

# CLIPSGUIDE

## FOR GROUP PROJECTS



COMMUNITY LEARNING INCUBATOR  
PROGRAMME FOR SUSTAINABILITY



# COLOPHON

## Writers

Mauge Cañada (RIE, Spain)  
Eva Stuetzel (GEN-Germany)  
Camilla Nielsen-Englyst (LOES, Denmark)  
Lucilla Borio (RIVE, Italy)  
Toomas Trapido (GEN-Estonia)

## Editors

Anna Kovasna (GEN-International, Schotland)  
Nara Petrovič (Sunny Hill, Slovenia)

## Translators

Adrian Areta, Spain  
Camilla Nielsen-Englyst, Denmark  
Elbe Kuldmae, Estonia  
Eva Stutzel, Germany  
Kyra Kuitert, Netherlands  
Manja Vrenko, Slovenia  
Monica Podsiadla, Poland  
Riccardo Clemente, Italy

## Design

### Corporate Identity and Cover

Johnny Azpilicueta (RIE, Spain)

### Framedoc design

Monique Wijn (GEN-Netherlands)

## International Partners

GEN-Estonia, Estonia  
Gen-Europe, Germany  
Gen-International, United Kingdom  
EcodorpenNetwerk, Netherlands  
Fundacja Ogrody Permakultury, Poland  
LOES, Denmark  
RIE, Spain  
RIVE, Italy  
Sunny Hill, Slovenia

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**CLIPS partners, Torri Superiore 2015**

**Photo: Moni Podsiadla**



# CLIPS

## COMMUNITY LEARNING INCUBATOR

### PROGRAMME FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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CLIPS is a solution oriented programme to guide community-led projects in their initial steps – and for existing initiatives that struggle with problems or simply need revitalisation. The purpose of CLIPS is to suggest and explain a framework for approaching community development. It also points out specific tools found useful by existing community-led projects.

The CLIPS guide, which is the document you are reading, explains a model for community development created by the CLIPS team. The guide is accompanied by workshops, mentoring and trainings, as well as an online platform with resources, links, examples and tools for both projects and trainers engaged with supporting communities to grow.

Check out <http://clips.gen-europe.org/>

CLIPS is based on learnings and insights from established ecovillage projects. These insights have been distilled into concepts and methods applicable to any group that recognises the value of community. As it was developed, the CLIPS package was tested and evaluated by community initiatives from nine European countries.

What is “community”? When we say “community”, or “community-led project”, we refer to a group of people connected by worldview, vision and goals, sharing at least some parts of their non-professional lives. This can include both eco-communities, co-housings, NGO’s, civil initiatives, business collectives, community schools, ethical banks, health circles, co-op-eratives, community-supported agriculture projects, etc.

Founding a community is a very exciting journey! Founders have to take responsibility for:

- **Getting the idea**
- **Believing in it**
- **Inspiring a handful of people**
- **Defining the scope of action and the vision to which the project should stay true**
- **Implementing the most appropriate form of governance**
- **Outlining an economic model**
- **Finding and developing the land, building or other common assets**
- **Choosing the right inspiration and guidance along the way**
- **Resolving disputes in a transparent manner when they occur.**

The list of tasks and processes could be much longer. The most important responsibility is to grow the project in a way that builds community and keeps up hope and purpose.

Good projects live on while different people come and go. In projects that survived longer than



#### What is an ecovillage?

An ecovillage is a type of community, one that uses local participatory processes to integrate ecological, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of sustainability in order to regenerate social and natural environments.





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a decade, many people who thought they found “the” place ended up leaving. Not all collective projects suit all people interested in them. Beyond that, moving towards more collaborative and collective ways of living can be challenging in unexpected ways. Sometimes it requires more adaptation, transformation and commitment than people are willing to deal with. Herein lies an important lesson: when incubating an initiative the project and collective have some priority over the individual.

What is incubation? To us, it is a facilitated process supporting a group to identify tensions,



Project CLIPS

solutions, resources and methods, applying appropriate measures at appropriate times. This is the domain of CLIPS facilitators. Like midwives, facilitators assist groups during the delivery of their project, and check in on it as it matures. Note that incubation requires atten-

tion and care, but should never be authoritarian.

### Who are we?

The authors of CLIPS are both senior and junior members of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) from nine European countries. Most of us live in ecovillages. We have



rich experience in applying community principles in a wide variety of groups, and we have seen communities both thrive and collapse. Maybe we have seen too many collapse, and too much constructive energy go to waste. We responded by designing CLIPS.

We see CLIPS in the context of a clearly perceivable shift towards increased connectedness, cooperation and community where all kinds of collaborative projects and shared economic systems are emerging – from small to big and local to

global. We think this emergence of ways to cocreate a more just and sustainable future is necessary to address the challenges of our time. Our hope is that CLIPS can be a support in this important work.

### The CLIPS model

In designing CLIPS we developed a conceptual model of concentric circles to show complex dynamics and layers found in community projects. Layers start with the relation between the Individual and the Community, and continue with Intention, Structure and Practice.

The CLIPS model visualises the interconnect- edness between the layers, starting from the dual core of the Individual and the Community. These two are in the centre as they are crucial for healthy development of any project. There is no thriving community without thriving individuals; functional community is very conducive to individual growth.

The next step in developing a community-led project is setting Intentions.

Then comes creation of functioning Structures. Structures must be aligned with intentions and values. Governance, decision-making, property and power, communication, etc. must be put in place. The layer of actual Practice takes shape last, stem- ming from Intentions and Structures.

Ideally Individual, Community, Intention, Struc- ture and Practice are perfectly interlinked. Howev- er, in our experience Practice is not always linked well to Intentions. Structures can be missing or inadequate, creating confusion and disruptions. Intentions can suffer from not being revisited and kept alive, perhaps because they are only fully owned by a few of the original founders. Coher- ence between Intention, Structure and Practice, and the balance between the Individual and the Community, are under constant challenge. Reasons for conflicts and malfunctions can generally be traced to not paying enough attention to intercon- nection between the layers or to neglecting one of the layers.

The CLIPS guide focuses on the first four layers: Individual, Community, Intention, and Structure. The fifth layer, Practice, is covered with a few examples that seek to illustrate the connections between the layers.

Before moving on to the detailed descriptions of each layer, here is a short paragraph about each of them, which should help the reader create a rough mental picture of the model:

### Individual

Every community consists of individuals. A community can thrive only if individuals are honoured and respected. Individuals tend to thrive in a community if they approach life with a learner's attitude, acknowledging that all they encounter is a part of the learning journey and therefore valuable, even if it turns out to be different than what they anticipated. Individual growth and community building work best in tandem when tools for deep sharing and feedback are consciously applied.

### Community

Community building does not happen by itself, it must be fostered consciously. Among basic requirements are common joyful activities and sharing in everyday life. Conflicts and difficulties are opportunities for designing appropriate organisation that supports community spirit. The form of organisation and the means of conflict resolution should be complementary.

### Intention

Shared intention takes people beyond the assumption that "we all want to go in the same direction". A clear, distinct intention gives orientation, especially in times when the group loses its track, unclear which way to go. Unclear intention can become a source of conflict, confusion and misunderstanding, therefore clarity should be pursued by all means. A sign of clarity is that members find intention statements (vision, mission, aim, and purpose) meaningful and identify with them. CLIPS Guide outlines examples of clearly formulated shared intentions which can serve the group well.

### Structure

Efficient cooperation requires shared agreements, for instance on decision-making, organising finances, legal representation, etc. These belong to the layer of Structure, and are, sadly, often neglected. Unclear structures are among key causes of long-term problems in group projects. On the other hand well developed structures, when disconnected from other layers, tends to be repressive and short-termed.

### A note to readers

Please note this guide is only one element of CLIPS. It identifies key ideas and attention points, which we find to be elementary for starting and nurturing community-led projects. We highly recommend you read the entire document, keeping in mind that it deals primarily with what and why. You will find additional background information and examples of how to on CLIPS website [www.clips.gen-europe.org](http://www.clips.gen-europe.org).

When you see names of methods written in blue, it means you can find further information about them on the CLIPS website.

### A note to trainers

This guide is not a trainer's manual. If you already function as a trainer, consultant, mentor, facilitator, etc., the guide might influence your work. We encourage you to be adventurous and to apply concepts from the guide whenever you deem appropriate. However, to stand as CLIPS facilitator you will need substantial community experience, a wide peer network and specialised training. The CLIPS website will provide information on Pilot Trainings and Trainings of Trainers, which are available to trainers with different levels of experience.



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The European Commission recognised the need for incubation of community-based activities and supported the development of CLIPS through a strategic partnership grant under the Erasmus+ programme in a project called Sustainable Communities Incubator Partnership Partnership



- **EVERY INDIVIDUAL MATTERS**
- **EVERY INDIVIDUAL HAS A ROLE TO PLAY**
- **EVERY INDIVIDUAL MAKES A DIFFERENCE**

• *Jane Goodall*



**Photo: Thomas Meier**





# THE INDIVIDUAL

## Key Points:

- **Creating new ways of living or solving societal problems can be challenging and require people to change and adapt in unexpected ways**
- **A mature, skillful and responsible way of dealing with emotions, beliefs, habits and attitudes is an important ingredient in successful community projects**
- **Cultivating a learner's attitude enables people and groups to meet challenges thus nurturing individual and collective growth and creativity**
- **Shared frameworks for supporting personal growth can turn potential conflict into opportunities for connection and increase the group's ability to reach its goals**
- **Transparent communication about intentions and commitment create synergies where collective goals and individual initiative combine to the benefit of both**
- **Joining a community project gives opportunities for meeting individual needs in collective ways.**

## Overview

Joining up with the conscious intention of working and living together creates both possibilities and challenges for the individual group member. The way a group functions in the long run, is dependent on how each individual responds to and deals with both. How we respond, in turn, often depends on our attitudes, our background, our personal needs and how we express them. It also depends on our openness to learn and improve skills for responding with greater awareness of ourselves, each other and our communities.

The willingness to create or live in community already indicates a person has a certain set of atti-

tudes. These may be a willingness to take initiative and explore new territory, a wish to live in a different way than before, a longing to change the world for the better, or to live more in alignment with one's ideals and values.

While positive and creative, the step to turn the search for alternatives into actual everyday life also challenges each individual's habits, beliefs and patterns of behaviour; things that often go deeper than expected or that the individual is not necessarily aware of before they take the step into creating, working or living in community. On top of that, being in community requires members to collaborate and view their own beliefs, needs and priorities in relationship to the intention, agreements and aims of the group, and the personal beliefs, needs and



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background of other community members. This is a permanent process requiring people to examine and unlearn social norms, habits and behaviours that get in the way of realising their projects, and instead learn new ones that support the group and its members to realise their visions.

Because of this, starting or joining a community project is not only about creating new buildings, structures or ways of life, it can also be a journey of inner discovery, transformation and growth. How people approach this journey greatly impacts the harmony of relations and the capacity of the project to realise its intention and reach its goals.

Supported by new skills, a learner's attitude and increasing awareness, community members can turn inevitable challenges into opportunities for realising both themselves and their project, and make the journey towards community a beautiful adventure full of new discoveries.

### **Personal Background**

People join communities in different phases of life, come from different backgrounds, and are shaped by their journeys so far. This influences how they perceive and interpret the world, how they express themselves and often how they feel and react in situations. People can have different degrees of awareness about how their backgrounds influence the way they act, but most have blind spots and many come to a group without great awareness of what they are bringing.

Since people act in accordance with their beliefs, even the ones they are not aware of, outer transformation comes hand in hand with inner transformation, and the other way around. Living in community can be an excellent support in individuals' journeys towards self-realisation and living life more in accordance with their consciously chosen beliefs and visions for the world. Of course, it can also be the opposite - and the outcome largely depends on the intention, structure and practice of the community, as well as our ways of approaching ourselves, the I, and each other, the community.

How can dealing with the past strengthen a common project? An important step is for each community member to realise that joining a group project is likely to end up as more than choosing a new place to live or finding a new job. It supports

the long term functioning of the group if members are also willing to explore their beliefs and habits, and in some cases change them. Much of that exploration comes about in the feedback community members give each other in the process of living and working together.

A second step is to encourage each individual to connect with and express their core values, dreams and aspirations. This process often brings people face to face not only with dreams for the future, but also with pain experienced in the past - pain from experiencing judgements, violence, rejection or disappointments, or life simply not turning out as imagined. This can be an uncomfortable process, but one that eventually leads to greater freedom and capacity to act based on conscious choice and aspirations rather than past hurts. At the core lies the growth and positive transformation of the individual.

The challenge is to shift from reactions based on past events and situations, to actions based on what is happening and what the individual and community want to create.

Different communities deal with these processes in different ways and accord them different degrees of importance. For some, it is a key reason for being in community that is given a lot of community time. For others, it is considered a private matter dealt with collectively only when it really gets in the way of the functioning of the group.

Regardless of focus, both groups and individuals can be greatly supported by agreeing on shared frameworks for understanding, talking about and supporting personal process and inner work. Doing so can in fact turn potential conflict into points of connection and deepening community. It can also increase the group's ability to reach its goals, since it increases people's capacity to act according to aspirations and beliefs they consciously chose. It can also make it easier to get along, because refusal to face past issues often makes people recreate the same negative experiences over and over; something that living or working in community gives ample opportunity to do. Creating spaces of trust and support where experience and feelings can be shared openly also can alleviate emotional pain and isolation and create deeper mutual understanding and appreciation.

Examples of approaches used in existing communities are:

- **forum**
- **process work**
- **conflict management**
- **internal sociocracy**

In many ways groups need to support individual processes of transformation. Equally important, however, is not to let such processes consume all the energy of the collective.

If that happens, it is difficult to reach any goals - beyond personal development - that a group may hold together. A caring group culture where it is possible to ask for support can be of great benefit. The same is true of encouraging personal responsibility and knowing that some problems are better treated on an individual level, or with external help or therapy. Each group needs to find its balance between individual process, working to create group cohesion, and a more task-oriented approach to realising collective intentions. There is also a lot of energy, support and relief to be had in our capacity to enjoy ourselves, have a sense of humor, find joy in life, and explore the many ways we can make ourselves and our communities happy on a daily basis.

### **Personal Intention and Commitment**

People who initiate or take part in group projects all arrive with different dreams, aspirations, and motivations. These can be based on rational arguments, political conviction, emotional longings, gut-feelings intuition or something else. For most, it is a mix of several. What most community and sustainability oriented people share is a wish to contribute positively to the world, to create sustainable, resilient alternatives, and to live life in a new and different way together with others.

