

CHAPTER 2

Sharing and Collaboration in European Ecovillages: Breadth, Enablers and Limitations

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Abstract

The chapter examines sharing and collaborative practices within the context of European ecovillages. The research is based on interviews and participant observation in five European ecovillages, located in Spain, Slovenia, Ukraine, Germany and Denmark. In total, 74 interviews were carried out, encompassing the levels of 1) community members, 2) enterprises or organisations located in the ecovillages and 3) the ecovillage. The chapter describes the sharing realities in the ecovillages, the sharing methodologies and the enablers of and limitations to sharing practices in the communities. Results show that, in contrast to other social structures that push 'members' towards competition, ecovillages offer incentives for collaboration. In these contexts, collaboration and sharing are the main trajectory to ensure sustenance, making ecovillages unique incubators for sharing and collaborative practices. As such, the communities merge

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collaborative and market-based economies, and so function as intermediate, or transitioning, spaces. Two frameworks are birthed: 1) A framework that outlines the sharing methodologies applied in the ecovillages and 2) a framework that positions the social and institutional enablers of sharing practices in the ecovillages. The research stresses the importance of aligning the mentalities of individuals with the sharing and collaborative values in the communities, and of carefully designing community structures to incentivise desired sharing and collaborative activities, while being flexible to change with the ‘sharing maturation’ of the community or group.

Introduction

Sharing and collaboration are surfacing as guiding principles moving towards the future of European livelihoods. However, complex, multilevel and long-term cases of sharing and collaboration are rare within Western industrial spheres, where single area cases involving carpooling, food-sharing or house exchanges have taken centre stage. In this context, ecovillages provide a unique example of place- and community-based sharing and collaboration practices. This chapter explores and delimits novel developments with regard to collaborative and sharing economies adopted in European ecovillages.

An ecovillage is defined as ‘an intentional, traditional or urban community that is consciously designed through locally owned participatory processes in all four dimensions of sustainability (social, culture, ecology and economy) to regenerate social and natural environments’ (GEN Europe 2021). Alice Brombin offers a description of ecovillages that captures some essential traits of the phenomenon:

ecovillages practice a holistic view of living, characterized by a new political-aesthetics in which pleasure, conviviality and restoring relationships of trust and sharing become essential in the pursuit of personal satisfaction ... following a process of individual and environmental renaturalization. (Brombin 2015: 471, 468).

In focalizing the collaborative economy, values characteristic of economic practices in ecovillages include *fairness, equity, transparency, low carbon emissions, inclusiveness and participation* (Frenken & Schor 2017). Furthermore, members of ecovillages consciously and unconsciously engage in discourses of ‘collaboration and community in order to reject stories of the economy as engendering isolation and separation’ (Richardson 2015: 122), thereby actively challenging neoliberal capitalist assumptions and biases. With a unique merging of a spatially embedded, intentional community with sustainability-oriented values, ecovillages and ecovillage members are engaging with collaborative economy practices on a daily basis. Such extensive and continued engagement with sharing

practices is unique in the Western industrialized social landscape,¹ amplifying the role of ecovillages as living laboratories for technological and sociocultural transitions towards a more collaborative culture.

The research presented in this chapter was collected during a field study of five European ecovillages² located in Spain, Slovenia, Ukraine, Germany and Denmark. These cases were selected because they represent the diversity of ecovillages in terms of size, age, economic organization and range of economic activities.

Data collection took place over seven months between 2018 and 2019 and combined semi-structured interviews with participant observation. A main demographic trend was that interviewees were highly educated, mainly with completed bachelor or master's degrees in diverse fields. In total, the researcher carried out 74 interviews,³ covering three levels of the ecovillage phenomenon: (1) *the individual level*, (2) *the enterprise/organization level* and (3) *the community level*.

This chapter describes the sharing economy of European ecovillages in four main stages. It first positions the communities studied within their socio-historical contexts and clarifies the main characteristics of each. Secondly, it outlines the collaborative and sharing practices documented in the ecovillages researched. It then elaborates on how these practices are enabled by the structures and cultures of these communities, including a discussion of their limitations. Finally, it considers the relevance of its findings in the context of a wider transition towards a collaborative economy.

Contexts and Characteristics of Case Ecovillages

Prior to the elaboration of trends and differences in the sharing practices of the ecovillages studied, it is important to ascertain in part the socio-historical contexts and defining characteristics of these communities. Each community

¹ Indigenous communities have merged these characteristics outside of and prior to Western industrial, cultural and political spheres. Arguably, the definition of an 'intentional community' does not apply to indigenous communities. The need for intentional communities generally arises where traditional communities have faded or been diminished.

