build relationships that extend beyond your current collaboration (e.g. by inviting them to future events).

Most intentional communities seek to **interact with the wider community** around them. This can be for a variety of reasons. For instance, to share materials and experiences, or to share knowledge about alternative and sustainable living. However, this can be tricky as people may have negative preconceived notions about new ways of living. To properly integrate into the wider community, it is critical to think of your image. This study found that it is best to clearly communicate your intentions and ideas to the wider community as soon as possible. Try to make the building site look aesthetically pleasing and invite people over to show them around or to ask them for help. Make clear what you are doing through a variety of channels (e.g. by placing a sign with your plan at the entrance of the site). Also, communicate the municipality's support if you have it and ask the wider community whether the had any intentions for the site.

10.

11.

Try to organize a broad range of events in order to attract the attention of a broader group of people. There are endless possibilities for events. Go to the events of other intentional communities and see if you would like to organize similar events yourself. Also, **do not only invite others to come to you, but make sure to offer your help to the wider community as well; go out and see what they would need/like help with.**

Moreover, try to integrate in the local economy. For instance, use the local currency (if they have one), and hire and shop locally. Many intentional communities include an educational purpose in their vision. Inspirational educational missions carry the risk of having an undertone of superiority. This may make others less receptive to your lessons. Therefore, make sure that your educational "style" is not normative, but more in the trend of "exploring sustainable ways of living *together*."

12.

13.

After interviewing (and sometimes visiting) six intentional communities, we can confidently confirm that community living is indeed one huge personal growth workshop. Creating a successful intentional community is no easy task. There is a reason only 10% succeeds. However, fortunately, those who attempt it generally all find it well worth the effort. Although we have given many suggestions and recommendations that hopefully save some trial and error, community living is still for those who are more interested in learning and exploring, than in comfort, convenience, and security.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Small-scale, temporary inspiration communities can be seen as a growing trend in the field of ecological living and building. These inspiration communities are a form of intentional communities: "a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values." A common configuration of an intentional community that focuses on a sustainable way of life is an ecovillage: "human-scale, full-featured settlements in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development, and which can be successfully continued into the indefinite future."

Even though modern conceptualizations of sustainable communities and ecovillages have been around for a while (the term ecovillages came into common usage in the beginning of the 1990s), the pilot-oriented approach of small-scale, temporary inspiration communities gives us the impression that there is a lack of knowledge and experience on how to develop such communities. Some suggest that these initiatives may suffer from "not invented here" syndrome: the rejection of knowledge generated elsewhere. Whatever the reason, existing good practices on sustainable community building and living remain insufficiently researched and analyzed.[1]

"LiberTerra" is a sustainable community initiative that envisions small and temporary inspiration communities looking to explore new ways of living, working and learning. They are currently establishing their first 'tiny house' community in "Recreatiegebied Geestmerambacht." In light of this endeavor, LiberTerra has requested the Wageningen University Science Shop for help. As such, we set out to explore and analyze the best practices of sustainable communities. The research is structured as follows:

1. **How to build a strong and flourishing internal community (e.g. how to deal with changes in the community, how to find new members);**
2. **How to create and sustain a good relationship with the municipality (and other key stakeholders);**
3. **The integration of communal living-working-learning into the wider community (e.g. a surrounding village).**

These components were identified through semi-structured interviews (and sometimes visits) of individuals from six different communities in order to learn from them about what determines the success of alternative ways of living. In other words, what are the 'critical' factors for community sustenance and flourishing. We used the same interview template for all interviews (with minor modifications to better fit the context of a particular community). The communities we visited had different visions, organizational structures, decision making structures, landscapes (i.e. urban, suburban, rural), worldviews, legal arrangements, financial arrangements, property arrangements (e.g. renting, buying, squatting), etc. Selecting a broad variety of communities allowed us to observe a wider spectrum of alternative ways of living, working, and learning. Five of the six interviewed communities are located in the Netherlands and one in Germany. The communities were in different stages of development: some were still trying to find the right people and some had moved into their finished homes.

With this data we hope to advance the best practices analyses found in the literature. We particularly particularly build on the contributions of Diana Leafe Christian's "Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities" (2003),[2] and of Karen Liftin's "Ecovillages: Lessons for Sustainable Communities" (2014).[3]

The graphic below briefly introduces the six intentional communities.

NOORDELAND // Ter Apel

Through a close collaboration with the municipality, Noordeland was able to settle their community on the plot of a potato starch factory that closed down in 1981. Seven years into their process, they are now in their building up phase, looking to grow the community. They recently started renovation of the plot and are almost ready to start building their homes. Noordeland strives to be ecologically, socially, economically, and spiritually sustainable. Their core values are: respect and care towards one another and the land, sustainability, collaborating and exchanging with their environment and interested parties, sincerely connecting, being in the here and now, transparency, and personal responsibility.