These personal intentions exist in relation to the collective intentions of the project, and how they are realised through its vision and mission, values and activities. It is important that all members know and align with the core intentions of the project, and that the group knows it can count on each of its members for the realisation of the common intention. In order to be active and sustainable over time, a group project would need the commitment of its members.

People's own interests and intentions need to

find a space within the common project, as long as it supports the overall vision. Taking advantage of the synergies that arise in doing so can be one key to success. Here is one example: a shared intention like organic agriculture can give rise to many different projects. Some people are interested in developing organic food gardens, while others want to focus on edible and medicinal flowers. Some may be interested in the production and conservation of seeds, while others are passionate about recycling organic waste and compost production. Together, these personal intentions and interests increase the community's capacity to realise its intention to engage with agricultural ecology, and also supports each person to take their project further and have greater impact in the world. This is part of the magic that can occur when people consciously join together with a constructive blend of personal and collective intention.

This type of consciously-lived interdependence is one of the keys to the success of a group project. It requires each person to be transparent about and clearly communicate their level of commitment, what they bring to the project, and what responsibilities they are willing to hold for the group, or not. The group can also create exercises and practices for transmitting and discussing their collective intentions, make sure everyone understands them in a similar way, create space for the expression of individual intentions, look for synergies and find an agreed upon common language for communicating them. However, not all projects are for everyone – there needs to be some level of match between individual or collective intentions for the individual and group to thrive, and to find the right contribution and level of commitment for everyone.

### **Attitudes, Abilities and Skills**

Creating community is a path that attracts many people, but only a few actually turn their dreams into tangible reality. Even fewer succeed in making this reality last over time.

Of the many factors involved in succeeding in a group project, some are directly related to the presence and development of the personal, internal attitudes of founders and residents.

People's attitudes, the way in which someone approaches life, are often part of a set of unconscious but learned beliefs and habits. Living and working together invites each person to be con-







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scious of the attitudes they bring to a situation, and how those affect themselves and others. This happens naturally in groups, but can be facilitated by practicing and agreeing on ways of giving and receiving feedback, and accepting that others sometimes can tell us things we do not yet know about ourselves - and the consequences our actions have in our environment. One method used in some communities to put feedback into practice is Yohari's Window.

Living and working together constantly bring about opportunities for becoming more conscious about attitudes and consequences. Understanding them, however, often requires people to learn new skills and tools. In fact, one of the most important attitudes for being in or joining a collective project is an openness to learning new things.

Having a learner's attitude and a willingness to explore new ways of doing things can open many doors for changing the way a person is and acts in the world, and even experiences themselves – something working together to realise dreams can easily bring about. Sharing with others helps people develop skills in listening, communicating, and practising empathy. In making decisions together, people develop responsibility for the collective and their own power and empowerment. They also learn to accept the same power within others. Conflicts that emerge in the group are an opportunity to become aware of what is not working, and through conflicts people can develop communication skills, better understand the diversity of their group, and discover how to manage their own emotions. In managing common resources, on the other hand, people learn simplicity. Engaging actively with Earth, people cultivate their love for nature and respect for the cycles of life.

On the path towards creating sustainable community projects, personal development and learning new skills is central. With a learner's attitude, both individuals and groups gain the capacity to see each challenge and situation as an invitation to grow and learn the relevant skills and abilities.

### **Personal Needs**

Needs are strong motivators that move individuals towards action and self-realisation. From the most basic and necessary related to survival, to the more subtle ones related with self-realization and

transcendence, needs form an essential part of our life journey. Meeting needs, in turn, often depends on the collective, the social environment, as most of our needs cannot be satisfied in isolation.

Attempts have been made to classify and explain human needs from different psycho-social perspectives. Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as well as other theories, provides a practical framework for understanding different needs as well as the relationship between them.

One way of understanding personal needs is the following four categories:

- **Freedom and trust – creating safe spaces**
- **Belonging and acceptance – love and relationships**
- **Recognition and influence – participation, meaning, and empowerment**
- **Personal fulfillment**

Needs, whether consciously perceived or not, are often at the center of conflicts and strong emotions. In fact, emotions often indicate whether a person's needs are met or not. Unmet needs can for example give rise to anger, sadness, confusion and isolation. Often, they also lead to a stronger focus on "I", the individual, and can push people to lose their trust in or care for the group. Finding the need behind any emotion is a good way to bridge conflict and find understanding and common ground for moving forward together. A mature, skillful and responsible way of dealing with emotions, individually and collectively, is a very important factor for living or working in community.

Working with needs skillfully, it helps to consider these different levels:

- **Internal: The ability to acknowledge personal needs, without hiding from oneself or others. Being willing to meet them as much as possible, but not at any cost.**
- **Inter-Relational: Sensibility towards the needs of other people, without judging or measuring them according to personal standards. Accepting the diversity of needs that can be present in different stages of life or in special circumstances. Welcoming these needs as an invitation, not a demand.**

- **Group: Capacity to integrate needs and shift from the personal to the group in order to satisfy both personal needs as well as those of the others and those which are shared by the whole group.**

Moving into a more collective or communal situation requires an individual to develop skills on each level, and learn how to find mutually beneficial ways of meeting their own needs and the needs of others and the group.

When someone starts to live and/or work together with other people, they tend to delegate parts of the satisfaction of their individual needs to the collective. For instance, instead of all having a separate house and way of making sure food is on the table, they can share spaces and resources in order to meet the same needs. Living in community also means that many needs that otherwise would be met only by the closest family or friends can be met by a larger and more diverse group of people.

Caring for each other in this way is also one of the three basic Permaculture ethics: people care". By giving attention to needs from a broad and collective perspective, focusing on the abundance of giving and receiving, groups can create a social reality where everyone can take care of themselves, the others, the group and the project in mutually supportive and beneficial ways. This might sound desirable or even beautiful, but it is not always easy. Meeting needs in collective ways is the opposite of what many people have learned growing up in individualist cultures, telling them to compete for what they need, fighting against each other, led by a belief in scarcity of resources, security, affection, and recognition. Embracing a more collaborative approach to meeting needs in mutual ways requires degree of trust and confidence which is not always present at the beginning of a project, and that can be challenged by conflicts along the way.

In order to create or transition to a culture of sharing, mutual support, care and collaboration, each person in a project is likely to sometimes need support in understanding and experiencing that caring for their own and other people's needs is often the same thing. This process requires introspection, questioning implicit and explicit beliefs, and opening the mind and heart to new experiences. Going through it in community makes it easier

and allows people to grow through mutual support and actual experiences of a different way of being together.

Of course, it also requires individual willingness to change, take responsibility and examine needs and emotions from new angles. How a person perceives their needs, their strategies for meeting them, and their reactions to not having them met often depend on their background, habits and attitudes. In well-functioning groups, people do not let go of the responsibility for themselves, but learn to share and communicate skillfully and open up to the possibility that seemingly contradictory needs can actually be complementary and met at the same time.



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### Individual – a summary

Many people dream about initiating a community or living in one. However, when a few individuals meet powerful dynamics get stirred up and this often gets too overwhelming. If such dynamics are recognised and channeled properly, they will work to the benefit of both individuals and the group; if not, the group project will suffer and in many cases break down. Paying attention to how individuals interact with each other and what personal "baggage" they come with, is a necessary prerequisite to community building process.



- **NO ONE CAN WHISTLE A SYMPHONY**
- **IT TAKES AN ORCHESTRA TO PLAY IT**

• *Halford E. Luccock*



**Photo: Manja Vrenko**





# THE COMMUNITY

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## Key Points

- **Community is elementary in vast majority of group projects; groups that foster community spirit and a sense of belonging have a stronger collective identity**
- **Groups need to ensure that people meet in diverse setups, both formal and informal, to create the necessary cohesiveness (the “glue” of community)**
- **Communication should be direct, honest, pure, kind; with good listening being just as important as speaking skills**
- **Deep sharing, meaningful rituals, celebrations and joyful activities are all elements of a well functioning community**
- **Official meetings deal with administrative, operative and social issues and need to be well organised and facilitated**
- **All groups encounter challenges once intimacy develops (either close friendships or romantic feelings)**
- **Conflicts arise no matter how much care is taken to avoid them; it is better to have methods of conflict resolution prepared in advance than to look for them once the conflict is already ablaze.**

## Overview

This chapter covers elements related to community, including those that are not relevant to all groups. However, since this is a community incubator it seemed appropriate to cover topics of community extensively. This further seeks to make the CLIPS guide comprehensive, inspirational and appropriate for a wide variety of group projects.

Community is central to developing group projects. Experienced people understand this well, but most projects still tend to focus mainly on intention and structure, neglecting community, as the common territory. In some languages the word “community” has strong connotations: archaic, religious, political, anarchistic, etc. It does not have the ring of modern words: team, crew, club, league, company, or collective. However, community dynamics are



something that any kind of group has to deal with, particularly if it puts people's real needs to the center and then designs the organisation around those needs, instead of expecting people to follow the organisational rules even at the expense of their human needs. Setting up and maintaining the community takes a lot of energy initially, but it pays off in the long run – even in the organisational sense.

One of the mistakes group projects often do is trying to resolve interpersonal issues by introducing more rules and making the organisation more rigid, thus brushing the real problem under the carpet. (See: Community building by Scott Peck).

Whoever tried to build a community knows it does not just happen. Spontaneous community building is possible indeed, but it usually leads to unpredictable outcomes and can involve high risks. Conscious fostering of community spirit should therefore be present in every phase of developing a group project.

Community cannot be fostered through strictly rational (left-brain) activities alone. Creating and maintaining group identity requires: open, trustful and respectful communication culture, where addressing difficult topics is possible without fear of punishment; rituals and celebrations; having fun while doing things together and space for emotional expression.

Intimate relationships, whether between romantic partners or between spouses, influence group dynamics greatly. A family (or even a couple) is the smallest form of community within the wider community, and attention should be given to how these two levels of community interact and affect each other.

Communities mature over time. It can be said that they are mature when they have brought to life strong community spirit and incorporated key structural elements, particularly common, effective methods of self-governance and conflict resolution. Substantial part of community building consists of striving for win-win solutions.

When community spirit and functional structures work together in a mature group the result is likely that mutual support among members is lively, everyone likes to attend events (common meals, anniversaries, meetings), members with special needs have a place in

the community and get assistance when they need it, children feel included, etc.

Here we will explore further each of the key aspects of community building, starting from the core of every community: its identity and spirit.

### **Group identity and community spirit**

The sense of belonging is a fundamental human need and thus a strong driver for forming groups. One of the early challenges for any young group is to start forming its own identity and shared community spirit. The process of getting integrated in a group and the transition from I to we needs time; but it also needs understanding of what is going on in people and how the collective can facilitate this process. Creating a common identity is a task that requires creativity, clarity, vision and strong will.

From ancient times in most cultures the collective identity was defined by opposition to "others" (us against them). This indicates that social cohesion generated by an external menace is an old and strong paradigm. Likewise, ecovillages have earlier been known for a kind of "counter culture", which has actually not been the intention but a result of representing something unfamiliar. This paradigm needs to be overcome in order to create proactive, open and inclusive conditions where collective identity is defined by inner familiarity. Familiarity does not mean uniformity; in healthy communities individuals thrive in their uniqueness.

To use a biological analogy: the identity of a group is similar to identity of a living cell. Inside the cell there are many organelles performing specific individual functions while, collectively, performing a larger joint function, depending on the organ or tissue to which the cell belongs. The cell is defined by its membrane through which it gets energy, nutrients and communicates with other cells.

For a group, the core identity is ordinarily framed in vision, mission and aims, which express the essence of its functions. Ideally, vision, mission and aims are defined early in the process of group creation, and revisited periodically to see whether they still reflect the core identity of the group. Clear identity attracts new members, as they recognise the group to be authentic, trustworthy; and they

easily see where they would fit and how their function would support the function of the whole. Unclear identity forces the group to draw an artificial, mechanistic line between those that are in and those that are out; functions of “organelles” remain undefined too. Groups with unclear identity tend to have difficulties to attract new and to keep existing members, with frequent frictions, confusions and conflicts.

How will new people join? What kind of people will be attracted to a specific project and why? How many can the group accept and at what rate? These questions arise in every group project and finding good answers is not easy. A good dose of realism helps.

Groups with clear identity will be aware of their actual strengths and weaknesses, possibilities and limitations. They will not create an idealised, unreal image, thus attracting newcomers who are in the clouds: with too high expectations both in terms of material needs (diet, housing, work, health-care, etc.), and more subtle, psychological and social needs. These subtle needs are usually more hidden and hard to detect at first. Newcomers can bring the risk of stress to a group once their possible strong behavioural patterns, dependencies, mental and emotional peculiarities become evident. It is naive to assume that any problem can be dealt with and solved or that any person can join at any time.

As shown in the previous chapter each individual brings to the group some personal “baggage”: experiences, emotions, talents, habits, whims, problems, etc.

This does not only influence the group as a whole, it influences individual lives of other members, especially if the group is small (under 20 members).

Nevertheless, there is something healing about communities. No wonder they often attract people who actually need healing. If the group does not pay necessary attention to this, a psychologically demanding individual can bring a lot of disruption. It is not the function of the community to deal with deep psychological wounds and to invest time and energy to this goal unless it is internally stable enough and the explicit intention of the group is actually to be therapeutic. Young groups will need to recognise pain and suffering, acknowledge

it, but still refuse a psychologically unstable new member to avoid the risk of this member exhausting the energy of the group.

On the other hand, being overly protective and conservative can harm the group and deprive it of the necessary, healthy turnover of people and energy, to the point of suffocating it. Note that cell membranes are permeable indeed, but they are also very selective.

In group projects where people mostly just work together, the procedure to accept new members can be relatively simple. In closer communities, however, it is wise to give attention to creating a detailed procedure for new members. For example, such a procedure can define a trial period in which the group can get to know the new member, and the member can get to know the group (its culture, agreements, etc.). In this period it is easy for the member to step out and for the group to break the membership agreement if strong reasons come up on either side. In a trial period the new member can be asked to observe, ask questions, and find a way to integrate in the group. After a certain period the member gets the right to participate in the decision-making process by expressing thoughts, views, opinions. Voting rights can be gained after another period when the group and the new member get to know and align to each other further. Tutorship of a senior member can be of help. Such a gradual, step-by-step entry procedure gives a sense of safety to both the new member and the community. It also prevents a close community from becoming too closed. Ideally, the same procedure should apply equally to all candidates, including relatives of existing members.

This leads to rights and responsibilities in the group. New members tend to gladly accept both rights and responsibilities and commit to them if they are – again – clear and well formulated, balancing contributions and rewards. Commitments to the group should be valid for a defined period of time after which they can be changed or discontinued.