² The terms 'ecovillage' and 'community' are applied indifferently in the remainder of this chapter.

³ The 74 interviews include 53 interviews with different community members, 16 interviews with enterprises or organisations located in the ecovillages, and five interviews with economic representatives of the ecovillages. All ecovillages and interview participants are anonymous.

is operating within considerably different national and subcultural contexts, although they are bound together by a European genesis. The cultural clues explained below have been distilled from the fieldwork and follow-up interviews.⁴ Accordingly, they are ethnographic accounts of the experiences and perspectives of the ecovillage members rather than a literature review of the national histories of ecovillages, intentional communities and the communitarian movement. This choice has been necessary as literature on ecovillage history is largely non-existent.

Denmark

The Danish ecovillage, established in 2002, was home to 72 adults and 30 children at the time of the field work. The community is characterized by individual plots of land⁵ occupied by families with fairly large self-build houses, all constructed of natural and sustainable materials. These planning and architectural characteristics are echoed in most Danish ecovillages. The planning aspect is mirrored in an individual- and family-based economy, where households each pay a yearly fee to the community and otherwise keep their economies separate. Freedom and voluntariness are central values in the community. Since the 1960s and 1970s, Denmark has seen a socio-political expansion of communitarian and ecological sentiments manifested through a widespread co-housing⁶ culture (Jakobsen & Larsen 2019). This trajectory has generally created fertile grounds for the growth of ecovillages and Denmark is at present the country with the highest number of ecovillages per capita. The narratives of ecovillage members emphasize a desire to make ecovillage life 'mainstream' and to show that 'the normal Dane' can live in an ecovillage too. Societal antisocial

⁴ Follow-up interviews were conducted with members from the case communities and members of other ecovillages located in the same national contexts. These interviews were centred on illuminating historical traces in the ecovillage movement in each of the countries. In total, seven follow-up semi-structured interviews were carried out.

⁵ The property is owned by a community fund, while the built structures on it are owned by the individual households. The households pay a one-time rent (entrance fee) for the usage of the property.

⁶ Co-housing can be defined as individual homes linked by shared facilities and certain shared activities (Beck, 2019). The main difference between co-housing and ecovillages is that ecovillages consist of an intentional community, whereas co-housing is often a collective of a randomised group of people (based on the market). Furthermore, co-housing initiatives do not necessarily include an ecological or sustainability dimension, whereas ecovillages do. Various forms of co-housing can be found in Europe (Tummers, 2015).

behaviour, such as paying less tax, not sending children to the neighboring village school or promoting the image of creating a separate society, is deprecated. As such, community members are attempting to make the ecovillage lifestyle culturally accessible by integrating widely accepted elements of social life into the ecovillage model, reflected in the work of Anette Høite Hansen (2019).

Germany

The German ecovillage was founded in 2009 and during the period of research had 36 inhabitants, 21 adults and 15 children. Located in the western part of Germany, this ecovillage practices a shared income economy⁷ and functions rather like a commune, with three or four large buildings that existed on the property upon purchase, plus a few additional tiny houses built after the community moved in. The project was initiated as an agricultural community and later evolved into an ecovillage largely focused on agriculture and education. The ecovillage is part of a network of 'sister' ecovillages located within the same region and which share a similar political affiliation and economic structure.

Contemporary Germany offers a diverse ecovillage and co-housing scene. Four main branches of ecovillages were identified by the interview informants and each of them was traced back to distinct subcultures and periods of time. Inspired mainly by political Marxism, politically left-wing communities appeared in Germany following the Second World War. Political and systemic change generally forms the community basis. Some of these communities define themselves as ecovillages, while others do not. The interview informants explained that the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s saw the rise of ecologically informed community initiatives driven by sustainability. These communities have a strong focus on organic and regenerative food systems, ecological building and lowering their CO₂ footprint over time.

Several communities driven by the impulse to instigate cultural change through personal and interpersonal processes appeared more or less at the same time, partially inspired by movements of sexual liberation. Finally, spiritual ecovillages arose within the German community landscape. These ecovillages include communities based on Eastern or Neo-Eastern traditions, as well as Neo-Christian communities and modern monasteries. Over time, knowledge exchange between communities has stimulated a merging of the various

⁷ The community practises a shared income economy, but not a shared savings economy. In practice, this means that newcomers to the ecovillage transfer their income to the common account from the day that they are accepted into the community, but they do not transfer their savings into the community account. As such, community members can hold private savings that they have secured prior to integration in the community.

branches in newer ecovillages and an integration of practices across existing ecovillages of different branches. This account is largely supported by Marcus Andreas' historical tracing of German ecovillages in his book *Vom neuen guten Leben* (2015). The case ecovillage is an example of a politically left-wing, ecologically based community.