IEWAN // Nijmegen

Housing corporations around the world come to visit "Strowijk" (strawbale village) Iewan to learn about self-organizing sustainable and social co-housing. Having started in 2008 with a group of six core members, they now have 51 members (including eight children). Their community is built on three pillars: sustainable/ecological building and living; social housing and communal living, and on an educational purpose. A key term which describes their initiative is self- organizing. They work with Talis, a social housing organization, and wanted to show that people in social housing can self- organize and should also have the opportunity to live "ecologically". They have asked the housing corporations to sign a declaration of intent to work with people who had a plan.

VLIERHOF // Kleve (GER)

The oldest of the communities we interviewed, Vlierhof has been around for eighteen years. Its main three pillars are: connection, creativity and growth. Vlierhof is currently transforming its organizational structure to one based on Frédéric Laloux's "Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness" (2014). The community members will be organized as individual mini-entrepreneurs.

PPAUW // Wageningen

Ppauw can be considered an autonomous 'edge' space (Dtuch: rafelrand). The land they occupied in 2014 is representative of a space where cultural and ecological innovation can emerge as alternatives to mainstream ideas. They are continuously exploring new ideas and ways of living.

ZUIDERVELD // Nijmegen

Since 2015, members of this community have been working to establish an ecovillage in which sustainability and connection are at the forefront of their lives. The Coöperatieve Vereniging Ecodorpen Gelderland' (CVEG), social housing organization Talis and the municipality of Nijmegen have worked together to create a relatively large ecovillage by mid 2021. The village is supposed to house between 75 and a 100 members. Their vision comprises of four main pillars: care, ecology, local community and awareness.
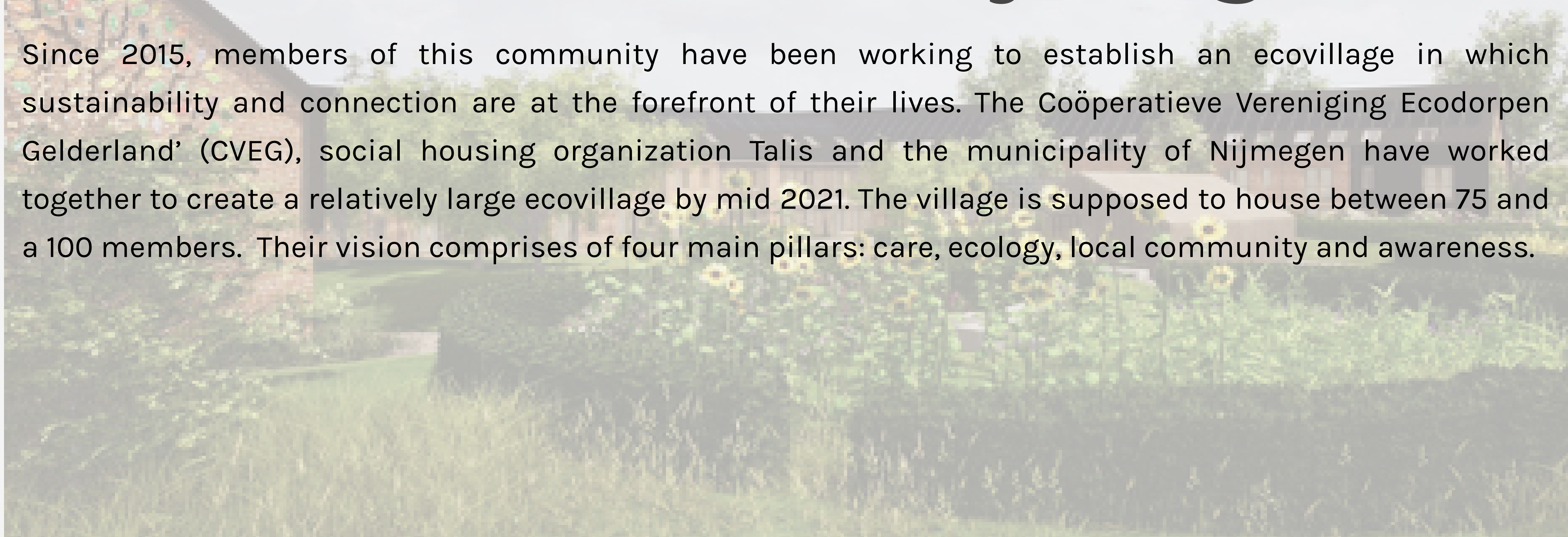
GROENLANDJE // Wageningen

Groenlandje emerged out of protests for more student housing in September 2019. They initially established themselves on a fallow piece of land that was later reclaimed by the municipality. Their ambition is to explore and demonstrate alternative ways of living, and to create and foster an inclusive and diverse intentional community.