Of the more structural elements group projects generally need inclusive decision-making processes that value both the responsibilities and the freedom of all members.







In all situations clarity and transparency foster long-lasting, authentic trust.

This applies to both individual relationships (trusting each other) and the group as a whole (trusting the community). Effective and consistent feedback systems can do magic in the group, building trust, authenticity and accountability.

In groups temptation can quickly arise with individuals to abuse their power.

That is why rank, roles and archetypes are another aspect to be conscious of. No matter our average height, there will always be the tallest and the shortest in the group. In the same way there will always be the most talkative and the shyest. It is impossible to avoid this, but it helps to be aware of it and use it in service of supporting both individuals and the group in their maturing. Maturing brings a very useful characteristic for community life: the ability not to take things too personally.

### Communication culture

Healthy communities nurture respectful and authentic communication culture.

The words “community” and “communication” have the same root: “common”, which means “belonging to all” (Etymology Dictionary). Community and communication are thus intimately related.

Authentic, mindful communication culture stretches over the entire specter from small talk to business talk, covering all topics that matter. Being cultured does not mean being invariably polished and courteous. High communication culture means looking for win-win solutions in all situations. See deep sharing for guidelines on effective and supportive communication.

Establishing such a communication culture in a group is one of the core elements of community building; therefore initiators of a group project should pay special attention to creating and fostering it. Note that the culture of the initial group tends to influence the culture of the whole project.

In many projects initiators make the mistake of thinking their main task is to get the organisational elements set up and the community could be developed later, once they start to really work and live together. But if patterns of communication culture and community building are not applied already in the initial phases of the project, there will probably be no community spirit for this later on, since behavioral patterns are created even if members do not attend to them.

Communication culture can be developed and nurtured through:

- **Specialised community-building events**
- **Trainings or mentoring, using methods like Non-Violent Communication (NVC), which is very characteristic for the ecovillage movement**
- **Meetings dedicated specifically to communication culture, consciously speaking about it, setting up agreements and guidelines, and using them on subsequent meetings and in various group processes**
- **Informal events, sharing stories, cultivating awareness of body language**
- **Learning and practicing the art of giving and receiving feedback**
- **Singing together (synchronising voice leads to synchronising heartbeats)**
- **Cultivating silence in the group.**

How people talk (and what they talk about) is only one side of the coin of communication culture, the other side of the coin is how they listen. In communities attentive, active listening is indispensable. Being with 2 or more other people means that everyone is (or should be) listening more than talking.

#### Deep Sharing

It was just stated that good listening is essential for good, deep communication. But how to create group settings where people can really listen to each other, hear each other, foster mutual empathy? Most successful communities chose to periodically dedicate some time to meet with the intention of sharing meaningful personal issues using methods for deep sharing in a large group.

Firstly, deep sharing brings positive things to light. People get to know each other's inti-



mate visions and dreams, passions and drives, attractions and tastes, get insight into internal and external factors that underlie people's emotional states (like daughter's graduation or relative's illness).

Secondly, people get to see what others are shy, inhibited, afraid, or prejudiced about.

This can mean expressing inner feelings and attitudes that might not be pleasant for others. Thus people get the opportunity to show less shiny aspects of their personality which are usually hidden, per example frustrations and annoyances related to others or themselves. Sometimes just talking about such inner states in a safe environment is enough to resolve them. Deep sharing contributes considerably to the community glue.

Keeping up polished facade comes in the way of community building, while standing face to face to someone else's weak side opens room to love and understanding. If unpleasant things are not shared and thus eventually brought to light, tensions might accumulate, build up pressure and possibly lead to an "explosion" in the group.

Naturally, deep sharing happens when friends meet casually and have a conversation.

Such instances of deep sharing can be even more valuable than organised events. Nevertheless, deep sharing events in the large group contribute greatly to shared communication culture.

Group projects around the globe use various methods for deep sharing, such as ZEGG-Forum, Community building (by Scott Peck), and Circle way.

These methods have some common aspects as they seek to create an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect through the introduction of some basic rules:

- **Speak about yourself, your own experience and feelings (even if they were triggered by other people), and avoid being judgmental of others**
- **Speak from your heart, and only about things that are relevant to you**
- **Speak about your needs and wishes and do not blame others for your situation**
- **See the sharing as self-exploratory journey, do not use it to hold speeches**
- **Listen with gratitude and respect for those**

**who speak, seeing their words as a present to the group and an insight into diversity of human experience**

- **Commit to confidentiality about everything that you heard, particularly about very sensitive, intimate matters.**

Some of the methods endorse periods of silence and recommend appreciative feedback to people who spoke.

### Rituals and celebration

The word "ritual" is used here in the sense of group-specific ways of doing certain things, not only referring to cultural ceremonies. Rituals can shape the group culture, the shared worldview, and thus strengthen the sense of belonging. Some rituals are integrated into everyday life, while others are reserved for special occasions.

Simple everyday rituals serve to support a mindful atmosphere, per example:

- **Introducing a short moment of silence when starting a discussion or when it becomes too hasty or overly emotional (using mindfulness bell)**
- **Check-in and short personal sharing at the beginning of a meeting, check-out at the end of a meeting**
- **"Thanksgiving" rounds, in which people express gratitude to others**
- **Starting shared meals by acknowledging how valuable the food is to the group (this can be done simply by cheering to the cooks before the meal, or by an intricate and even spiritual ritual or prayer)**
- **Singing, playing mu-**



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#### Circle way

People sit in a circle. A talking object (commonly a stick or a stone) is passed around and only the person holding the object can speak. Others listen. People are invited to speak and listen from their hearts. After they have spoken, they pass the object on to the next person. If that person does not want to speak, she or he passes the object on to the next person. Circles continue until nobody says anything in the entire round, or until the group decides to stop.



**sic and dancing (whether done purposefully at some given time of the day, or simply while waiting for all the people to gather for the meeting)**

- **Having short games as energisers during longer events.**



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Such simple everyday rituals foster mutual understanding and appreciative group-culture. Among special occasions anniversaries are probably the most universal.

Making a list of all anniversaries (important dates of the community, birthdays, marriage anniversaries, dates of members' joining, etc.) makes it easier to take sincere and focused effort to celebrate them. Very few things can make people feel as good about their fellows in the group as a birthday cake, perhaps a few presents and some special attention.



### Roles in Group Meetings

During meetings, roles can be assigned to group members, like time keeping, heart keeping, minutes taking and celebration.

Celebrations are fundamental to every society, and even in the secular world certain days are considered sacred. Humans have a deep, even ancestral

need to mark special occasions and celebrate. If community life is characterised by all work and no play, it will risk only to "make Jack a dull boy" and potentially have a bad effect on the entire group in the long run.

Different groups have different styles of celebration. Spiritually oriented groups favour meditative, silent ways, immersing in prayer or some spiritual practice. Secular groups prefer party, music, laughter

and festive food. Combination of the two styles is also an option, of course.

Celebration does not necessarily require a lot of time. Sometimes taking two minutes to congratulate the colleague who had just shared his story of success can mean a lot. Attention to such little celebrations makes the group conscious of the cohesive power of big celebrations, and people will gladly take long time, for example, to prepare the project's 20th anniversary celebration.

People in secular societies have become estranged from rituals and especially from celebrations. No wonder community spirit is dwindling in the majority of rich countries. Successful group projects therefore pay extra attention to celebrations.

In Dragon Dreaming, it is even said that a quarter of project's time and resources should be dedicated to celebration.

### How to run meetings

There is no group where meetings are not a necessity for creating focus on relevant issues, whether operative, administrative or social. Appropriate format for each kind of meeting is ensured by good facilitation. Facilitation ensures that everyone gets a chance to speak and to be heard, that the time dedicated to different topics is in the right proportion to their importance, and that everything that needs to be discussed is discussed.

In many group projects meetings start with a short check-in, during which participants briefly share their feelings, inner states and personal issues and "land" in the present moment. This takes time but it generally makes the future discussions a lot easier. Group projects are really about people; by encouraging personal expression the group keeps people in its centre. Check-out works similarly as a round-up of the meeting where people express how they felt about it, about the group, or about the future, in what mood they are leaving, did anything change, etc. Starting together, ending together.

Depending on the occasion and availability of time the beginning or the end of the meeting can include a common meal or drink when informal personal exchange with other members can take place. People often use such opportunities to have a talk with those



### Mindfulness bell

Someone is assigned to be the keeper of the mindfulness bell and to ring it whenever it seems appropriate to have a short break. When the bell rings, everybody becomes quiet until the bell rings again, and then the discussion can continue. This can tremendously improve the atmosphere of a discussion.



members they usually do not get a chance to communicate with.

Meetings do not necessarily take place only to make decisions, they are also spaces for sharing views and ideas and participating in co-creative processes. They can be utilised as spaces for collective learning.

Groups that start and end meetings with a song tend to have stronger feeling of cohesiveness. A tool like the mindfulness bell reminds people of the power of silence, and how intentional pauses in the flow of arguments work in favour of the group.

Here only some of the less common elements of meetings have been described.

Such elements seek to improve general elements such as: well structured agenda, minute keeping, maintaining a log of all key decisions and agreements, etc.

If discussion becomes very emotional, this is often a sign that there is something underneath factual arguments and is a sign of a potential conflict. It is difficult to deal simultaneously with emotional sides of an issue and speak on the level of facts. Emotions that come in the way of reasonable argument should be dealt with on specific meetings for deep sharing, where they can be expressed and explored.

### Sharing joyful activities, creativity and art

Setting up and running group projects requires an awful amount of conceptual work.

So much so that social activities often get neglected. It is therefore wise to organise spaces and events that have nothing to do with deciding, coordinating, managing – but just plain practical work in the garden, cleaning, renovating, decorating.

This comes with numerous benefits. First of all something gets done with no expense or through compensation. Secondly, members' practical competences and manual abilities come to light. Some people tend to hold back in official situations, but quite often these people prove to be ingenious manual workers. When other members of the group get to see and appreciate their talents, this can improve their self-esteem.

The third benefit is that manual work results in satisfaction rarely achieved by mental work.

Working together is an embodiment of group energy, a commonly owned totem (for example: "this is OUR garden"). The fourth benefit is that organised group work creates an excellent opportunity to invite neighbours, friends or any interested public; this can lead to some of them considering joining the community or becoming supporters.

Creativity and art are transversal and universal languages understood globally.

Current mainstream society made them hermetic, competitive and commercialised.

In non-competitive contexts, per example in an intentional community, art proves to

be a fascinating tool for bridging differences and deepening collective enjoyment. People get to appreciate each other's hidden aspects and open up to being honestly surprised; for instance when a cook finds out he is an excellent sculptor. Art therapists rely on creativity and art for individual and collective therapy. Setting up an internal choir, band, theater or dance group is a great way to strengthen group identity through art.

There needs to be fun in group projects! Thus existing members will want to stay, and new members will want to join. Honouring time and space for enjoying together makes group projects lasting, alive and appealing to its own members and others.

### Relationship: love, care, sexuality

Love between partners is not only about emotional feelings. If it is to last it needs partners to decide together to walk their common path. If they have children, parental love adds the need of a protective environment with



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deep friendships and supportive community.

In any case love should entail self-care, care of relationships, meaningful work, joy and health. In the modern society, troubled with many environmental and societal problems, love may include ecology and justice as two of the core values.

Community life can be compared to an extended marriage; close community means stronger bonds, but also more opportunity for friction. Pressing a balloon will cause the molecules of gas in it to meet and collide with greater intensity; in a similar way people in

close communities meet and collide with greater intensity. This can create frictions and “heat”. To keep level of stress (heat) due to friction low, it is wise to design appropriate individual and common spaces,

making sure there is the right ratio between the two.

In co-housing projects people live in private units, have their individual source of income and share only a few things, such as common garden, a room where they spend leisure time or dine together. Encounters in such spaces are generally not so intense. However, as we know, intense relations can start anywhere at any time, even in loosely bound groups like associations, transition town initiatives, food coops or even workplaces it is not uncommon to experience and witness emotional dramas that derive from personal attraction and unexpected love feelings.

In communes, on the other hand, private space is often limited to a bedroom, most other things are shared. People have a high chance of encountering each other very often (sometimes even too often). Tensions, frictions and conflicts are always around the corner, unavoidable. Communes address this by choosing a conflict resolution processes which fits their community structure.

Some attractions invariably take lovers beyond generally acceptable manners in the community. Some communities deal with this issue by limiting what is acceptable in relationships. Communities with strong religious basis,

per example, set monogamous relationship as the one and only option. In the Western society, where “serial monogamy” is generally accepted, falling in love with a new person also means breaking up with the previous partner. Some communities are choosing to go beyond prevailing patterns of heterosexual monogamy, thus they have to deal with intense complexities and rely on appropriate methods to resolve them.

Regardless of perception of love relationships, break-ups do happen in communities and new relationships arise. In such cases the “abandoned” partner is the one who often feels hurt. That is when jealousy, rage, resentment and many other powerful emotions spring up from the innermost – and concealed – psychological sphere, directly linked with the subconscious. These emotions are a part of human nature, they should be accepted as such and not blamed, judged, suppressed or ignored. However, choosing to live communally requires a commitment to the general principle that each person takes responsibility of their behaviour in order to keep social relations healthy.

In communities, just as in mainstream society, some couples are starting their relationships while others are breaking up. In communities, however, former couples and their new partners often continue to encounter each other in community spaces and there is a chance and even a need for making up and healing wounds. In the case when one of the former partners decides to leave the community, such decision means not only leaving home and parting one parent from children, but in many cases also parting from a number of very close friends, and work colleagues.

Some communities follow a set of agreements and use social tools (like ZEGG-Forum) to shed light on these issues in a non-violent way, to allow sorrow and pain to be voiced, seen and heard collectively. This results in emotions being brought out in the open, elaborated and honoured, but on the other hand preventing them from hovering over the community as a threatening shadow, engulfing energy and creating more tensions.

More and more people in communities are coming to the conclusion that the most important element in love relationships is



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not the exclusiveness of the relationship, but rather truthfulness, trust, openness, and the conscious consent of everyone involved. Speaking openly about romantic attraction that extends beyond the existing partnership can bring relief and even imbue the existing partner with new energy. Sometimes opening an existing partnership to new partners turns out to be a way of saving the partnership that would otherwise end in the paradigm of serial monogamy.