Spain

The youngest of the communities considered here, the Spanish ecovillage was founded in 2014 and at the time of research had around 50 inhabitants, including 25 adults, 15 children and a group of long-term volunteers. The community was established in existing buildings in need of renovation, in which community members live in apartment-like housing. The interview informants regard the ecovillage movement in Spain as defined by two main trajectories.⁸ Similar to one of the German branches, one trajectory is characterized by spiritual communities, or communities that have been started from the desire of working with personal growth within a community setting. Examples of such ecovillages can be found in most European countries. The second and most prominent trajectory arose in the aftermath of the Franco regime. According to the narrative of the interview informants, the deep political divisions that provoked the Spanish Civil War lingered on after the dictatorship, when political disentanglement allowed left-wing representatives of the middle and lower classes to look for alternative ways of self-organizing. The movement is inspired by anti-Franco, anarchist and anti-militarist sentiments and is experienced as a radical political activity. Accordingly, it separates itself from society in general, accentuating its distinctiveness.

Given the concurrent conditions of high land prices⁹ and a rise in the number of abandoned villages in rural Spain due to urban migration, this trajectory has manifested itself through the (often illegal) occupation of abandoned villages and a type of self-governance largely characterized by common economies, anti-private property ideals and deeply rooted political engagement. This nonconformity is driven by a will to be autonomous and by the associated values of living off-grid and being self-sufficient. Among these communities, some identify as ecovillages, while others do not. The case ecovillage is a rare example of a 'median' community that does not follow one of the trajectories but focuses on social processes mainly through experimental systems of governance (sociocracy), common educational projects and balancing individual

⁸ A third trajectory might be defined as communities formed by Northern Europeans who have purchased land and migrated to Spain, creating enclaves of migrant communities.

⁹ As compared to the average wage in Spain.

space and communal spaces. This translates into a rent-based economy: members hold private accounts and pay a monthly rent to the community.

Ukraine

The Ukrainian ecovillage was initiated in 2012 and at the time of field work had 22 members, including children. The community was established through the private purchasing (by members of the community) of properties and existing houses in three traditional rural villages in close proximity to one another. As such, all ecovillage members live in separate, family-centred housing. The sense of community is thus transferred to common activities and shared agricultural land, showcasing how an ecovillage approach to the collaborative economy can be applied to traditional villages.

The ecovillage movement in Ukraine started in the 1990s in the wake of both economic and systemic instability and a newly gained sense of freedom and opportunity precipitated by Ukrainian independence. Within the urban middle class an environmental awareness has been progressively growing, along with an appreciation of clean air and water and fresh food. This demographic accounts for most of the community members. Despite this trend, ecovillage members generally feel distanced from and rejected by Ukrainian society. The narratives of the interview informants tell the story of a contemporary Ukraine that is experiencing a massive urban drift with a lingering memory of USSR policies, so that any voluntary shift to community life and 'moving back to the countryside' is deprecated. The Ukrainian ecovillage movement is characterized by a clearly defined ideopolitical split between pro-Russian ecovillages, commonly called 'Anastasia communities',¹⁰ and pro-European communities inspired by European ecovillages and often aspiring to integrate similar politics.¹¹ Structurally, the Anastasia communities are separated into family 'homesteads', each on approximately one hectare of land. Individuals in the community consider each other as neighbours who individually strive for self-sufficiency, rather than 'community members'. This structure eases the complexities of sharing, whereas pro-European communities vary extensively in terms of ownership and economic structures, as well as the integration of sharing practices. The Ukrainian ecovillage in this study is defined as pro-European.

¹⁰ Anastasia ecovillages are ideological communities informed by the 'Ringling Cedars of Russia' book series. The first book in the series is called *Anastasia* (Megré, 1995).

¹¹ Examples of such politics include the status and positioning of women, acceptance of unconventional sexualities and family structures, governance methodologies, and the practice of affectionate non-romantic physical touching between community members.