HOW TO BUILD A STRONG AND FLOURISHING INTERNAL COMMUNITY
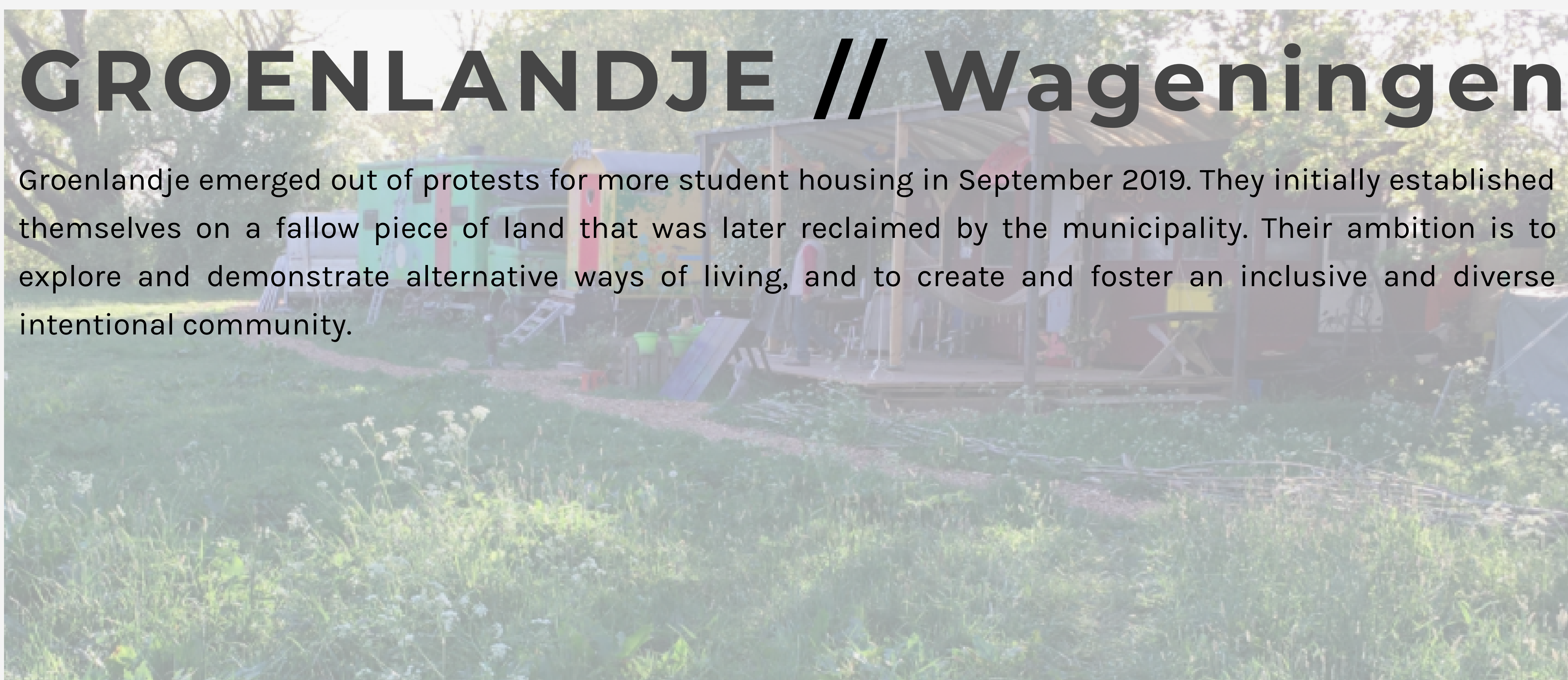
"During my interviews with roughly 150 ecovillagers around the world, one of the questions I always asked is "What do you experience as the most challenging aspect of community life?" The most common answer was some version of "the people." When I inquired about the most rewarding aspect, these same ecovillagers often chuckled as they gave their answer: "The people."

- Karen T. Litfin, "Ecovillages," (p. 258)

A well-crafted vision and/or mission statement

Many ecovillages have found it helpful to create a vision and/or mission statement once the founding group was formed. Although communities without a vision have succeeded, and ones with a vision have failed, it is one of the six primary ways to reduce structural conflict according to Diane Leafe Christian.[2] She highlights that **a well-crafted vision**: "describes the shared future you want to create; reveals and announces your group's core values; expresses something each of you can identify with; helps unify your effort; gives you a reference point to return to during confusion or disagreements; keeps your group inspired; and draws out the commitment of the people in your group."[2] At the same time, a well-crafted vision is also helpful in thinking about and writing down what you *don't* want to happen. Throughout the interviews it became clear that the communities continuously refer back to their mission to decide on matters and to guide them through the process (e.g. as a reference point for negotiations).