Man-woman relationships are the object of strongest biases in practically every society in the world. People stick to their general tradition even after they have realised that it does not really serve them, that it is harmful or even insane. Some communities have decided to take this realisation seriously, to explore various biases and see what the alternatives might be. Such communities have come to a conclusion that mutual trust and care, endless patience and supportive listening act as a soothing balm for a suffering soul, as most people know problems in love relationships hurt a lot. Individual therapy is also an appropriate resource to support and help individuals in times when pain and confusion are too intense, especially if internal resources are not adequate for the emerging needs.

### Dealing with conflict

Roberto Tecchio, a well-known Italian facilitator and counsellor, coined a concise definition of conflict: “Conflict is the result of two factors: disagreement and personal discomfort.” In other words: conflict is not proportional to intensity of disagreement, it is proportional to the level of personal discomfort stemming from disagreement. Topic of discussion, implications, magnitude of the decision, etc. do not lead to conflict in and of themselves. (See the 9 steps of conflict building.)

The real catalyst is discomfort. Discomfort deeply impacts relationships and impedes people’s ability to participate constructively in decision-making, implementing decisions, and even in everyday living. Everything becomes difficult, unclear, confusing.

Disagreement can be a gift to the group. It reflects difference in opinion and perspective, brings fresh ideas and proposals and widens the horizons. It is the antidote to conformism

and passivity, and preserves group resilience by constantly tapping into collective intelligence and stirring the energy.

Discomfort, on the other hand, is elusive and, at times, mysterious. Since time immemorial humanity has tried to answer the question “Why do we suffer?” Multitude of answers in countless religions and philosophies only touch upon the surface of the issue. In recent decades theories centred on suffering have come up in psychology, researching how suffering correlates to various conditions and events in maturity, childhood, birth (the imprinting theory), before birth, and even in relation to our ancestors up to four generations and beyond (constellations work). Much seems to derive from ancestral fear of death and abandonment, which people obscurely perceive every time they feel disaffirmed, or in simpler words, ignored. Disaffirmation is a subtle weapon to obliterate dissent and erase disagreement out of sight (and the disagreeing person along with it).

We would like to illustrate how conflicts work on two examples.

1. Maria and Nadia are speaking heatedly next to the coffee machine. The argument is about whether or not the association should invest a relevant sum of money to participate at the upcoming fair trade festival in town. The cashbox is low and Maria raises concerns that the group just can not afford it. Nadia believes the opposite, and they talk at length about pros and cons of the choice. Both have strong beliefs, and hold their respective positions. After a long while, Nadia invites Maria to leave the discussion for later and join her for a walk. They thank each other for passion and commitment and off they go.

2. Beth and Judith are sitting at a meeting. The agenda looks like “business as usual”, normal everyday stuff, mostly of minor relevance. Beth is talking about rearranging the dishwashing rota. Judith is silent. She shakes her head but says no words. After the turns are assigned Judith stands up and goes in tears to the corner. Beth is startled and can not believe this is happening. She has no clue as to why Judith has reacted this way. She vaguely remembers that Judith was often critical of her





proposals, that she recently missed several meetings, and seldom spoke her mind. Judith leaves the room and tells her friend Ana “I’m leaving for good. I quit the group.”



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These two cases tell us two different stories. Nadia and Maria had an intense discussion that did not affect their relation. Beth and Judith hardly discussed at all, but the relationship was damaged to the extent that one had to abandon the territory: it’s the story of conflict and the impact it can have – and indeed has – on people’s lives.

In a conflict one can either win or lose, and in the long run we all end up losing as we see

### Discussion supported by “Angels”

Two people (person A and person B) who are in conflict sit in the middle of a circle to discuss an issue. Both choose an “angel” to support them. The discussion does not flow in a “ping-pong” manner between the two persons. After person A speaks, her angel repeats the essence of what was just said in her words. Next, person B’s angel replies, stating what she heard in the message, coming from person A. Only then person B comments and shares her view.

our groups and communities decrease in number and energy, get bogged in endless discussions and finally dwindle, die out or break in two (or more) fractions, only to start all over again in a new setting.

Maria and Nadia strongly disagreed, but neither of them felt uncomfortable in the discussion, and their relationship was

not in danger. Spaces were found to listen to each other on different levels in order to address emerging tensions. An effective way to honour and manage disagreement is by using **meeting facilitation**, and choosing decision-making processes that respect the different positions instead of dividing the group into majority and minority (such as consensus or consent, versus majority rule). Creating dynamic social structures that allow mobility and direct participation of members, such as **sociocracy**, is also a good strategy to address disagreement and contextualise it in spheres of influence and competence where individuals can be seen, heard and appreciated by their fellows.

Has Beth ever listened to Judith’s opinion about the dishwashing rota, or has she turned a deaf ear to her, simply ignoring her dissatisfaction? Is Judith rancorous towards Beth and

others in the group, who do not seem to value her opinion very much? Does anyone even notice if Judith is or is not attending the meeting or care about what she thinks?

When emotions come up and manifest themselves, it is not the time to try to be rational and work on a proposal or a plan of action. It is time to stop and listen, to pay respect to a person’s feelings without judgment, criticism, unrequested suggestions or advice. Just listen.

Social tools such as **sharing circle**, **ZEGG-Forum** and **mediation council** are useful to release pressure and help people build bridges and stay attuned with the shared vision and mission which shine like a beacon, showing the way forward towards mutual recognition, and possibly acceptance.

Practical conflict resolution methods and theories can be found on the CLIPS webpage.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning Arnold Mindell’s theory on **rank and privilege**, a basic and ingenious tool to read and understand social dynamics not only in groups, but also in society at large. All theories have a value and are worth exploring, but the message is: to manage conflict, we need to address disagreement and discomfort with the appropriate instruments, in the appropriate context. It is a long and challenging path, but well worth following on the way to a less conflicting and more collaborative society.

To conclude: every community is encouraged to create some conflict resolution mechanism that fits its membership. Some communities operate with internal mediators who can assist in interpersonal conflicts, while others make regulations which induce individuals to get educated in conflict resolution, thereby demystifying it. What is crucial is to take the necessary measures in time. This pays off since the only worse thing than heated conflict is an ongoing heated conflict.

**Community – a summary**

Community building is like a an aggregate of tiny investments: effects become visible and tangible only after a long time. However, without such tiny investments groups invariably lose their soft, humane side (their soul), and can become result driven machines. Elements of community building listed in this guide can be applied in any kind of a group project centered on people and considerate to nature. Healthy community spirit is like fertile soil that supports fulfilment of individual intentions inside the larger, shared intention of the group.



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• **OUR INTENTION CREATES OUR REALITY**

• *Wayne Dyer*



Photo: Henk Petter



# INTENTION

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## Key Points

- **The intention of a group project gives direction, rhythm in its development, generates the movement necessary to realise and act in the field that is chosen**
- **Thus the intention further positions the project in the broader society**
- **The vision describes the kind of world we wish to leave to the next generation; the mission defines the contribution of the project when going in that direction; objectives are concrete ways to achieve this**
- **All group projects need tools for self-regulation and adaptation**
- **Intention is shaped through interactions with the surroundings and good networking with the local community.**

## Positioning in the society

**P**ositioning in the society

Consciously shared intention (where the group wants to go) is one of basic pillars in the majority of group projects. Setting, developing and maintaining such intention requires both initial effort and continuous attention later on. This ensures good “journey” and serves as a measure of goals being reached. Intentions in group projects can be subtle (spiritual) or practical (material).

Intentions define which people will be included and which excluded, based on their personal motivations. This is natural, since each project embodies certain core characteristics (for example how close the community is, whether animals are allowed, what is the policy on meat-eating, etc.), that is the filter determining what kind of people the project attracts and how much they identify with the project.

When talking about various aspects and processes that have to do with intention the first layer is personal intention to join (or start) a project. Personal intention influences individual contributions to the group. It is usually about meeting personal needs and desires, like for friendship, meaningful work, a change of living conditions, healing wounds from past relationships, etc. Personal intentions actually open up opportunities for community-building, which is often insufficiently acknowledged.

The second layer has to do with shared, community-oriented intentions. This layer is often expressed as vision, mission and goals. Besides these three concepts many others are used by various groups such as: aims, values, objectives. Clear intentions bring a clear message to potential allies, members, partners, donors, etc., and are helping to understand what the project is actually about.





The intention further defines the positioning of the project in the society. How is the project seen in relation to the surrounding society? Successful projects are generally built through alliances with various stakeholders, both with like-minded projects and with diverse individuals, groups and institutions.

A group resembles a microcosm of a living cell that needs a membrane to hold together all its elements and allow it to preserve it as a unique entity. The membrane gives each cell its identity by separating it from the environment and allowing it exchange by letting information, nutrients and excreta move in and out, thanks to its osmotic structure. Similarly, a group project needs a membrane to hold it together in different phases of its existence, particularly in times of difficulty and conflict. In our experience one of the most useful steps that a group can take to make sure that the light would shine even in dark times is to create a set of documents describing and confirming the transpersonal identity of the group, binding people over and beyond personality.

This set should include documents with different levels of abstraction and time frame, ranging from the most abstract, general and long term (vision), to more concrete, defined and local (mission), to even more detailed, practical and time-defined (goals), and finally right down to the meeting minutes describing how each single action will be implemented (action plan: what, who, when and where). Legal statutes also belong to the set of documents and should be aligned with other main documents as much as possible.

All these documents are interconnected like steps on a ladder or genes in DNA chain.

They are reflected in structures and practices and lead back to the founding intention.

To make sure that these elementary parts of group membrane are really shared and perceived as common it is important to create them in a participatory process, to discuss and revise them and give people space to include their individual perspectives, personal intentions and commitments.

Finally we need to acknowledge that a group project, like any living organism with its own internal metabolism and life cycle, goes through phases of birth, childhood, teens, maturity, old age and, yes, death too.

## Vision, mission, goals

In community projects vision often expresses a hope to implement some values that are neglected in mainstream society: equity, solidarity, sustainability, just economy, etc. Attempting to realise these values through a chosen mission is in itself a creative process of building a new culture.

**The vision (Why?)** is a long term, visionary overview of the sort of reality we want to create for our group and the planet at large. Vision is about a group's shared worldview.

It answers the question "Why is the world a better place because of my group?" and refers to ideals, values, and even dreams that are important and non-negotiable for the members. It should be fairly short, easily remembered, clear, understandable, and attractive for potential new members. As an example of a group vision: "We want to work together to foster peace, understanding between people and respect for all living beings, and to create a living environment where our group can reside in harmony, solidarity and balance with nature and the environment."

**The mission (What?)** is a more defined, localised and focused view of what the group will do to implement the vision and make it a reality in its cultural, environmental and social context. Again, it should be fairly short, clear and easy to quote and remember, and should give information on what the group will actually do. It answers the question: "What can we do to make our dream come true?" An example of a group mission: "We will create a resident community of about 50 people, share living spaces to encourage participation, sharing and creativity, and farm the land sustainably, based on permaculture principles. Each person, family and small group will have a private living space according to their needs and possibilities. We are inspired by voluntary simplicity, sustainability, and mutual respect."

**The strategic goals/plan (How?)** are a set of clear and well-defined steps that the group will take in order to move effectively and efficiently in the direction pointed out by the vision and mission. They contain a clear time frame and a list of practical actions that the group will take

in the near future. They can refer to governance, decision-making, economy and property issues.

Knowledge of group processes should be a part of designing strategies.

Thus focusing on the “what” (results) can integrate the “how”, while allowing that things will not always develop as planned.

Strategic goals do not need to be only short-term, but they do need to be defined and placed in a given timeframe to orient the everyday decisions made on the meetings.

Goals answer the question: “What shall we do to implement our vision and mission, by when, and why?”

Here is an example of strategic goals, following the guideline to keep them Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely (SMART):

*“We will create a sociocratic association (2 months), identify the location for our community (6 months), and create a development plan based on permaculture principles (12 months). We will promote our project to bring in at least 3 new members (6 months) through a series of 10 public events that will inform and inspire both general public and local authorities (12 months).”*

Concise formulation of vision, mission and goals, whether on the website, flyer or in a presentation, creates clarity and helps outsiders get a rough image of what the project is about. For insiders (members of the project) the intention serves as a criterion for decisions, particularly in the case of difficult decisions where members are divided.

In such cases the group should ask the question: “Does this support the fulfilment of our mission and goals?”

## Meeting minutes

Minutes allow the group to keep track of all changes, statements, decisions, agreements (and disagreements). Minutes are an essential tool to keep the group in line with the intention. They are an ongoing, dynamic set of documents describing actions, and placing them in time and space. They also define checks and balances, outline domains of responsibility and substitutes (who takes care of what, who can offer support), remind peo-

ple about milestones and dates, etc. Besides decisions, decision-making methods can also be noted down in minutes. It is better to keep minutes brief, focusing on decisions and main points, not writing down actual word-by-word dialogues.

All documents belong to the group and can be modified over time through participatory processes, such as planning seminars where the group revisits the vision/mission/goals to keep them aligned with the changing reality of the group.

The vision and mission may change, but the sense of belonging will remain strong if every member has a voice and an active part in the group.

## Adaptation & resilience

Besides vision, mission and concrete strategies group projects need to have tools for self-regulation and adaptation. Like a living organism it needs to receive feedback from the surroundings through various channels, and pay attention to it. Such feedback comes in the form of consequences of our actions on our lives and lives of other people.

This manifests on each of the five layers of the CLIPS model:

- **In other people’s responses (individual)**
- **In group atmosphere (community)**
- **In motivation for developing vision, mission and strategic goals (intention)**
- **In efficiency of managing decisions and organising tasks (structure)**
- **In noting concrete results of what is implemented (practice).**

Since the environment and circumstances are alive and constantly changing, the project will face diverse pressures. For example: if a part of the mission is ensuring food self-sufficiency but environmental circumstances



### An example of minutes

*Founding the association*

Date: 5th of May 2017

Present: Sarah, Susan, David, Marc, Jill, Rob, Anna, Tom, Sarah, Becky

Minute keeper: Becky

- The association will be called Living Peacefully on Earth.
- It will be non-profit organisation.
- Marc and Jill will prepare a draft of the Statutes and submit it by email until the end of the month.
- Sarah and David will research legal costs and report these to the group on the next meeting. Susan is available to help.
- The group agrees by consensus/consent/majority (8 in favour, 2 against, one abstained).





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create factors of risk (drought, poor soil, etc.), then the project will have to adapt to the real, although undesired situation.

When the project develops there can be unexpected moments of shock, causing big communal challenges. Accidents, fires, big financial difficulties, etc. require the project to practice consciously capacities of resilience. This is necessary in a world where things can change quickly.

A clear vision of the process, not only of the goal, allows for integration of strategy and group culture, thus enabling adaption to new situations or, in other words, resilience.