Slovenia

Founded in 2013, the Slovenian ecovillage was the home of 15 adults and children at the time of research. The interview informants understand that communitarianism is a concept distrusted by the Slovenian public as a result of socialist political rule in former Yugoslavia. The cultural, ethnic and religious diversity of the population, and the history of recurring conflicts between these groups, have resulted in a general suspicion towards inter-group community building and sharing practices in general. This intersection of cultural influences has allowed enclaved ideologically based and religious communities to surface in larger sizes. Communities without a strong ideological affiliation are typically smaller family-sized units of five or six members. The Slovenian ecovillage studied here is an atypical case of a less ideologically driven community that has grown to a total of 15 members. The community shares a common house rebuilt from ruins and a few smaller housing structures such as yurts. Individuals live in private or shared rooms while the kitchen and other living spaces are communal. Permaculture and voluntary simplicity are central values, as well as creating partnerships locally, nationally and internationally to advocate for ecovillage and community lifestyles.

Ecovillage Sharing Practices

This section describes the sharing and collaborative practices performed in the case study ecovillages. Collaborative and sharing practices were evident in all three levels of analysis: the individual, the enterprise/organizational and the community. Sharing and collaboration are mainly centered upon providing livelihoods in terms of facilities, goods and services. In pooling several forms of capital,¹² the ecovillages have acquired ownership, or common rental, over spatial resources, making a range of facilities available to their members. As such, the ecovillages engage in a variety of ‘commoning’ practices, described as ‘the social process of creation and reproduction of the commons’ (LeVasseur 2013: 255, cited in Esteves 2017) and are developing ‘alternative economic and social arrangements, such as inclusive decision-making, cooperative enterprise, collective consumption, and “economic communalism”’ (Mychajluk, 2017: 181).

The commune-like communities are highly integrated and have a large number of communal assets (shared facilities, goods and services), while the communities with individual housing lean more towards private ownership. These levels of ‘commoning’ are in alignment with previous research in the field (e.g., Mychajluk 2017; Lockyer, 2017; Ergas 2015; Moravčíková & Fürjészová 2018). In the commune-like communities, individuals and businesses alike share

¹² Including financial, social, and human capital.

resources and facilities. Several community members use the metaphor of ‘one big family’ to explain this sharing reality. Examples of shared resources include living and common spaces (leisure rooms and multi-purpose spaces such as dining rooms, bars, meeting rooms, playrooms for children, saunas and swimming pools), hardware (kitchen equipment, washing machines, garden tools and tools such as those in sewing and carpentry workshops), mobility (cars and car sharing) and shared infrastructure (electricity, heating, water, biogas, internet and roads). One Slovenian ecovillage member describes it accordingly:

Almost everything which is not in this room, is common and we all use it together ... because we do everything like in one big family, you know? Because heating, washing things, cooking, these are all things that we do together.

Although the communities with individual housing are separated into individualized housing units, they have assimilated certain sharing solutions. For example, in the Danish community, a ‘freezer community’ exists where community members can store food, along with a consumer group that allows for collective bulk purchase of food by members. Additionally, the community owns a communal garden, a fruit orchard, chickens, and other facilities like a sauna, playgrounds, campfire, shelter, a lake and table tennis, as well as a ‘free shop’ and recycling centre where members can share clothes and items with each other. Community members of all five ecovillages engage in a high degree of sharing and gifting of personal belongings and a variety of homemade products through various sharing pathways (further discussed below). A Danish community member describes their gifting culture:

The email system has been used a lot to say ‘now we have five boxes, does anybody want them? Pick them up for free’, or ‘we need to get rid of this couch or this table, is anybody interested?’

Collaboration and sharing also takes place through activities or ‘services’. A good example of this is communal cooking and meals. This is an important social meeting point that has been institutionalized in several of the ecovillages. The Spanish community shares a common lunch every day, albeit on a voluntary basis, whereas the Slovenians share lunch and an evening meal daily. The German community shares all meals, while in the Danish and Ukrainian communities, on the other hand, communal meals happen on an ad-hoc basis and are arranged by members who volunteer (non-institutionalized). A Spanish ecovillage member expresses her appreciation of this exchange of services:

I love that I have to cook today for example, and the rest of the month I go to eat. Without cooking, without buying groceries, without thinking about

it. I just go and eat. 29 days and only one day of cooking. For me that is very good. And that doesn't happen in other situations or in the city.