Crafting a thorough vision and mission statement is a challenging and time-intensive endeavor. It requires negotiation between individuals visions to bring them together into a communal one. Diana Leafe Christian's book "Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities" describes the different steps and the process of creating a vision and a mission statement. Vlierhof emphasized that a vision statement should be made as clear and concise as possible, so that every word matters. Some communities choose to publicly share their vision, while others keep it private. Regardless of this, at least make sure that it is easily available and understandable for prospective applicants and project partners. This may, for instance, ease the difficulty of passing on the built vision to new applicants and partners,

Finding the right organizational structure - power, decision making, and governance

Most intentional communities intend to share power - the ability to influence other people or systems - equally among members. Although every member may have an equal say on paper, power differences also express themselves through dominant communication styles, information discrepancies, high energy characteristics, or because of someone's role in the community (e.g. a founder). Christian warns that there is nothing wrong with power in itself, but people who have power and privilege in a group are often not aware of it, and this can be problematic.[2]

The **use of fair and participatory decision-making methods** can greatly reduce power imbalances by spreading power equally among members and by offering a system of checks and balances.[2] There are a plethora of decision-making methods available, so with the right experimental attitude, it should be possible to find one that suits your community's needs and wishes. Some common decision-making methods are: consensus, super- majority voting, voting fallback, consensus-minus-one or consensus-minus-two, and multi-winner voting. The most common one among the communities we interviewed was a form of sociocracy.

Sociocracy upholds two fundamental principles: (1) organisztional effectiveness (i.e. realizing the community's vision and mission effectively and efficiently); and (2) member equality - there should be safe and protected time for everyone to speak their mind, to have their voice respected, and to have their views considered. These principles are realized through key features. First, *decision-making by consent*. One consents when one is able to accept that the proposal is good enough, that it fits within his/her 'range of tolerance'. An objection essentially means that a proposal would compromise or impede upon the realization of the circle's determined vision/mission. A second feature of sociocracy is *circles and double-linking*. Circles are the organizational model of sociocracy. It represents a group of individuals within the community that organize themselves around a domain (e.g. environment) and elaborate their own mandate within their domain. Zuiderveld, for example, first organized, what they called pre-organizational circles at the start of their project, which were directly related to their core tenants (i.e. ecology, well- being and care, awareness and local community) and procedures that were key to the stage of their project (eg. building). Double-linking refers to a person being the bridge between two circles, by being part of both circles and actively connecting their needs and wishes. Zuiderveld used this method to ensure that all circles are connected one way or the other. Lastly, *feedback* as a distributed process (as opposed to being concentrated in certain roles or titles). After circles have implemented their decisions the circles use feedback mechanisms (measuring and evaluation) to assess the extent to which they have moved forwards (or backwards) in fulfilling the circle's objectives.[4]

This brief overview of sociocracy shows us some of the elements that are generally present in decision making methods which have served sustainable communities. **Skilled facilitation**, **a willingness to learn the process**, good **communication skills,** and **humility** are pivotal for all aspects of community living. Ecovillages Noordeland and Zuiderveld stressed the importance of **(external) communication and facilitation training**. In fact, Noordeland makes sure that everyone in the village is trained to be a facilitator and has hired a process supporter and project supporter who have helped with negotiations, circle coordination, and conflict management. To reiterate, a comprehensive **common purpose** will focus and unify your efforts. For instance, in sociocracy the circle's aim/purpose is central, not people's personal preferences. Therefore, you need a **willingness to let go of personal attachments in the best interests of the common project**. By extension, **trust in the process** and **trust in each other** is critical.

Try to decentralize decision-making as competence and trust allow.[2] Noorderland inhabitants explained that it was a process to learn to let go of your personal (or first) preferences sometimes and to trust the process and other people. Ideally, you would be able to give your input on everything, however with an expanding group, this became impossible. It would have slowed down the mission, work, and process too much. In a similar vein, Zuiderveld had to loosen their ecological demands regarding building material so that their vision could be created within the limits of traditional building regulations and their financial budget. However, to be clear, even though letting go is important, acknowledging the dreams and preferences of each individual is equally important. In the words of Liftin, the goal here is to "cultivate group mind without sacrificing individuality."[3]

Furthermore, fair and participatory decision-making systems require a **willingness to share power** and **equal access to power**. As mentioned above, it is imperative that people understand the power that comes with being a founder, having more information, being more dominant, having better communication skills so that they can equally share the floor with others. Similarly, try to create a space in which everyone is heard. Ideally, the facilitator should make it a point to "be alert to the reservation, hesitations, doubts, niggles, uncertainties, discomfort expressed … by members in verbal and non-verbal ways."[4] It will take time to learn to balance inclusiveness and sensitivity with the need for efficiency.[2] In this regard, a common practice is to have a short check-in at the beginning of the meeting to see how people are feeling and what is on their minds.[3]

An **organizational structure should be able to transform itself with the changing needs of the project.** For example, for both Zuiderveld and Noordeland, required faster decision making as the community grew. They changed to a task- oriented or proposal approval system in which a community member proposes a project, the project has to be accepter by the entire group, and then circles are formed to realize this project.