Both results and process need to be assessed periodically.

Collective creativity is the main source of adaptability. Creativity does not only refer to artistic expression but also to the capacity for generating innovations. There are many dynamics for learning and boosting innovativity: games, brainstorming, mind mapping, creative problem solving, etc. Groups can choose methods which resonate with their own character and preferences. It is necessary to understand how important change is and to allow the process of change to constantly go on, being always ready to adapt to the new reality.

### External relations and networks

According to *systemic thinking* life is a network and collaboration is its essence.

This fascinating discipline tells us about relations and exchange between complex elements, about relations of systems with each other.

A group project is, like any human group, a living system and has a constant need to communicate and evolve in order to adapt to the changing conditions. It seeks not only to survive but to thrive and benefit its members and the surrounding environment.

In CLIPS guide we are suggesting that knowledge developed in close communities can benefit many kinds of group projects. Having written this there is a common misconception about communal living which we have to address here. The misconception is that community people create a private paradise, an oasis just for themselves, as if community was an isolated, sealed-off reality, separated

from the “real” world.

In reality it is quite the opposite: close communities are normally an active part of broader society that carry the flag of human rights, sustainability and hope for a better future.

It might be that only some of them formally offer training programmes to the wider public, but they all provide a living example that a different life is not only possible, it is accessible and advisable. This is evident from the long-lasting successful work of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN).

Whenever a newcomer tries to introduce some changes, the local community responds with scepticism. All new group projects stumble upon this issue when they come up with innovative ideas. So, many groups struggle with the question, how to create positive and mutually satisfactory relationships with the neighbourhood. When “the new kid on the block” takes his first steps, he needs to simply look around. Who is there? Who has been there long before the group moved in or started being active? Whose is the sense of ownership of the land, of the buildings, of the local culture and traditions? Buying a property and starting up a really good project is not enough to become the real owner from the perspective of the local/bioregional customs.

Group projects, like trees and forests, need to put roots in the ground and start the cycle of nutrition – growth – exchange – return with the surrounding environment. They need to recognise, accept and honour the community that has already lived on the land, whether it is humans, animals or plants. Go out and shake hands or paws or branches. The new community, as the new element, has the task to make itself known. Being accepted will be the second step.

Fun is a universal language that everyone can understand and appreciate, so create a social occasion with joyful activities and invite all neighbours, including the next village, for an open day. Do this even if the community-led project has only just started. Present the group vision and mission, talk about plans and projects, and exchange clothes, seeds, food, tools, etc. This is an effective way of building relationships with the local community. It is the key to creating a supportive network around a new group. It has a multitude of benefits, very

few disadvantages, and will pay off, even in the short term.

Formal relations with local administrators, politicians and key people are also essential, therefore it is useful to plan formal events too. But remember: local community, the people close to the new project, will communicate with others about the new project long before the group meets and talks to the mayor.

We all come from an individual background, and bring our connections along when we create a group project. Most people involved in a group project belong to associations, companies, food coops, permaculture chapters, etc. This can be a big asset for a new-born project. Keeping an open flow of information on the development stage of a group will attract attention and energy from fellow-activists who can become a supportive network around the initiative, bringing in fresh ideas and energy and even creating a flow of new members.

Keep in mind that transparency, openness and inclusion do not mean that every group process must be open to anyone. Working in a group project implies many private moments. The balance between inclusion and exclusion is an art that every group must master, especially communities where people live very closely together.



### **Intention – a summary**

Intention is like an arrow with the tip pointing to a desired direction and with fletchings stabilising the flight. Group projects with good sense of direction and relying on creativity, adaptability and resilience usually have stable progress. Communicating with the “outer world” is part of a truly sustainable group, a fundamental element in the system’s dynamics.

With the chapters Individual, Community and Intention covered we have determined the flow of the river. The following chapter, Structure, is like the river bed: it doesn’t only support the flow of the river, it is formed and shaped by this flow.





**Photo: Moni Podsiadla**



# STRUCTURE

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## Key Points

- **The broad concept of structure refers to the practical level of how the group is organised in terms of governance, decision-making (related with access to information), property, legal and economic organisation**
- **It also deals with interpersonal aspects related to rank and leadership, powerful motors of the group as well as potential sources of conflict and disruption**
- **The challenge is to create structures that are solid and coherent enough to support the group's intention without oppressing or limiting the ideal vision in a rigid way**
- **The structure is an important tool also to protect the group from legal problems that may arise with the external world**
- **The key issue behind the structure is the decision-making process, that should empower all members and distribute power in a balanced way.**

## Overview

Structure means “building”, a metaphor for making protective walls around safe rooms; roofs, guiding aisles and doors that can be opened, closed, locked and unlocked.

Decisions to really put an effort into such structures are critical and difficult and often omitted in favour of more low-hanging fruit. The result is often that the community does not have a solid “building” when it needs one, such as in cases of conflict.

Thus, groups that want to realise something lasting need to have clear agreements about structural issues like how to come to decisions,

how to organise finances and legal representation. This is not always easy or self-evident. Sustainable communities often struggle when it comes to creating a structure that can be understood and supported by everyone, lingering on the dangerous misconception that spontaneous decisions and good vibrations will solve all problems, and that too much structure will become oppressive.

Just the opposite can also be said: failing to create appropriate legal structures, address crucial property issues and collectively write a viable constitution, opens the door to endless argument that can – and often does – undermine the community's foundations, and ends up in the law of the jungle. The creation and





development of these structures is a living and somewhat organic process that should fit each stage of the project. In the same way, attention should be given to creation of regulations and feedback dynamics that provide information on efficiency at all levels.

Project structure supports common intention and creates a safe space both for the group and for individuals. Members need to learn how to create and sustain agreements that express group values.

Human interactions create group dynamics related to rank and leadership, which are not to be judged, denied or opposed, but rather understood and used in a conscious and effective way, thus avoiding abuses and preventing conflicts. Such issues are a powerful engine and they deeply impact people's wellbeing and sense of belonging. On this level focus goes to the application of power and opening up the willingness to share it.

The governance and decision-making structure take into account several levels,

### Sociocracy as a governance model

Sociocracy spreads out responsibilities within the group, equivalently distributing power in different circles. Circles are connected with double links: one person represents the more general circle in the smaller, specific circle or working group, and one person represents the more specific circle (working-group) in the more general circle. In each circle decisions are made by consent. (See decision-making). Different roles are chosen through "elections without candidates", so that the roles are filled in by the most appropriate people at that moment for that purpose.

starting from internal organisation (working groups and clear responsibilities), addressing the chosen governance model (sociocracy, holacracy, consensus, democracy), and identifying the decision-making method that best fits the group's nature and contributes to its integrity.

Structure of communication and meet-

ings are crucial elements in any group project; it is very helpful to have basic training in facilitation and group dynamics. Meetings are not only meant for decision-making, they are also spaces of sharing views, ideas, discussing projects, participating in co-creative processes. They are spaces for collective learning and mutual recognition.

In terms of economic organisation, focus should be on the structure of necessary resources, both to initiate the project and to sustain it over time. Pay attention to clarity

between personal economy and common economy, and to the creation of agreements and transparent structures for management and regulation.

Thinking about property and legal organisation invites the question: Which principles affect the project around subjects related to the management of shared property? One of the biggest mistakes we can make is to start a community project on the property that belongs to one or few members of the community. This will always cause imbalance.

As mentioned above, group project needs to create its own rules of the game, its constitution, according to intentions and agreements that ensure the future of the project. The legal structure gives the group identity in the world and embodies its purpose.

Project management and delegation of work define the group's mode of operation, division of tasks and sharing responsibilities. Operational structures rely on task definition, project design and programme planning. All this serves implementation of decisions made on meetings or assemblies.

A consistent feedback system ensures quality control and provides a good source of stimuli for improvement and celebration.

### Governance

Making decisions together leads to the acceptance of diversity. There is space for all, for every part of each person and for all voices and feelings. Good governance encourages taking a wider perspective towards relations within groups, collectives and institutional practices. Decision-making power is not meant to be in the hands of the governing elite but in the hands of everyone in the group.

Questions concerning governance include:

- **Who should decide, in which situations, and for how long?**
- **Where is the power? Is there clarity which groups take which decisions?**
- **What methods of decision-making are appropriate in different circumstances?**

Answers to these questions depend on how often and for how long we want to meet to make common decisions. Every group needs to think about organising and governing them-

selves in the most appropriate manner.

There are processes that fit somewhere in-between the seemingly efficient governance by a small elite or one leader, and the challenge of trying to reach consensus in every situation. Such processes usually consists of giving decision-making power to smaller working groups (or even individuals) that have the trust of the whole group to solve particular issues – and consequently many leaders are created for many different fields.

The delegation of power needs regulation, so that it can be withdrawn from those who abuse their power or show lack of competences to apply it for the best of the group. In any case, everyone involved needs to be considered, transparency is necessary, power and efficiency have to be distributed.

A stable structure ensures that each person knows how and where to participate, has the chance to bring in skills and knowledge, and learns to take decisions in a participatory way. Everybody doesn't need to participate in every single decision. Thus members of the group learn to trust other individuals, the group, and the process.

Sociocracy, group circles, and deep democracy are a part of a rapidly growing movement of participatory decision-making.

## Decision-making

A good decision takes into account the boundaries of all people who will have to live with the consequences of the decision.

The process of decision-making in a group project needs to be clear, transparent and legitimated by all people who form the group. A difficulty that often arises in groups is making too many decisions. Not everything needs to be regulated or decided upon.

It is always good to ask: "Do we really need to have a common position on this or can we accept that it remains everyone's personal decision?"

It is possible to choose different systems of decision-making for different types of decisions – depending on the number of people involved. Decisions are usually classified according to their range of consequences and necessity in the group project.

Three different types of decisions can be distinguished:

**Strategic decisions:** Identification of the overall goals of the project and the means of reaching them. Over time this affects everybody in the project. Such decisions should be taken by the whole group, or everyone should at least have somehow participated in the process.

**Organisational decisions:** The way to organise different aspects and parts of the group or project with the goal of being more effective. These decisions should be taken by the group of people concerned.

**Operative decisions:** To work and manage daily activities the best solution is usually forming small, stable groups or individuals which take care of everyday tasks.

Some concrete conditions can facilitate the process of good decision-making:

- **People have sufficient knowledge of the topic to be discussed and enough time to think it over**
- **Good facilitation of decision-making gives everyone involved equivalent space to participate**
- **Decisions have to be written down and ratified according to the agreement on how decisions are made**
- **Decisions must be communicated and accessible to the entire group.**

Commonly collective decisions are directly related to the governance structure:

- **Participatory and direct democracy:** decisions with majorities, be it a simple majority of 50%, or a qualified majority, for example 70%
- **Consensus decision-making:** decisions pass if no one blocks
- **Consent decision-making (Sociocracy):** decisions pass if there is no paramount reasoned objection – this is called consent; "good enough for now, safe enough to try" phrase expresses the spirit of the sociocracy in terms of decision-making
- **Collective intelligence emerges** when individuals and workgroup are invited to suggest con-



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crete shared proposals for decisions; proposals are the basis of decision-making, therefore the process of developing them together is central in participatory decision-making.

Establishing a culture of decision-making where objections to a proposal are seen as gifts to the group, this leads to real community spirit. Objections help to improve the proposal and the capacity to integrate different opinions nourishes the community.

The quality of a proposal depends on certain criteria. It needs to be within the range in which the group has the right to make decisions. It must address a problem or situation that is actually in the hands of the group. It needs to refer to the problem or the situation with clarity. The problem is seen as a tension, and this tension is the expression of the distance between the current situation and what the group aspires for. The decision should address reasons for problems, not symptoms. Reasons must be described clearly, along with needs that are not met in the present situation. Reasoned arguments back the proposal, explaining how it addresses the problem. The proposal is not rigid, it is open.

It is not a claim. It can be accompanied by other possible options, can be improved and transformed. If possible, the proposal should include an action plan and an agenda.

This action plan should have milestones, be realistic, doable, measurable and verifiable whether it really meets the needs.

**Care of agreements:** One of possible difficulties is not keeping or fulfilling the decisions and/or agreements. It is advisable to establish a system of monitoring how and whether decisions are followed.

### Access to information

In the second chapter many of the soft elements of communication culture, which have to do with the spirit, attitude and flow of communication in everyday life and on meetings were covered. Here a few key elements of communication structure are added, that help groups stay aligned and functional even in the face of difficulties.

A challenge of communication in a group is well-organised information access.

Minutes from meetings shall be public and easy to access. The group should be informed

about topics covered on different meetings.

Both a blessing and a pitfall of digital information flow is that most communities these days rely on digital internal information flow. Sharing information via e-mail and online file storage services has become a prevalent practice in many groups. This should be alright as long as it does not exclude members who prefer not to use or own computers.

It should be noted that emotional clashes in the digital realm can destroy the project, therefore emotional issues are best dealt face-to-face. It should be clear that digital media are only to be used to exchange information. Clear rules about e-communication can help with this.

The good-old cork pin-board or a simple notebook to share information are excellent tools to ensure information flow. The rule not to try to solve emotional issues through written communication applies to pin-boards as well! Everyone interested should be able to access all relevant information easily.

### Property and legal organisation

The question of who owns the buildings used by the project is extremely important.

One of the worst mistakes that groups can make is that one individual buys the property and then assumes that a fully-fledged, long-lasting community of equal members can emerge on that property. There can be a fine community-feeling for years, but eventually the fact that one person is the owner and others are tenants will influence dynamics in the group and almost inevitably cause problems.

The owner holds much more responsibility and therefore should have more rights than people who are not owning the house; this invariably causes an imbalance and has a negative impact on the group. Group projects with strong community spirit can only thrive in buildings where every member has the same rights as other members. For this, several options are possible:

**Commonly-owned property:** i) Many communities own their buildings as a cooperative. This legal form has been designed for economic activities where people get together to do something that is related with economic activity. ii) It is possible to have other legal forms, such as an association or foundation as

owners of facilities, depending on laws in each country. It is best to look for advice to find the appropriate legal form for commonly-owned property.

**Community of owners:** Houses can be owned by a community of owners – where everyone owns one condominium while outside walls and shared spaces are owned by the community of owners. There are special national laws that define what is necessary for such a shared-ownership, where people have maximum freedom in their own apartment but community issues are regulated for shared parts of the house.

**Being tenants in someone else's house:** For group dynamics it is much easier to be tenants in someone else's house than to be tenants in the house of one of the members of the group. This is especially true if the house is owned by a big organisation with similar values, for example by housing cooperatives or foundations that look for ethical investments. Such a solution is appropriate if the initiative doesn't have strong intention to build their own houses.