Other services are self-organized within the community by a group of community members as a response to a shared need or desire (e.g., childcare, consumer and production groups, football or board game clubs, movie nights, singing circles and yoga classes). Services are also provided by individual members to the community. These services similarly include cultural activities such as yoga and contact improvisation classes, theatre training, drawing lessons and crafts workshops, as well as various alternative treatment and therapy methodologies. It is also a common practice for members to participate in the courses and events hosted in their communities. In the business and organizational realm, community members will typically cook for visitors who attend courses and events hosted by the ecovillage, be responsible for event logistics and facilitation, and host participants in their private homes. These customs indicate that the 'business' realm and the community realm are highly intertwined and are rarely strictly separated. Businesses are mainly understood in terms of the community members who own them and are treated accordingly. As such, sharing and collaboration take place between individuals and businesses. This includes the use of technical assistance and specialized knowledge within the community, such as legal support, translation, IT services or administration by businesses. In some cases, human resources have also been translated into financial resources such as investments or informal loans. The communities also foster productions and activities otherwise unavailable in rural areas. As the community members constitute 'immediate customers', it is easier for household productions, cottage industries or small businesses to venture out. In return for their customer loyalty, community members are granted access to in-house products and services, to acquire which they would otherwise have to travel.

The most prominent shared service is 'human resources', the immediate or organized availability of assistance in the shape of hands or heads for advice, ideas and solutions. 'Help and assistance' is a fluid currency that is constantly in use. During communal meals requests for help are often called out, such as 'two or three hands are needed for this or that task', and in most cases help is to be found. Another embodiment of non-institutionalized shared human resources is exemplified by a Ukrainian ecovillage member:

I know I can count on the help of my neighbours [community members]. Our house is cold now, it is an old house, and I know that if I came here [from our urban home] I could ask to stay for a night at some of the neighbours' places. It would be pleasant for me and for them also.

Services also extend to the numerous informal learning opportunities that frequently emerge in the ecovillage environment through interpersonal relations. A Slovenian ecovillage member explains this continuous dynamic:

There are so many different little bits of knowledge! You know, you can ask one person about sociocracy or dragon dreaming, another person told me about facilitation, and another person told me about building and wood carving, and parenting, a lot, a lot. I've never been a babysitter before, so this is for me really big. And [someone is] teaching music sometimes because she's playing the violin, just all of these tools ... all this for me is a service, you know? I'm learning all this stuff.

One essential 'human resource' is community work. Lisa Mychajluk defines it as 'the unpaid, intra-organizational work that is commonly undertaken by members in a cooperative' (Mychajluk 2017: 184). On average, community members in the five ecovillages dedicate 42.6 hours¹³ of work to the community every month. Community work is integrated into a narrative of 'mutual benefit', whereby members 'transfer' work that would normally provide a personal livelihood to the livelihood of the community. These are mainly household activities that have been expanded into the wider community. Community work is experienced as a part of 'normal life': chores that must be dealt with independently of living in an ecovillage or not, but that are often more effectively handled in a community setting. Cleaning, cooking and maintenance are common cases of community work typically organized through rotation or shared responsibility schemes. For example, in the Slovenian ecovillage, each week a new 'couple' is responsible for daily cleaning and every Tuesday all members are invited to take part in an extensive cleaning of the premises.

As such, the community members have access to a wide range of facilities, activities, goods and services that would not be available to the vast majority of, or to any, members outside of the community setting – due to financial constraints or lack of availability. Many of these facilities would also be available to individuals in urban spatialities, albeit based on monetary exchange. One Spanish ecovillage member explains this financial dimension:

The difference for me is money. I can do all the things I do here in the city, but here with less money. In the city there are consumer groups, and ecological groups, and a network to take care of the children, but to sustain that economically you need to put in a big amount of money.

¹³ This average is based on the monthly estimate of the 53 community members interviewed.

In pooling their financial and human resources, the ecovillages provide a continuum of shared facilities and services that are cost-free (apart from rent, initial entrance payments or other financial agreements) and continually available for members. As Karen T. Litfin eloquently writes in her book *Ecovillages: Lessons for Sustainable Community*:

In the affluent countries, many ecovillagers are living comfortably on incomes that place them well below the poverty line. Their secret? A combination of self-sufficiency, sharing and elegant simplicity. (Litfin 2014: 81).

Sharing Methodologies

Apart from sharing through common ownership and lending/borrowing, the types of sharing documented here are indicative of various other sharing methodologies. Ecovillages apply these methodologies within the community, as well as in their external relations. The lines between methodologies (sharing, gifting, bartering and monetary exchanges) are blurred and often situationally dependent. To understand the reality of community life, these levels of sharing methodologies should be imagined as interactive and fluid concepts, illustrated in Figure 2.1.