Lastly, **well-crafted agendas** and **the right topics** can prevent tedious meetings and instead energize the group. At Iewan they make sure to ask for input for the agenda in a systematic way, communicate the agenda in advance, and to only discuss topics that are relevant for everyone that is joining. This can save a lot of time and energy for the members. This is especially important because participatory systems already require **a significant amount of time**.

All in all, there are many decision-making methods that may work for a community. When you find one that speaks to you, make sure to read about the process, read about the experiences of others, visit other communities that are using this method, get trained in it, mix and match methods for specific purposes (but decide which one you are using before a meeting), and experiment and adjust to your specific needs and wishes. For instance, members in Ppauw recognized that hierarchical decision-making is a quick and efficient method for decision making, but have currently been working by calling a meeting whenever a problem arose and are currently exploring consensus models. Moreover, as a response to 5-year circles of building and collapse, "Vlierhof" recently adopted an entirely new organizational model based on the TEAL method (in which members relate to each other as mini-entrepreneurs) as described by Frederic Laloux's "Reinventing Organizations: An Illustrated Invitation to Join the Conversation on Next-Stage Organizations."

Dealing with conflict

During the interviews it was often mentioned that it is essential to be able to deal well with conflicts that may arise in the community. Although the aforementioned skill set of organizing a community is similar to the one you need for dealing with conflict, there are a few extra things we would like to mention.

Communication of expectations, self-understanding, understanding of the other are essential to reduce and go through conflict. First we may say to communicate the reality of living in a community. For instance, Iewan in the process of finding new members, Iewan clearly communicates to prospective applicants that "this is not the promised land and that this project will not take away your disappointments in society."

> "Community living is the longest, most expensive personal growth workshop you'll ever take, [but] virtually everybody I spoke with agreed that this full-immersion workshop was well worth the price."
>
> - Karen Liftin after speaking with around 150 ecovillagers (p. 254)

Christian beautifully analyzes that most people fail to realize that "our wider society is dysfunctional because it's just ourselves, doing what we habitually do, but multiplied and magnified by millions of people."[2] In other words, in order for community life to be better than life in wider society, self- transformation is required. One of many things we need for this, is the cultivation of **deep self-reflection**. This is likely one the reasons many communities practice some form of meditation.

The interviewees stressed that it was critical to invest in conflict management and to maintain regular and continuous communication between members. Groenlandje highlighted that regular meetings were important as it allowed for a "sort of intuition" to build between members. Examples of external help from our interviewees came in various forms, but often involved hiring professionals trained in a type of conflict management style and workshops. For instance, "Noordeland" got trained in and uses **Nonviolent Communication** (NVC) as a key principle of their resolution system.

Christian and the interviewees argued that these are some communication and conflict resolution strategies worth implementing. Firstly, **speak consciously**: try to use "I" rather than "you" in messages; check assumptions; and use neutral language to describe behaviors (e.g. I feel like X when Y happens). Steer clear of value judgments (e.g. you did X and therefore you *are* Y) Secondly, **write down communication and behavioral agreements**. What is normal is different for everyone. That is why some communities clearly describe what they find appropriate or not (e.g. public display of affection, nudity). Thirdly, **use conflict to strengthen the community** (as opposed to ignoring and suppressing it, leaving it, leaping into it aggressively, and changing how you personally feel about it). While easier said than done, try to regard/frame conflict as an opportunity for personal and communal growth. Fourthly, **learn the fine art of giving and receiving feedback**. For the former, consider your motives for giving feedback and do not try to convince or coerce change, but rather support someone's own willingness to change. Regarding the latter, listen for a potential core of truth and try to find out whether others agree with the given feedback. Some communities reserve time during meetings or plan specific sessions where everyone can share their feelings and frustrations. Fifthly, **hold each other accountable**. For instance, keep track of tasks/challenges from meeting to meeting, or implement a buddy system in which everyone checks up on someone's task with the intention of helping them be successful. Lastly, **write down conflict resolution procedures**. When you create a system for dealing with conflict you create some certainty for people that may already feel vulnerable. Also, when there is a more or less standard procedure in place, everyone knows that this is a normal part of community life.[2]

Expansion of the community and finding new members

Finding new members can be a great source of new energies, characteristics, skills, stories, and ideas. However, it can be very challenging to find the right people to join you. The most important condition for accepting a new member is **whether their values and dreams align with the already built vision of the community**.