Those who want to go deeper into details of ownership, should get acquainted with the concept of "emphyteusis" or "lease in perpetuity", which is an interesting option between buying and renting. It provides almost the same rights of real "ownership", but makes it possible to set some standards that need to be respected by all owners. This solution is often chosen in cooperation with a foundation that owns the land and sets some standards for the project.

## Constitution

Creating a set of internal agreements, which makes up the vision, mission and strategic goals of the organisation, is often an early and challenging task for a newborn community. It usually takes quite a lot of time and effort as it requires individual opinions and motivations to meet somewhere in the collective super-ego, melt together and ultimately create a shared and mutually supported identity. However, the challenge is not over yet as another, very large and important factor must be taken into account that may require a completely different level of thinking and writing: national laws. These laws can compel the group to come up with a formal constitution, also known

as "the statutes" of an organisation.

Each national state has a set of laws, which can be complex, entangled and contradictory (sometimes to the point of madness), but nonetheless regulate the legal status of almost all intentional communities. So it's a wise idea to look into your national legal codes, preferably with the help of an expert, and get a clear picture of the limits imposed by the law. Especially important to know are the sanctions that apply to various infringements, and the accountability of different stakeholders.



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Not every group will need to have legal statutes, as it is also possible to remain "informal" and avoid the troubles and complications caused by legal registration of your entity. But keep in mind this does not in any way mean that the group (and its members) will not be held responsible for their actions, either collectively or individually. This may place group leaders in a vulnerable position, without being fully aware of the possible consequences.

An informal group is fully entitled to exist, and several intentional communities have chosen to remain informal for years. But this condition places the group in a sort of legal limbo, limits its powers, lacks an interface that society can recognise and decode, and, in a way, deprives the group of the ability to speak and interact officially with formal authorities. It can lead to a situation where, if merely a few people leave a project, it will dissolve and have no existence on its own. Projects that have a legal entity are much more likely to survive for a long time than proj-

## Cooperative as common ownership

A cooperative is a legal entity that exists in all European countries and forms one of the most suitable legal forms for group projects. One of the principles of cooperatives is that one person has one vote, regardless of the amount of money they brought into the cooperative. Although details are regulated differently in different countries, a cooperative is a legal form intended for people who want to join forces to reach their goals. Those interested should check the regulations in their country.

## Legality of private loans

In Germany it is a criminal act to ask for private loans that exceed 12,000 Euros. People doing that are conflicting with bank laws, laws that are there to protect citizens against organisations that may be gambling with other people's money.

The legal representatives of communities that ask for private loans, may be committing a criminal act – without knowing it!





ects without one.

Apart from giving the community a formal frame, legal statutes can also be necessary if you need to buy common properties, sign contracts with suppliers and consultants, or request funding from public or private sponsors. If properly designed and written, the statutes can also add important elements to the group identity, strengthening the sense of belonging. The choice to found a cooperative instead of a commercial company, for example, means assigning one vote to each member (emphasis on the person) and not one vote to each share (emphasis on the capital). It therefore reflects the values and vision of the organisation.

The constitution must respect the national law, and to some extent also European Union prescriptions. It should also include a short version of the vision and mission of the group in the first part of the document (generally in the section “Aims of the organisation”). It should deal in detail with formal aspects that will have a big influence on what happens in the case of conflict, such as regulations about how to vote and come to decisions, rules for formal and informal settlement of disputes, and rules for how people leave the project.

Creating the constitution can be a real challenge for some groups, as it forces people to think in ways that are different from everyday reality. Becoming legally literate can be a significant moment of collective growth and evolution. Several questions that are important include:

- **How do we preserve our identity and translate it into legal terms?**
- **What adjustments do we need to make in our organisation so that we are not in conflict with current laws?**
- **How can we protect ourselves and our project from legal suits, financial losses, debts and bankruptcy?**
- **How will this impact our internal balance, and how will it affect internal rank?**

Looking at an organisation from a formal or legal perspective can be a very sobering and healthy experience. It can provide elements of reflection that force the community to implement necessary changes in order to avoid future, and potentially fatal, problems.

The ability to speak various languages, including the legal language of the local and

national government, can only make the community stronger and more resilient.

### **Economic organisation**

Each project needs to find an agreement on basic duties and rights that everyone in the project has. One important aspect of this is the issue of organising the economic aspect of the project.

Does everyone have to pay the same amount? Does the amount differ depending on the space that is used? Does it differ when people have different economic means? What about the elderly with low pension? What about children? These are very important questions that need to be decided in the planning phase of the project.

Most people involved in sustainable community projects share the value of solidarity and inclusiveness for people with less economic means. When it comes to designing the economic organisation, these values need to be put into practice. This is a crucial moment in the project design. It is important to take time to explore the values and belief systems behind dealing with money. This is an extremely emotional topic and has a lot of impact on the group identity. Methods of deep sharing can and should be used to explore and express attitudes when dealing with economic questions, rather than just discussing them on the organisational level.

Sustainable community projects have found a variety of solutions to the question of economic organisation. Some communities are overcoming financial inequality by sharing their income and directing all of their capital towards the development of the project. This sounds too extreme for many people, but the experience of these communities is that it works out quite well and is often even perceived as easier than any other solution. Experience shows that projects which agreed on doing this before they started very often succeed with this way of organising their community and are happy that they have chosen it. Many others do not dare to start this way and attempt to move towards a more “shared economy”; however, experience shows that this is extremely difficult and hardly ever leads to a shared economy.

Communities that don't want to share their

income completely have found different ways for organising economic solidarity within the community. Examples for this include:

- **Rather than a fixed sum or one which depends on the use of space, a percentage of the monthly income is paid for rent and common expenses for food, etc.**
- **All expenses for children are covered by the whole community**
- **Solidarity-fund is created within the community (see the example below)**
- **Members give each other interest free loans or donations as an informal way to balance economic differences.**

### Rank and leadership

In our daily life, we are totally immersed in the social context that responds to a variety of stimuli and relationships. Living or working in a group can act as a multiplier for these forces, and impact our behaviour and emotions at the deepest possible level. Why does a meeting wait until Mr. Green arrives, even if he is late? And why does the comment by Mrs. White remain unnoticed and unwritten on the flipchart or in the minutes? Why do we feel nervous and anxious to speak our mind when specific people are present?

A very powerful, and always present, social dynamic has been unveiled and identified by Arnold Mindell, an American therapist and teacher, founder of process oriented psychology, also called Process Work. It concerns rank and privilege, terms that we can find unattractive and even repellent as we reject the idea of hierarchical society and strive towards equality and equity. But being naive about the issue of rank can cost us a great deal of frustration, and end up in destructive conflicts.

Mindell defines privilege as an option that is available to us, i.e. the possibility to make a choice based on our free will. Every time we choose something, we exercise an option and take advantage of our privilege to do so. Consequently, rank is defined as the sum of privileges we have in a given context. The more options we have, the higher our rank. Having (or gaining) a high rank is often exciting or tempting, while falling to a low rank can be very frustrating and depressing.

According to Mindell, rank itself is the sum

of many factors that derive from our birth, social status, nationality, personal talent, psychological stability, spiritual connection, and more. Some aspects are more evident than others, but nonetheless, all relate to making us what we are today. Some are evolutionary and can be modified over time. Others are unchangeable and can only be accepted as a given fact.

Being entirely contextual, our rank varies (sometimes dramatically) according to the social conditions that surround us in any given time and place. Since we are inherently designed as social creatures, we are completely adjusted to shifting place (or rank) when the conditions change, to the point that we are normally unaware of this powerful dynamic.

In our efforts towards creating long lasting, healthy and nourishing communities, we must be aware and conscious of rank issues, so that we help ourselves and our partners to correctly interpret tensions, and prevent potential conflicts.

Communities usually strive to be egalitarian, a high value for many people. However, if this value leads us to ignore that rank plays a role in all human relationships, it can make things worse and not better. Making good use of your personal rank is a great gift to your group, and ultimately to yourself. Accumulated, unexpressed tensions boil down to anger, resentment and bitterness that can, and historically did, fuel attacks and even revolutions. Sadly, history is not a good teacher and drama repeats itself.

Understanding rank and its effects is like wearing a new pair of glasses that suddenly define the contour of foggy, unclear and uncomfortable frictions. It certainly is not the only dynamic at play in social settings, but it underpins any interaction between humans. Rank's importance cannot be ignored or underestimated.

If rank is not a taboo but rather something that the community has agreed to speak





about, then it can be dealt with consciously. Of course, a person living for many years in the community and being in a responsible position will be more influential than a person that just joined. Reflecting this and offering chances to change rank (i.e. through taking on responsibilities), rather than closing one's eyes about rank issues, will contribute to a more egalitarian society.

Leadership is a closely related issue that is often denied in egalitarian communities. Even if it is not defined, it will happen. There are people that say "Yes, we can!" and start doing it, and others that do not take this role of being an initiator. It can be very relieving if these implicit roles are made explicit. People who are explicitly assigned roles can receive clear feedback on their work. A role can be withdrawn, if the people filling it do not work for the best of the community. Informal leadership roles are much more difficult to deal with.

In some cases, it just makes sense to ask the most competent and experienced person to take leadership and make decisions that do not need to be discussed with a group. Imagine building a house without an architect or construction supervisor; it will probably not result in a very stable or even visually appealing structure.

Taking over a leadership role should be seen as a service to the group. A good leader is always a servant for the values and members of the group. He or she will take into account the capacities of group members and assign tasks according to their competences and potential. Such a leader will see it as her or his responsibility to create a situation that selects roles where everyone can live their full potential.

It is important to give new and less experienced members the possibility to develop their leadership skills and to gain rank through taking on responsibility. Forming teams with both more and less experienced people, or teams with professionals and people that know the community issues well, is a good way to introduce people to powerful roles.

Many communities strive to create a "group of all leaders". This is not a hierarchical group that only a few leaders hold. It is not an unstructured egalitarian being, but rather an organism, where everyone is in their right

place and takes responsibility and leadership for issues that are important for them and for which they have competence. Having a leadership position on one issue makes it much easier to accept that others have the lead in other areas.

*For a more detailed explanation, including group practice, please refer to the "Resources" section on the CLIPS website (<http://clips.gen-europe.org/>).*

### **Project management, delegation of work and task assignment**

A transparent and participatory project management process is recommended to organise internal work in a fruitful way. This is especially helpful in the early stages, when a great number of decisions and actions need to happen to transform the project from dream to reality, and make things move along. This may happen in a series of steps that are interlinked and may be repeated if necessary. The steps could be:

- **Assessment of resources:** Running an internal survey of competences, professions and personal desires creates the basis for an evaluation of the group's potential. It is helpful if each person honestly tells the group what he or she is able to do, but also what he or she really burns for and wants to develop in the future, even though this may request training and practice. This process should include all group members, and can be repeated from time to time to check if wish lists have been fulfilled or not.

- **Assessments of urgencies:** A committee can be appointed to draw a list of objectives that need to be reached in a given time frame (typically short-, mid- and long-term) based on the vision, mission and strategic goals that the group has previously elaborated. A list of tasks related to the objectives brings the discussion to an even more practical level and opens the way for the next phase.

- **Matching abilities, desires and needs:** The group can now compare the two lists and see if members feel naturally attracted to one or more tasks, either individually or as a sub-group. This elaboration can take the form of an open discussion, a game, or a constellation, and should bridge the two levels (what I can do – what I want to do) in a way

that is satisfactory for both the individual and the collective. Forming working groups with experts and assistants is a classic peer-to-peer learning tool, and creates community bonds while responding to project needs.

- **Accounting and balancing the work:** Another delicate phase opens with the question: who should be paid for what? A large share of voluntary work is normal at the beginning but cannot last forever. Some groups decide that all work done by group members is paid by the same rate, be it farming, building, cooking or accounting. Some groups decide to differentiate between agreed limits, while others refer to market prices and pay according to the competence. There is no right or wrong. Fascinating discussions emerge from the heart of group beliefs, reflecting the socio-political stance the community is willing to support.

- **Outsourcing:** After going through the above phases, organisers may very well find out that some core competences are not covered by internal resources. At this point, they may need to outsource according to mutually-agreed-upon criteria to avoid nepotism and personal favours. Having a circle of community supporters will enlarge available resources and the number of potential candidates, often available on a voluntary basis. Many mainstream people who don't have the possibility to join a community full time are normally quite happy to participate as "honorary" members and give a factual contribution to a project. Bring them in, honour and thank them, and build as many bridges as possible with all the potential supporters out there. It will not only answer the need, but also expands the culture of solidarity and sharing around the group.

From time to time, the committee should call a meeting to revise the advancement of work, the level of satisfaction of members and efficiency of the process. A level of shift and change within working groups is not only normal, but also advisable and healthy, as long as roles remain clear and tasks are met. **Sociocracy** offers an intelligent model to set up an efficient and dynamic structure that optimises competencies, results and communications.

Finding the right place in the group is at the core of personal well-being and satisfaction. Individual happiness paves the way for

long-lasting communities, living laboratories for personal evolution.

## Feedback

An important aspect for living organisms is to integrate feedback. Feedback provides us with the opportunity to reflect what we have been doing, to adapt to our environment, and to learn.

Establishing feedback-loops is an integral part of any sociocratic organisational design. Every proposal includes a commitment for feedback: "When will we check if the intended consequences were reached by the decision, and when will we tweak it as needed?" However, we do not need to apply sociocracy for integrating feedback. Feedback can be at many different levels:

- **On a personal level:** to consciously create spaces in which we give each other feedback, enhancing clarity of how others perceive us

- **On a role level:** it is a very good idea to give each other feedback on how the roles assumed for the group project are developed; this usually only happens if something is running really poorly or extremely well; however, the most learning potential is in everything between – where we usually would not take the time to give feedback

- **With decisions:** one definite way of improving project governance is to check, after a certain time period, if decisions had their intended consequences

- **For services:** customer feedback gives the chance to improve services.

## Structure – a summary

Structure is in many ways the most complex layer of a functional group project. Setting it up and maintaining it demands high level of strategic thinking and patience. The larger the group the more it has to incorporate governance, decision-making, legal statutes, project management, economic organisation, etc. These aspects of group dynamics have a powerful function: they safeguard people from unnecessary and even destructive stress.