The service of offering drawing lessons, for example, is typically given as a gift to one person, bartered for some good with another and exchanged for money with a third person. The pathway chosen is usually determined by the depth of personal relationships and the means and capabilities of the recipient, along with the community norm. Bartering is a common practice in ecovillage settings; members exchange products for products, services for services or products for services and vice versa. In terms of products, this method is especially used in Ukraine, where members grow produce on individual plots, and then barter to diversify their food supply and attain greater self-sufficiency. The German ecovillage, on the other hand, operates on the basis of shared income, in which context bartering becomes insignificant. Gifting is a level of the sharing culture in which community members give their private belongings or services to other community members. This procedure is especially normative in the income-sharing community, as individuals are increasingly aware of the needs, wants and consumption of others and try to reduce the total consumption. It is also employed in the Ukrainian ecovillage, where self-sufficiency is highly valued. Gifting can also take the shape of ‘free flow’ economies, where members give what they are able to without expecting direct reciprocity, or as part of a generalized reciprocity. This economic attitude is explained by Tobias from the Danish ecovillage:

When I was about to put on the roof here, I had no idea how to put on this kind of roof, then I asked my neighbour and he said ‘Oh I’m not that good, but I know this other person in the community, he is good at it’. I had never even met this person, and then the person comes and he is

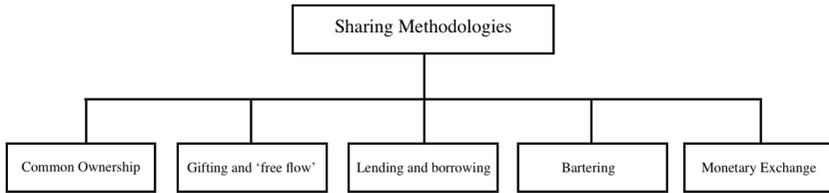


Figure 2.1: Sharing methodologies applied in ecovillages.

super busy with his own house, and then he spent half a day helping me with the roof. And I'm like 'shouldn't I pay you anything for this?' and he is like 'no no, you will just help some other time'.

The 'free flow' mentality is apparent in all the communities; however, it is especially present in the income-sharing setting and in settings involving greater financial individuality (Ukraine and Denmark). On a slightly different level, the communities create stable and beneficial relations to the external world. The ecovillages situate themselves within a wide pattern of linkages, so as to extend their sharing practices beyond community borders and to obtain greater self-sustainability through common sustenance practices, the sharing of advice and experience, funding opportunities and the amassing of collective social capital. These relations, or linkages, include ecovillage to ecovillage relations; national, European and global networks and associations; collaborations with organizations, businesses and governments; and relations with local villages. The depth of linkage embeddedness varies between ecovillages, but they are all actively engaging in external relations to expand their sharing practice reach and to provide non-monetary paths for sustenance. The trend of establishing linkages and networks is reflected in the findings of Robert Hall (2015), Susanna Waerther (2014), Shahrzad Barani et al. (2018) and Robert Boyer (2014).

Enablers of Sharing

The breadth of collaborative and sharing practices in ecovillages has important social and technological implications. Ecovillages have developed social norms based on, and continually reinforced by, the shared values of the individuals in the community. The themes of 'limiting resource use' and 'sustainable alternatives'¹⁴ guide these values, and are also supported by previous ecovillage research (e.g., Brombin 2015; Esteves 2017; Ergas & Clement 2015; Waerther 2014). Tension between these values and social norms and the surrounding reality has motivated innovation and experimentation and has led to novel sharing solutions. These solutions, social norms and the enabling social context

¹⁴ Including social, cultural, environmental and economic sustainability.

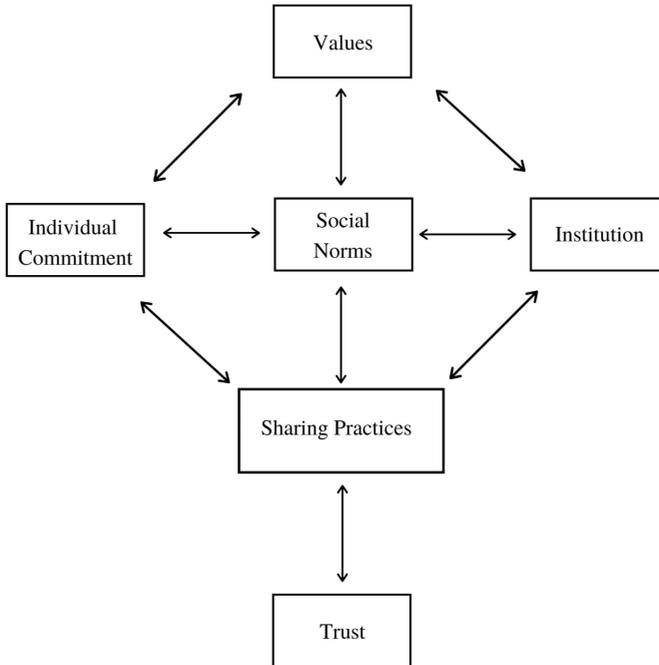


Figure 2.2: Cultural and institutional enablers of sharing and collaboration in ecovillages.