Noordeland, shared that it can be quite difficult, and a balancing act to convey the built vision to new people, while not stifling their dreams and ambitions as "this place attracts people that like to do things, when you come here you have all kinds of ideas. It seems that you can do everything you want here, but there are already a lot of things which have been thought of here before."

"New people have their own dreams and cannot always see what is already in progress in the community, so they may want to start building their own dreams immediately."

- Noordeland member

As Noordeland mentions "there are basic pieces that we don't want to negotiate about. There are some decisions that people need to make and are ready to live with. We prefer if people say we love it, and if that is not so, then they should probably not join us". Otherwise, you risk (partly) losing your shared history, values, and culture to the new influx of people. Noordeland also stresses that you have to **consider who are attracted to community life** because these include people that may be resentful to wider society and who may be (emotionally) damaged by their experience with it. Instead, **look for people that are emotionally mature.**[2] In other words, people who display the skills described above (e.g. good at deep self-reflection, good at giving and receiving feedback, good communication skills).

During our interviews we observed that t**here is no set number of people that can join a sustainable community** or ecovillage. Vlierhof argues that the number of people their village can support is between six (minimum) and twelve (maximum). However, we would argue that this is specific to their vision and organizational structure. Zuiderveld, for instance, currently has 75 'promised inhabitants'.

Regardless of the size, the interviewees stressed that you always have to be careful and selective in choosing new people to join the community. That is why communities aim to have **membership requirements** (some sort of screening process). For instance, Zuiderveld requires applicants to: (1) have been a member of the association for at least half a year; (2) have been active in a circle during that time; (3) have taken the CLIPS training (by Global Ecovillage Network Nederland); and (4) have been interviewed about membership. These membership requirements may allow the community to get to know the other at a deep level, something highlighted as important by Vlierhof. Vlierhof blamed the five year waves the village experienced in which major things changed, on its 'weak' membership requirements which enabled newcomers to come into the 'system.' They argue that it may very well take up to half a year to get to know people's true intentions, (past) behavior, and emotional maturity, and that this is essential before a member is accepted within the 'system' of the village.

In contrast, others simply have an introductory conversation, **ask them to stay in the village for a while** and then decide on whether that applicant can join.

Lastly, listen to your instincts and **don't be afraid to say no**. Although it is understandable for people interested in community life to feel strange about not accepting everyone - or at least giving everyone a chance, it is less painful to say "no" to someone before they join than after they have joined. Christian argues that it is OK to accept highly wounded people when you are an established and relatively large community. However, only if they show a high willingness to heal and get better.[2] Also, **ask and confirm whether applicants can meet financial, labor, and behavioral requirements.** For instance, Iewan turned down people who worked full time, as they were looking for people that could dedicate a certain amount of time to the project (e.g. each member was required to work 3 weeks/year minimum on the construction of their strawbale buildings).

HOW TO CREATE AND SUSTAIN A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MUNICIPALITY (AND OTHER KEY STAKEHOLDERS)

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> "Make connections with the ones you expect resistance from and understand the reasons behind it. Investigate what is needed in that area, and see that, for instance, this is a place where people are moving away to build a life in other places. Then you speak to them on this topic and say: hey we are going to draw people here. We will invite younger people, we will create work here, and entertainment for tourists."

- Noordeland member sharing their strategy for win-win proposals

In the Netherlands, the most important external relationship is likely with the municipality. There are many legal requirements you have to meet in order to be able to start a sustainable community. One of the most important ones is a zoning permit (i.e. a permit that determines what a piece of land can be used for). It is critical to first check whether zoning permit allows the establishment of a community *before* buying or renting the land. In fact, Noordeland suggests that you should first **look for the support of the municipality before considering buying or renting a plot of land**. Here are the lessons we learned from the interviews about getting the support you need from the municipality, landowners, and/or housing corporations.

Win-win proposals and the mutual gains negotiation approach

When seeking partnerships or agreements, it is critical to create win-win proposals (i.e. beneficial for both parties). To do this, the needs of the prospective partner should be understood and you should identify and communicate how you will help them in fulfilling these needs. For instance, Groenlandje identified needs of the municipality of Wageningen: a housing shortage and insufficient space for cultural activities. Noordeland prepared a strategy for their collaboration with the municipality which was focused on preparing themselves to convince others of their potential.