Photo: Moni Podsiadla



# PRACTICE

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## KEY POINTS

- **The practice is the stage of the project coming to life, where aspirations, prospects and goals, which the group has been striving for, become visible**
- **Implementation of the project involves fruitful relationship between the other four layers: individual, community, intention and structure; a malfunctioning practice can be leading back to confusion or dysfunctional patterns in the other layers**
- **When the group is aware of the impact of planned actions it can ensure coherence between all layers**
- **The glue of a group lies particularly in shared practices, such as eating together, working together, sharing daily practices; thereby creating “rhythms” or “patterns” in community activities.**

## Overview

When designing a group project we should pay attention to details of everyday life. Daily practices, per example meals, work and the use of resources, are expressions of worldviews, intentions and visions of the group. If we handle these daily practices consciously they can support and strengthen the project, maintaining – and even enforcing – the clarity of intention.

Sometimes the value expressed through a certain practice does not correspond fully with the value of an individual member or even of the whole group. Members of the group may have agreed to a common vision and intention, but the process necessary to fine-tune their

agreement with relevant attitudes and skills to actually implement it has not yet been fully nurtured. The concern arises: Why are we not doing as much as we want to? This is a possible source of conflicts and personal struggles on the one hand, or a source of mutual support and group cohesion on the other.

Projects that aim to change or improve something in the world commonly have blind spots. Blind spots become visible only when something disturbing or challenging comes up, per example issues with punctuality, pets in common areas, dietary differences, alcohol, or stark differences in opinion. Changing or re-designing everyday life can hardly be expected, if intentions and basic assumptions are not examined closely.





When individuals form a group, some daily practices which used to be individual and “domestic” become shared. Examples in this section are chosen to illustrate how coherence between the layers of Individual, Community, Intentions and Structure can be achieved through everyday practices, thus exemplifying their interconnectedness.

To reflect GAIA Education’s wheel of sustainability four examples have been chosen, each one focused primarily on one dimension:

- **Social – the example of shared dinners**
- **Cultural – the example of moments of awareness**
- **Ecological – the example of compost toilets**
- **Economic – the example of car sharing.**

Ecovillages have a magnitude of experience on these topics. We have included a part of it to the CLIPS-website (<http://clips.gen-europe.org/>). This section simply explores how practice in our model is influenced and is influencing all layers: from Individual to Community, Intention and Structure.

ration between different projects. We mostly refer to groups that live closely together, but we acknowledge that many groups organise shared meals on meetings or special occasions, so many of these concepts and dynamics also apply.

#### **Impact on the individual**

Eating together traditionally takes place in the daily routine of a family. In an ecovillage, for example, all the people from the community are included and become part of the intimate space, which was formerly reserved for the family. For individuals who previously had no family for daily dining, shared meals can meet the longing for community and are one of the main reasons why they decide to join. Families cherish shared meals in community as they enrich relationships for both adults and children. On the other hand it is necessary to preserve the intimacy of families and similar small groups when the community takes over spaces that were previously meant for private time.

With respect for individuals’ and families’ need of their own space the opposite might be needed in some communities: days with no shared meals. This can manifest in providing the opportunity to bring food prepared for a shared meal back home, or through other ways that allow individual needs and wishes to be mindfully incorporated into the shared community practice. This also takes into account allergies and personal preferences – eating in silence, blessing the meal, favoring raw food, fitting meat into sustainable lifestyle, avoiding gluten or sugar, etc. Eating culture requires individual balancing and compromising with the group.

#### **Impact on community**

The need for food is universal. Eating together is inherently community building because it includes everybody. Common meals are a space of informal dialogue whereby even those group members who ordinarily don’t communicate get to meet and speak. In this way common meals build and maintain relations. Forming a community of practice in preparing and serving food for each other is of high value as these practical tasks foster avenues of cooperation and dialogue.

### **Example 1: shared dinners**

A common feature in many groups (e.g. the ecovillage and cohousing movement, community gardens, transition groups) is the practice of dining together. This ranges from sharing every meal to having shared dinners occasionally, usually on a weekly or monthly basis. Systems of shared dining are often subject to experiments and changes as the ultimate form that meets the needs of different individuals is generally hard to

reach. Therefore the practice of shared meals offers an excellent co-creation process to find a solution that group members can all consent to. Furthermore, it is a field of mutual explo-



**Shared dinner, Spain**  
**Photo: Henk Petter**

Shared meals are an excellent entry point for newcomers, guests and volunteers to a community, where new contacts and plans are made. These ways of developing community cohesiveness are often found in such daily practices, and the act of eating together is essential.

### Intentions that influence practice

The decision to have shared meals comes from the combined intentions for both community building and wishing to meet practical/ecological parameters. Sharing food preparation is a community building practice and an opportunity for members to grow together.

The ecological benefits of not having kitchens running in every household around mealtime and reducing food waste can be part of the intention for setting up a shared meal system. There may also be a wish to create free time for people by sharing work tasks rather than spending time on the individual tasks of shopping, cooking, and cleaning in every household.

A moment of gratitude shared before eating is a way of valuing the systems that produced the food, as well as valuing the privilege of having the food and sharing it with the group. It is also an expression of the wish for creating a new relationship with people and planet. All this is quite common in eco-communities. However, some people feel uncomfortable about mixing common meals with what they perceive as a spiritual practice (blessing the food). To avoid this some groups express gratitude in a more relaxed and non-ceremonial way.

### The importance of structure

Shared food systems often attract well organised people to design structures that underlie this practice. This is particularly common in ecovillages. Almost all ecovillages have an established structure for shared meals. The structure deals with organising kitchen teams, managing financial aspects with regard to reimbursement for expenses and payments, the way how people subscribe and unsubscribe for meals, if they pay monthly or separately for each meal. It deals with the issue of fairness, such as excusing sick or elderly people from participating in practical tasks.

The structure tends to change over time depending on ever changing needs of the group. The number of days in the month when people share meals can vary depending on the season; meals can be available only for fixed groups or also for visitors, etc.

In summary, the practice of shared dining includes all of the GAIA dimensions of sustainability, contributing to community glue (social), decreasing food waste and promoting shared resource utilisation (ecological), showing intentions (culture/world view) and finally saving time and money (economic).

### Example 2: check-ins and moments of awareness

This is an example from the Findhorn Foundation and Community in Scotland.

In the Findhorn Foundation Community every workday or meeting starts with a short meditation and check-in. Before starting with their tasks

team members meet in a circle and spend a few moments in silence, listening within, noticing how they are, connecting to the larger purpose of their work together, and focusing their intention and awareness on the present moment, the group they are with and the tasks at hand. All team members then share a few words about how they are in that moment, and sometimes about the work they plan to do, and who they will do it with. When all team members have checked in, the work starts. The length of the meditation and the check-in depends on the group and its needs, taking from three to thirty minutes.

This practice has two parts that can be used separately.

Have a minute of silence before you start an activity. Focus your attention on the present moment and become aware of your inner state, physically, emotionally, and mentally. It might help to close your eyes. Use your senses to become aware of the group you are with, and the intention for doing what you are doing, individually and together. Use some form of signal, when group members should stop the



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Moments of awareness, Findhorn

Photo: Manja Vrenko





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activity. This can be a bell, a sound, a squeeze of hands, etc. The time can similarly be adjusted to what you feel is right for your group.

Check in by quickly sharing with the group how you are in the current moment. This is usually done verbally, but some people also choose a movement, facial expression, a sound, etc. Pay attention or listen mindfully to your team members as they check-in. Let the check-in inform everyone about the state of the team on that day.

### **Impact on the individual**

Incorporating moments of awareness and check-ins into everyday life encourages group members to pause, reflect, connect with the intention and purpose of what they are doing, and openly share their inner state with others. This can support all members' understanding of their own needs and emotions. For many, it also builds trust, empathy and understanding the needs of others and the diversity of experiences present in the group. Increasing awareness in turn supports the group to work together in ways that care for each individual, each other, the group and the project.

However, participating in moments of awareness and check-ins can be challenging, too. One member might have a habit of suppressing her emotions in order to be more efficient at work. Another might be convinced that revealing his inner emotional life will make him a target for attack or ridicule. The third might find it hard to listen to other people's check-ins without taking their words personally. The fourth might think it is a waste of time and that the group should just get on with the work.

Does efficiency have to come at the price of personal connections and nurturing relationships? Are we more or less capable of working together when we also spend time reflecting and sharing? Are we valued as individuals only when we present a polished surface, or do we increase our sense of self and value by opening up to others? All these questions influence how people experience and engage with moments of awareness and check-ins. They also apply directly to collective beliefs or assumptions held by the group.

### **Influence on community**

Moments of awareness and check-ins are

possible ways to practice communication skills and increase community glue. Practicing awareness and open communication has often proven to be a good early detection system for discontent or conflict within the group. Checking-in can also be an opportunity to celebrate good news together. By doing something together regularly, the group increases chances of developing a strong identity and group culture, thus contributing to a sense of belonging and continuity.

### **Intentions that influence practice**

Moments of awareness and check-ins can be seen as a small everyday ritual. Like all rituals they function as an enactment and reminder of the worldview and vision that guide the group as a whole. Moments of awareness and check-ins could, for example, reflect an intention to create a group culture where each person's authentic self is considered valuable and welcome, where transparent communication is seen as key to efficient collaboration, community building, and personal growth, where regularly reflecting on personal and collective intentions is encouraged.

### **The importance of structure**

Some groups prefer if moments of awareness and check-ins happen spontaneously, however many groups have the experience that check-ins have the greatest impact when they are regular, embraced as an aspect of how people meet, work together or engage in common activities. Making them a regular part of meetings provides a clear framework for personal reflection, open communication, emotional connection, celebration, and strengthening the community glue. All of these provide the ground for organising work or making decisions in efficient and yet caring ways.

### **Example 3: compost toilets**

Compost toilet is a surprisingly symbolic, complex, emotional, and educational phenomenon. Water closets (WC's) interrupt natural cycles, pollute water, waste energy; if the water is not cleaned it pollutes local soils, waterways and groundwater. Sustainable groups, particularly ecovillage communities, use compost toilets to transform their everyday practice of

releasing human waste. Some are basic and functional, others are aesthetic and a real pleasure to use.

Usually dry, organic materials are mixed with human waste to help it compost faster. Some compost toilets separate urine and faeces. In such toilets the composting process is even easier and cleaner. Separately collected urine can be used as fertiliser in the garden, being a great source of nitrogen and phosphates. Composted faeces can nourish plants and build soil fertility. Compost toilets are therefore an ecological practice which touches social and cultural layers as well.

### Impact on the individual

Toilet culture is one of the most individual everyday practices and normally “not for sharing”. Common toilets (either compost or regular ones) are a sign of willingness to share something that is usually reserved for the private sphere. Bringing up the idea of building and using compost toilets can trigger emotions and tensions related to status and wealth. Some individuals might disapprove of them due to negative experiences (bad odour, discomfort, etc.), fear of germs and contamination, or lack of experience. In most cases compost toilets open up a large field of opportunity for individual and group growth. Individuals have to reevaluate their own principles and investigate how far they are willing to go to change their behavioral patterns.

### Influence on community

Sharing an innovative toilet culture is a great opportunity for community building. The group needs to find answers to many questions: Who will create the system? Where to place it? How will the system be taken care of? How aesthetic and comfortable do people want it to be? How much can it cost? etc. This is a chance to practice negotiation and decision-making. When a group is starting in the countryside or suburbs, compost toilets can act as an indicator whether the group is ready to address ecological and collective issues.

In some ways it demonstrates the readiness of people, to put it bluntly, “to own their own shit and work with it”. Compost toilets exemplify the shift from being consumers to finding

more sustainable solutions in – every part of! – our lives.

### Intentions that influence practice

Building a compost toilet is a design challenge in the society where WC is the norm.

At the same time it is a relatively small space where limitless creativity can be expressed.

A well-designed and well-functioning compost toilet is one of the most ecological and elegant solutions to prevent wasting water, lower expenses, produce excellent fertiliser, etc. Creating healthier lifestyles with simple solutions like compost toilets demonstrates an intention of establishing alternative, efficient and sustainable solutions, valuing waste as a resource and examining everyday practices for their ecological footprint; acting on it. Furthermore, toilet facilities give a first hand impression of the group to visitors. Are toilet facilities collective or individual? Does the community have compost toilets? Are toilet facilities given attention and care? Have these aspects generally been thought off, in the overall design of the place?



**Compost toilet, Estonia**  
Photo: Monique Wijn

### Importance of structure

If compost toilet is self-built, this is an example of making the dream and design a reality. It involves doing something real and tangible together; obtaining and preparing materials, laying the foundation, building the framework, thrones, roof, walls, and making it beautiful, unleashing creativity in a community effort. After the building is completed, it is time for celebration, feedback and harvest of learnings. If looked upon from this angle, a compost toilet is a good exercise in the Dragon Dreaming project cycle – dreaming, planning, doing and celebrating. So to grow as a group while doing something tangible design and build a compost toilet together! Once it is built, create all the necessary structures to maintain it, process urine and composted faeces appropriately, use them in farming and enjoy the harvest.



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To sum up, the practice of having compost toilets in a community touch upon many layers:

- **The social dimension**, by sharing toilet culture as community
- **The ecological dimension**, with the advantage of saving water and producing fertiliser
- **The economical dimension** by closing the circle of the flow of organic material, utilising “waste”, saving by sharing
- **The cultural dimension** by adding value to the end of the cycle of food, bringing in aesthetic features, transforming the prevailing “rituals” of toilet culture, etc.



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fectively: having in average more passengers per ride, distributing ownership and maintenance costs, reducing the number of cars on the road. One possibility is to join an official car sharing agency that offers car sharing in different cities. There are usually no car sharing opportunities in rural areas, but if there are enough people in the community who want to use it, car sharing agencies can be approached to install it even in villages. Another possibility is to self-organise a car sharing system for the community. This usually works quite well even with privately owned cars.

### Example 4: car sharing

Nowadays most people use cars very frequently, so it is no wonder that even in groups strongly dedicated to sustainability cars are unavoidable, particularly in ecovillages which tend to be remotely located. Cars symbolise increasingly individualistic lifestyle which depends on resources that strain the

#### Impact on the individual

Common causes of tensions around car sharing are: cleaning the car “properly” after use, returning the car on time, making sure there is fuel in the tank, accepting that there may be times when you need the car but it is already in use. Both trust and planning are necessary. Owning one’s own car may seem easier, more efficient and autonomous for doing everyday trips (commuting to work, shopping, etc.) without having to coordinate this with others. Still, benefits of car sharing are numerous whether you are joining an existing formal scheme or implementing own system of sharing privately owned cars. Common ownership gives a chance of closer connection with others in the community. Mundane errands have a potential of becoming moments of fun and adventure. Furthermore, car maintenance costs are substantial; car sharing means cost sharing, so individuals who otherwise couldn’t afford a car can use it when they need it.