reinforce each other and, together, stabilize the sharing reality of the ecovillage. Figure 2.2 illustrates the enabling social ‘cultures’ (*individual commitment and trust*) and the enabling structures (*institution*).

Enabling cultures

The use and development of sharing and collaborative practices are enabled by a high level of commitment on the part of community members to the project/ ecovillage and the common intentions. Many state that they do not experience the ecovillage as separate from themselves, but as part of their immediate reality. They perceive it as their own project and take ownership of its continuation and success, with the result that they are willing to devote large quantities of time and energy to its realization. Most members report that they are willing to do more community work than they do at present. A large number of the members are thus willing to ‘sacrifice’ immediate self-interest for the collective good, if they see a pressing community need, reflecting their commitment. Via carefully structured phases of social inclusion and membership processes, ecovillages can ensure that members are committed, are aligned with the

common vision and fit in socially. Membership processes are relatively long and require multiple steps that will normally take more than a year. Common features are initial visits, written or verbal applications, probationary periods and a community decision.

The community setting itself generates other ways for the members to relate to each other. Relations among community members are constantly revitalized as continual interaction and collaboration are necessitated by common activities and simply through living in close physical proximity. Ecovillage members commit themselves to staying within a web of relationships. This commitment entails participating in social processes of all kinds, from sharing personal emotions and states of mind to engaging in, sometimes uncomfortable, conversations and resolving conflicts.

Where ecovillages depart most markedly from more conventional social trajectories is in the commitment by the members to resolve tensions and continually re-evaluate their ways of relating to each other. Ecovillages are thus places where personal spheres increasingly become the property of, or held by, the collective. Such continual and deep sharing requires trust and generates trust in return. It surfaces through normalized, daily practices such as leaving doors unlocked. This, however, is not the case in the Ukrainian ecovillage because the community is only partially spatial, and community members are living among residents who are not part of the community. In all five ecovillages, children roam around freely within the community perimeter, and parents trust that all community members are observant of their wellbeing. These practices, considered normal in the eyes of community members, indicate a high level of trust within the community. Individuals in the community setting generally enjoy a deeper level of intimacy, based solely on the fact that simply by being members of the community they immediately own a commonality, a shared commitment and common frames of reference.

The high level of trust spills over into the businesses and organizations located in the communities. The businesses and organizations in the ecovillages actively attempt to change the competitive status quo of business environments. Accordingly, sharing, trust and openness are valued principles. Many enterprises and organizations are even willing to share their ideas and information freely, making no distinction between businesses outside of or inside the community. Trust and collaborative practices are seen to reinforce each other in the ecovillages, so that trust among community members is essential for the deepening of sharing practices.

Enabling structures

The technical structures mainly consist of the formal and informal institutions that the communities have devised through legal setups, community constitutions and community rules. Central to all of this, the ecovillages constitute

various degrees of common ownership. The wider the extent of a co-owned livelihood (financial means/housing/productions/facilities ...), the greater is the incentive for the community members to collaborate and engage in sharing practices. Common ownership entails common responsibility and legitimizes the right of community members to request or demand cooperation from the others. Waerther (2014) also emphasizes the fact that through common ownership, members share the economic risk. Furthermore, the institutionalization of sharing activities is a practical and symbolic tool, enabling ecovillages to ensure the continuation of key values, standards and activities. Examples of these enabling structures are community work and working groups, which are structured spaces for ongoing collaborations.

The Spanish and Slovenian ecovillages have written agreements establishing the minimum hours of community work expected from members, whereas other communities have institutionalized working groups. In these models, community members volunteer for different activity groups, such as cooking, cleaning, mobility or communications. These groups have responsibility and decision-making authority within their field of work, and distribute these responsibilities to individual community members. Meetings for emotional sharing have also become structured practices for the ecovillages and are used to facilitate social cohesion through conflict resolution, deepening relations and inducing trust. Emotional support is institutionalized in three of the ecovillages, through weekly or monthly meetings that facilitate emotional sharing and processing.