In the case of Noordeland, the municipality wanted to give "something back to the people of the town, something to boost their pride, their local history, something to be proud of". As such Noordeland bought the land of a potato starch factory that closed in 1981. They agreed to renovate this old factory and to make it accessible to the public. They will create a little museum to remember the local history of the town. They look forward to more interaction with the neighborhood.

Old potato starch machinery, Noordeland

This approach is not limited to the municipality. Iewan Nijmegen sought a collaboration with a housing corporation and convinced them that they could offer them self-organized sustainable social (co-)housing. They now serve as a co-housing model for housing corporations around the world. Moreover, Zuiderveld had to lower their sustainability demands to comply with traditional building regulations, to not overshoot on their financial budget and to be able to work with a building company that had no experience with sustainable building. Instead of giving in, they focused on the interests of the building corporation and said: "if you want to develop in the sustainable building society, which is a growing market, you have a chance to think [i.e. learn] with us."

Also, both communities highlighted their **minimum key requirements** to realize their vision. In the case of Zuiderveld this was done with the core group of people using the tools and methodology of deep democracy. The identification of their minimum requirements enabled them to understand their negotiation position and to leave room for flexibility to conform to the limits they were confronted with. Zuiderveld identified that their project wanted/needed: a community house, minimum sustainability requirements regarding energy, insulation and housing units for people that do not have easy access to buildings through the housing market. They achieved their minimum requirements by for example using recycled concrete instead of new concrete, using recycled jeans for insulation material.

A diverse team and asking for external help

Noordeland, Groenlandje, and Iewan argue that **a group with a diverse skill** set is of high importance due to the varying nature of the tasks and challenges of communal life. For instance, you need organizers, planners, researchers, connectors, helpers, builders, diplomats, pioneers, etc. If a skill set is not present in the group, **hire external help**. For instance, Noordeland hired a negotiator for the purchase of their desired land. This made a huge difference for them.

Reliability, persistence, and belief

Reliability, persistence and belief in your projects are fundamental if the project is to be successful. Although there are signs of change, currently, not many municipalities and housing corporations are jumping at the chance for alternative living projects (in part due to negative stereotypes of temporary communities). This means that project initiators have to **be extra persistent** and that they have to **strongly believe in the worth of their project**. For instance, Iewan had to push for their proposal to be taken seriously by the housing corporation. They, themselves, "bridged" a formal barrier of going to speak to the director themselves to make sure that their project was no longer at the bottom of the pile. They enthused the director and the project was taken up much sooner. Moreover, Noordeland and Iewan highlight the need to **be a reliable project partner** by, for instance, showing up on time for an appointment and by (quickly) providing the requested documents. In other words, by showing your commitment to the project..

Stone garden, Noordeland

Relationship building

Try to **build relationships with partners beyond the point of needing something from them.** For instance, make sure to invite partners to your project even after it is "done." This can significantly improve the relationships you have built over time. Noordeland and Zuiderveld argue that it is very helpful to have **a key point of contact within the municipality.** This allows for things to not be lost in translation and to build a relationship with the other. Zuiderveld highlights that the municipality is not made up of a single department, and that therefore one will deal with different departments at different stages of the building up phase. Points of contacts may be created in each department. As a result, Noordeland was guided through the process by the municipality; they communicated what needed to be done from their part.

"At the beginning we were continuously walking a little behind [...]. They took us in the process, they drew us in, in what was needed."

- Noordeland member

Both communities achieved a positive relationship with the municipality (and also the housing corporation in Zuiderveld's case). Along the way, they changed many project partner's perceptions. For instance, in response to Zuiderveld's demand, the housing corporation hired a new employee who held a circular building perspective. Most communities have introduced building corporations to the future of sustainable building. And lastly, Iewan impressively shifted the perspective of the housing corporation by showing that people in social housing can self-organize.

THE INTEGRATION OF COMMUNAL LIVING-WORKING-LEARNING INTO THE WIDER COMMUNITY

"It is the same as the municipality. To really draw them in, once you have a plot in mind, invite them, talk with them, organize events with and for them."

- Noordeland member sharing their strategy for community integration

Most sustainable communities have the intention of interacting with the outside community. This can be a surrounding village, neighbors, or anyone who responds to their invitations (e.g. visitors). Each community looks for this connection for their own reasons. Common reasons are: (1) to share materials and experiences; (2) to share the knowledge they have gained by exploring alternative ways of living (e.g. spiritual lessons, lessons for a new economy, or ecological practices); (3) to prevent them from living in a bubble.