#### Influence on community

Car sharing can bring communities together, not just at events of celebration or business, but for everyday functions. In a community with a few fully utilised cars it is a lot less common to see someone driving a car alone, with all other seats empty. This reduces the carbon footprint of the community as a whole. Car sharing is one of the possible elements of shared economy and it is easily aligned with other elements. Some car sharing schemes allow users to see the trips of other users so they can contact each other and share costs. Car sharing is about making individual practices more collective, utilising effects of such



Carsharing Lebensbogen, Germany

Photo: Monique Wijn

environment severely, either through congestions or emissions.

Transport and cars represent a dilemma and ambivalence. It is no wonder that many sustainable groups, wishing to minimise their ecological impact, are attempting to rely on ecologically and economically viable alternatives, such as various forms of public transport or, even better, bicycles! However, availability of public transport infrastructure varies widely from place to place. Many sustainable projects chose to be based in remote places, away from cities, shops and offices, and also far away from other groups with similar values. For such groups cars remain a necessity. The question remains: how to use cars in a less environmentally harmful manner – while still using them to maintain everyday life with work obligations, friends/family relations, etc.

Some groups establish car sharing schemes, thus using common cars more ef-

practices, and benefiting from community building.

### Intentions that influence practice

Key questions are: What is community's intention? How much does the community focus on reducing its carbon footprint? Does it wish to use resources more effectively? Would it like to cultivate day-to-day communal activities? Answers to these questions need to be positive, if car sharing scheme is to run well. Communities that present themselves as sustainable but don't have a car sharing scheme can use these questions to reevaluate their vision and see how would car sharing help them function more sustainably. Curious visitors of ecovillages commonly ask the question: So, you live in an ecovillage but each one of you drives your own car? How does this correspond with your core values and intentions?

### The importance of structure

Many car sharing structures are possible but the basics of all schemes usually include the following:

- **Ownership: all the cars are commonly owned and/or personally owned cars are a part of the scheme**
- **Organisation: membership contracts, payments and liability for possible damage, rules for reservations, etc.**
- **A place (physical or virtual) where reservations can be made, sharing of rides arranged, usage monitored, etc.**
- **A place, where all car keys (and other equipment) is stored and, of course, parking places for shared cars**
- **Driver's log in for all cars that are a part of car share**

Support team, responsible for cars (maintenance), payments (administration), etc.

These structures usually work better if cars are commonly owned (for instance by the central organisation of the group). Car sharing scheme with privately owned cars is easier to establish on the one hand, but tends to be more complicated to run on the other, since owners wish to enforce special rules and rights for using their own cars. Negotiation is a skill learnt best in community!

### Practice – a summary

Chapters on Individual, Community, Intention and Structure have taken us through essential attention points. The result is Practice, as lived, experienced and witnessed in concrete communities. Shared dinners, moments of awareness, composting toilets and car sharing schemes were chosen to illustrate Practice because they touch upon all four layers of the CLIPS model. They exemplify both simplicity and complexity of the model and the need for coherence between all the elements it is comprised of.



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### The 24-hour rule of Sieben Linden car sharing

In Sieben Linden there are 10 cars in the car share, 8 of which are privately owned. Whoever wants to reserve a car for more than 24 hours, needs to get consent from the owner. Within the frame of 24 hours all free cars can be reserved and used by anyone. If the owner finds out hers/his car is already occupied, she/he must look for another car from the carpool. With enough cars in the carpool this usually works well.





**Ecovillage Playing Cards**

**Photo: Ita Gabert**



## WHAT'S NEXT?

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### To end is to begin

Congratulations on your determination to read this guide to the end! We hope that this journey through the potential “ups and downs” of starting a sustainable group project has encouraged you on your path. If you are one of the many people who want to make this planet a better place for all, we hope you feel strengthened and committed to go on with that mission.

As we have already pointed out this is not a universal step to step guide for users and facilitators. Every group is different, facing its own challenges and potentials, needing different methods, processes and strategies to find its direction and drive. We have added tips for facilitators as an annex to this guide. In the annex we focus on diagnosing and stocktaking the group process.

The creators of CLIPS are convinced that standing together we have a chance to create the more beautiful world we dream of. We look around and see many people struggling to join hands and work collectively and peacefully with each other – even when they share the same goals and intentions. We hope CLIPS shows that collaboration is both needed, possible, exciting and productive – if we are prepared to face challenges and transform them into learning opportunities.

### CLIPS in its landscape of related resources

CLIPS exists in a rich and dynamic ecosystem of resources and training opportunities that aim to support new initiatives. The experience of pioneering communities all around the world proves that a dream, if properly incubat-

ed, can become reality. The CLIPS model and collection of resources are designed especially for that purpose: to support new initiatives, as they set off on their unique journeys of design and implementation. In this way CLIPS is unique.

CLIPS integrates decades of experience and many existing tools for guiding individuals and groups through developing their projects and realising their dreams. Organisations, projects and programmes in the list below form an integral part of the inspiration behind CLIPS. They give opportunity for further learning and development in many different fields.

The websites of the [Global Ecovillage Network](#) and many of the national networks of GEN Europe list internships, trainings and workshops in the network of ecovillages across the globe.

**GEN Education** offers ecovillage introductions and taster workshops as well as custom-made trainings in the 4 dimensions of sustainability – social, cultural, ecology, economy – and the central path of whole systems design.



**Ecovillage Playing Cards**



**Mandala of the Ecovillage Design Education (EDE)**



GEN has also developed the **Ecovillage Playing Cards** – 36 illustrated Ecovillage Principles that distill years of experimentation and research into a flexible tool for play, reflection, dialogue, research and design in the 5 dimensions of sustainability – for individuals, groups, projects, organisations and communities.

GEN's longstanding partner **Gaia Education** offers a month-long and UN endorsed Ecovillage Design Education (EDE), in many locations around the world, as well as accredited online courses in the 5 dimensions of sustainability.

<https://i0.wp.com/clips.gen-europe.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Structure.png?resize=416%2C243>

Welcome to CLIPS!

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**Bridgedale 360 is the place for youth to learn and build new world**

**Social Innovation for Resilient Communities, SIRClE**, provides a flexible pattern-language curriculum for social entrepreneurship, supporting people to marry personal skills and passion with actively strengthening community well-being.

**Bridgedale360**

offers a free online youth sustainability toolbox to empower the work of youth and youth workers everywhere.

In addition to all of the above (and a whole lot more) there is, of course, CLIPS itself with the web-based platform of facilitators, resources, tools and methods designed to support groups. On the CLIPS website: <http://clips.gen-europe.org/>, you can find:

- **The CLIPS guide (this document)**
- **A toolkit of methods**
- **A resource section (with self-assessment tool, forum and advisory service)**
- **Trainers' profiles**
- **A map with projects.**

There is definitely more to come as this guide, the website, the list of trainers and the educational materials are in constant transformation as we keep developing and improving the programme: it's the labour of life and life never says "the end".

We hope, you will enjoy and put this work beautifully into action.





**Ecovillage Gathering Slovenia**  
**Photo: Manja Vrenko**





**Smurf game**  
**Photo: Manja Vrenko**



## ANNEX

### Incubation of group projects - notes for facilitators

Looking at CLIPS from the facilitator's point of view there are particularly relevant points worth noting down. Facilitating community incubation is very rewarding, but we must stress that it requires specific expertise derived from concrete experience in group projects.

Facilitators commonly invent their own methods and styles. So, realistically, we don't expect CLIPS to be embraced universally as the one and only tool-box for facilitating group incubation. We're offering it to facilitators for inspiration, insight, guidance and reference. CLIPS gives recommendations to relevant and desirable tools and processes.

On the other hand CLIPS provides a solid facilitation base too! CLIPS facilitators have been trained to apply appropriate methods for a vast variety of group issues. Based on their needs, groups can rely on certified instructors for methods like: Process work, Dragon Dreaming, sociocracy, Non-Violent Communication, etc.

CLIPS programme is still young. So far it didn't develop certification process and formal schemes of training the trainers and facilitators. Therefore CLIPS trainings are currently done only by the central CLIPS team which developed it. This is not to discourage facilitators from utilising CLIPS in their work with groups! We only request them to undergo upcoming trainings before giving trainings on community incubation based on the CLIPS model. To ensure best results, please consult the central CLIPS team.

### How to facilitate groups with CLIPS?

Facilitator's task is most often to be an external consultant (without vested interests), to offer processes suitable for detecting the needs of the group (in each particular phase), and then to facilitate the processes that the group needs and wants to go through. This is the essence of facilitation in CLIPS.

First step: get to know where the group is

Before applying any of the methods listed in CLIPS, "diagnosing", or "mapping" the present situation should be done to get a sense of group's needs. Proposed tools for this task (to be found on the CLIPS website) are:

#### Self-assessment tool

Various questionnaires give insight into group's situation at any particular moment.

A good way to fill in the questionnaire is by all members doing it individually and then undergoing a group process of comparing it, finding overlaps, differences, making compromises, etc.

<http://clips.gen-europe.org/selfassessment-tool/>

<https://ecovillage.org/resources/sustainability-assessment/>



#### Force field analysis

This tool explores tensions in groups, supporting self-analysis of potential "engines and



**SWOT**



**CLIPS model**

Photo: Ita Gabert

brakes”, which either hinder or promote desired changes. Force field analysis aims to unlock unnecessary brakes and fuel the engines to move on.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Force-field\\_analysis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Force-field_analysis)

This well known matrix sheds light on internal elements (strengths and weaknesses) and external ones (opportunities and threats) thus giving an overview of the situation. The SOAR model is like SWOT, only with a more appreciative orientation (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, results).

There are many (self-)assessment methods facilitators use in their work and can be used depend-

ing on the project. The above listed three methods are suitable for most groups.

**The Clips model in use**

Facilitators can use the CLIPS model as a diagnostic tool to help groups understand which issues fit into which layers in the model, thus outlining attention points. They can thus support groups in adequate development of their projects.

**Individual**

Here the group should pay attention to balance between personal and collective dynamics. Facilitator’s task is to assist the group in clarifying how they want to manage those dynamics. It is good to identify what kind of individual work is necessary to avoid negative impacts on the group.

**Community**

There is no community without individuals (and vice versa), and it is no wonder that facilitation approaches and methods dealing with these two layers go hand in hand. Some simple processes should be encouraged in the first stages of group development: communicating, celebrating, working together, playing, managing tensions and emotions, accepting diversity. Many methods for the first two levels have already been listed in the Community chapter of CLIPS.

**Intention**

The facilitator should keep an eye on the movement of the group towards its vision, mission and objectives, its presence and effect in the environment. Facilitation should support the group in recognising the need for feedback. The most relevant processes in this phase have to do with the ability to realise aspirations, live up to values, keep up commitments, evaluate results, update and adapt vision, mission and objectives when necessary. It is good to set the timeline: for finalising the initial phase of setting the vision, mission and objectives, for reviewing them, stocktaking them, opening up enquiries on the levels of ownership of the existing vision and mission in the group, etc.

**Structure**

On this layer groups can use assistance in writing down clear guidelines. Pay attention to how clear, participatory and appropriate is the structure; what are the dynamics of power between different roles; is there transparency in leadership, privileges and distribution of responsibilities; what are economic, legal and organisational issues. Good facilitation supports efficiency of meetings, allocation of clear roles and functions, clarity on information flows, decision-making system. Sometimes good analysis of these issues requires an external facilitator to shed light on blind spots.

CLIPS website offers a collection of methods for each layer. Further methods are going to be added and developed. Our web forum is the place for trainers and facilitators to share methods with peers.

## Recommendations for training of trainers (ToT)

The above suggestions are relevant for group requesting support from trained CLIPS facilitators.

When training CLIPS facilitators additional attention needs to be paid to the meta-level of the process. We should assume that the attendant of training starts with the high level of competence in the basic contents of the programme. Solid facilitation and communication skills, knowledge of group dynamics and other fundamental social tools are not only recommended but advisable or even required.

The focus of the ToT is to enable the trainee to manage two levels simultaneously:

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### Content

The trainee needs to be able to diagnose and comprehend the main challenges the group is facing, where it needs support and coaching, what the desired outcome of the assisted group process would be.

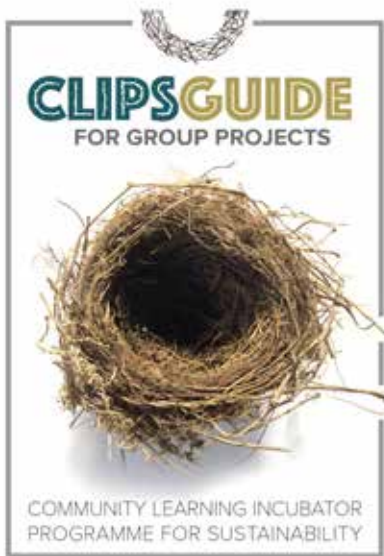
### Process

The trainee should be able to determine possible and appropriate approaches for various contexts and situations (group culture, number of participants, time frame, etc.); monitor the chosen approach as it is applied, notice resistances and driving forces, adapt, and stir.

The role of ToT trainers is to encourage trainees to widen their horizons and open to new possibilities. Selected tools and appropriate information can stir up changes in group habits with significant long term impact, modifying both the individual and the collective behaviour.

Trained CLIPS facilitators are invited to follow-up on the developments of their facilitation based on peer evaluation after three, six and twelve months. Only trainers who constantly develop their knowledge and skills will keep up with the rapidly changing world and keep the ability to support group processes in diverse initiatives.





# CLIPS

## COMMUNITY LEARNING INCUBATOR

### PROGRAMME FOR SUSTAINABILITY

**Are you part of a starting or already developed ecovillage, eco-communities, co-housing project, NGO's, civil initiative, green business collective, community school, ethical bank, health circle, co-operative, community-supported agriculture project or any community led project?**

**Then this guide may just be what you are looking for.**

#### International Partners



GEN-Estonia, Estonia



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**CLIPS is a solution oriented programme to guide community-led projects in their initial steps – and for existing initiatives that struggle with problems or simply need revitalisation. The purpose of CLIPS is to suggest and explain a framework for approaching community development. It also points out specific tools found useful by existing community-led projects.**

**CLIPS is based on learnings and insights from established ecovillage projects. These insights have been distilled into concepts and methods applicable to any group that recognises the value of community. As it was developed, the CLIPS package was tested and evaluated by community initiatives from nine European countries.**

**This CLIPS guide explains a model for community development. The guide is accompanied by workshops, mentoring and trainings, as well as an online platform with resources, links, examples and tools for both projects and trainers engaged with supporting communities to grow. For this information look at:**

**<http://clips.gen-europe.org/>**



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