Limitations to Sharing Practices

An underlying challenge to sharing practices is the need for individuals to change mindsets that generally reflect the surrounding culture. The ecovillages have clearly established their intention to engage in sharing practices and to shift from a competitive to a cooperative culture. However, for this intention to be realized, each community member needs to shift their own mindset in a similar direction. Many community members relate that such mental and emotional change is the greatest barrier to the further development and entrenchment of sharing practices in their communities. This challenge is hinted at in the work of Waerther (2014) and Mychajluk (2017), though without further elaboration. Mental barriers to the deepening of collaboration and sharing activities surface within the context of community work. All the ecovillages report conflicts related to reaching a common definition of community work, as well as controlling and tracking the amount of community work contributed by each member. Tension arises from comparisons between individual contributions to community work and perceived inequality in this area. These social and personal barriers limit further collaboration between members because they generate a growing distrust.

Furthermore, sharing practices in the communities do not stretch beyond immediate realities, evidenced by the fact that none of the communities have institutionalized any comprehensive social security systems.¹⁵ This is challenged by Geseko von Lüpke's (2012) testimony to the fact that social securities exist in other ecovillages. Certain social security¹⁶ elements are, however, incorporated in the ecovillage structures. By sharing income, inhabitants of the German ecovillage are able to support each other economically if members are temporarily out of employment. Pensions and eldercare have been the centre of discussion in several of the ecovillages. These have been especially pressing topics in the income-sharing community, as although members are officially not allowed to save money outside of the community account, they are at the same time not obliged to share savings. The Danish ecovillage is discussing whether to impose an internal insurance scheme, under which community members would insure each other, instead of taking out household insurances with external companies. In general, social security functions of the communities are currently limited to case-by-case scenarios, which emphasizes the limits of ecovillage sharing practices.

Various other factors limit the deepening of sharing practices in the ecovillages. None of the sample communities have developed a way to sustain themselves economically without being dependent on the external financial incomes of their members. This means that most of the community members must travel outside the ecovillage to work. The daily commute and economic pressures leave the members less opportunity to create daily sharing practices. For example, the Spanish ecovillage shares a daily lunch, which, however, is only a 'common' activity for the individuals who work within the community perimeter and thus excludes community members who work elsewhere. This is partially because the communities have not created a common source of income able to sustain the entire community (or have not achieved self-sustainability), but it also results from a particular accounting system that separates personal and collective incomes. Accounts related to sustaining the ecovillages and accounts covering designated income-generating activities are typically separated and do not spill over into each other. This dilemma can also be traced back to the lack of property ownership or the holding of loans in multiple communities.

¹⁵ It should be noted that the ecovillages are embedded within the social security systems in force in their national contexts, and that what is offered by these systems varies.

¹⁶ Examples of 'social securities' are health care, child care and schooling, unemployment support, sick leave support, pensions, elderly care and insurances.

Conclusion

Ecovillages facilitate sharing practices through a range of elements that can be transferred to other fragments of the sharing and collaborative economy movement. However, the unique combination of a place-based intentional community and sustainability-oriented values allows for the emergence of beneficial social norms and institutions, and the creation of a fertile experimental space. The diverse and intricate economic structures and institutions simultaneously enable and restrict the sharing and collaboration practices in the community. Sharing and collaborative structures should thus be carefully designed to incentivize desired sharing and collaborative activities, while being flexible enough to change with the ‘sharing maturation’ of the community or group.

Apart from working with enabling institutionalizations, this research stresses that the main limitation, and/or opportunity, with regard to developing sharing and collaborative practices is the *mindset* of the individuals or community members. To shift mindsets, the importance of exposure to cooperative and sharing cultures, mindsets and practices is indicated in the research. Furthermore, by being engaged in a community of shared values, members reinforce the legitimacy of these practices and assist each other in shifting mindsets from competitive to cooperative. As such, the research emphasizes the importance of an intentional community; although the research findings might be relevant in any setting, the fact that ecovillages are spatially bounded enables greater interaction, trust and cooperation. Sharing common values, building mutual trust and asserting a certain level of exclusivity through group membership ensures commitment to the shift in mindset, behaviour and structures and allows community members to develop solutions together.

Certain solutions, especially concerning social security, delimit current sharing practices in the ecovillages studied. Identifying ways to address this is an area for potentially fertile engagement with research in other fields of collaborative economy.

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