To illustrate, in its interaction with the wider community, Ppauw aims to provide and demonstrate alternative ways of doing things from the mainstream way (culturally, ecologically and economically). If "things go wrong" with the ways things are currently done, they are a source of alternative ways to Wageningen (and others more globally) through their presence (e.g. at festivals). Moreover they highlighted that being connected to the local community, allows them to stay connected to the 'real world' and not drift to the 'dream world'. For Iewan the connection with the outside community came as an 'after-thought' to the project. However, they now organize workshops, show their way of agriculture to the outside community, offer tours and conferences. In fact, housing corporations from all over the world come to see their "strowijk" (strawbale village). Vlierhof adds a geographical component. They limit their contact to people living close to them to keep the integrity of the ecovillage. That is not to say that visitors are not welcome, but in significantly limited numbers.

The importance of image

We found that many communities had to deal with the bad connotations that temporary settlements and alternative ways of living have. For instance, in the Netherlands people think that they may be gypsies or a cult/sect. While this may seem ridiculous, it is good to keep this in mind as you devise your communication strategy. Some villages, for instance, do not want to be referred to as ecovillages because of possible negative associations (*See Table I for names the ecovillage we interviewed prefered*). To overcome these negative connotations it is critical to **clearly communicate your intentions to the wider community as soon as possible**. To illustrate, the community around Noordeland was afraid that Noordeland was starting a camping site or that a sect was moving in. A good way to reassure the local community of your intentions is to **invite people to visit and/or to ask them for help**. For example, Groenlandje, Iewan, and Noordeland invited people for building days. This is a win-win situation because the local community can see what is going on and get to know the people, and the community members get some help in realizing their dreams.

Ecovillages	Description, names given.
Vlierhof	Ecovillage.
Iewan	Eco- community Did not feel connected to GEN. It talked about exclusion rather than inclusion. Moreover, GEN requires a spiritual component which is kept to a private matter in the case of Iewan.
Noordeland	Ecovillage.
Groenlandje	A community project.
Ppauw	Ecovillage not defined. This is good for artistic expression. Wanted to name it ecovillage or occupying nature. Use this name so it attracted certain people to the ecovillage.
Zuiderveld	Intentional community.

Table 1, names preferred by each community.

The importance of image is nicely illustrated by Groenlandje. They started building in winter, and because the building took longer than expected the site looked untidy for a while. This was visible to the local community, who, as a result, thought negatively about the project (they figured they were just camping there). The fact that the land was occupied and the negative connotations that come with that did not help Groenlandje.

> "It was not very handy to start in the winter, as then for a long time it looked quite ugly here, and you could see everything from the street. [...] So then people just (believe) … ah these people are just camping here."

- Groenlandje member

Therefore, it is important to **make a project look "warm" and aesthetically pleasing as soon as possible** (e.g. finish one cute tiny house first so people can see the charm of it, or by dedicating the first few months to building) and **always communicate what you are doing** (e.g. with a sign that shows a drawing of your plan and some explanation of it). Also, **communicate the support of the municipality if you have it**.

Unfortunately, despite Groenlandje's efforts (e.g. they gave many tours to visitors), their neighbours lobbied against them. The local community had interest in access to that land as well and Groenelandje had to leave after 8 months. Another lesson is thus to make sure that you **know how a local community currently uses the land or the intentions of the local community with a plot of land**, and to be ready to negotiate with them

Visitors and temporary residents
Generally, visitors or temporary residents are highly appreciated because they bring in new energy, ideas, stories, lessons, skills, etc. However, as we learned from Vlierhof, it may be good to have some rules around visitors so that it does not affect the integrity of the community. An example of an agreement to guarantee privacy is to communally decide where visitors are allowed to come. For example, most communities had built a place which was reserved solely for the community. The most important lesson in this regard relates back to our section on membership requirements. It is to establish membership requirements which may allow temporary residents to participate in meetings for example but that their participation in decision making is differentiated by the time scale and the impact this decision may have on the vision.

Integration in the local community

Lastly, some final notes on integrating in the local community. Try to **organize a broad range of events**. Think of communal meditation sessions, dinner parties and potlucks, dance parties and festivals, gardening sessions, art exhibitions, "zwandelen" (walking and picking up trash), etc. There are endless possibilities. **See what other communities are organizing and copy the events you would like to organize.** **Also, go out in the community and help** *them* (as opposed to only the other way around). See what the needs of the community are and volunteer to help them. This is quite often forgotten.

Moreover, If you are using a local currency, perhaps try to get the wider community involved. Buy, sell, and contract locally (e.g. hire local building companies for help with building and renovations).

Finally, many intentional communities have at least some form of an educational purpose. However, in temporary inspiration communities there may be a normative undertone present that is inherent to the mission of inspiring by example. This creates a sentiment of being better than others, which, in turn, makes others less receptive to new ideas and information, no matter how good your intentions. Therefore, make sure your educational "style" is not normative, but more in the trend of "inspiring by learning together" or "exploring sustainable ways of living together."

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