**From idea to reality - from the founder of Hallingelille**

*When I got the idea of Hallingelille, I knew nothing or very little about the idea of ​​ecovillages - I knew of course the freetown Christiania, the practical eco-commune Svanholm and the old ecovillage in Torup, but only very peripherally.*

The idea for building up an ecovillage originated from the winter of 1994 where I took a period where I did some serious ‘stocktaking’ of my life - especially issues like housing and work. I thought there had to be other ways of living - ways that for me could feel more life-affirming and ‘being in the present’, answering a calling and not just being stuck in a very normal everyday life and routine that can be hard to get out of. I was born and raised in Copenhagen, but always knew I was not an urban person - that I wanted to get out of the city and live in nature. Therefore, I had lived in the countryside most of my adult life. It had been good and in the various small village communities I had lived over the years, there had always been good neighbors and initiatives for various "village activities". As an example, I was a member of a cooperative where I could buy organic goods. For many years I had been interested in the alternative and spiritual world - and it has filled a large part of my life. I have always managed to find at least a single person in the villages I had lived in, who I could talk to and be inspired by about these big questions in life.

I experienced how living in the countryside meant a dependence on having playmates for the children nearby in the local community and how people, including myself, were dependent on cars to be able to make everyday life work, catering for the children's leisure activities and maintaining private networks. During the same period, my old mother came to an elderly home - she was a Christian and came to an elderly home that had the same approach to life as she had. I saw how she blossomed by being with other people who could inspire her. I started speculating about my own end to life and imagined what it would be like to be housed in an elderly home without "peers" - without a focus on organic diet or spiritual paths of life - it did not look promising in my eyes.

All these reflections laid the foundation for the dream that then unfolded for me about a community where there could be local jobs established, for the place not to become dormant in the daytime, hopefully both within agriculture and social projects. A place with other children to play with for my kids, like in an old village, and where I could also have a strong social network. A place where I could become old and a place where I would not need to leave, so I would not have to be "deported" to another city if a time would come where I would not be able to handle everything myself. A place where I did not have to drive far to buy my organic goods. All in all, it should be a place where it was good to live, from cradle to grave. It formed a dream of an eco-spiritual community with a kindergarten, a school, a home for emotionally damaged children (my own area of ​​work and a dream of being able to establish an alternative to already existing places), a health center, an elderly/nursing home and not least a hospice. I was quite sure that the settlement should be somewhere in the middle of Sealand, but I did not exactly know where – or with whom.

The dream was a good dream. But it seemed quite overwhelming to me – and others - and was therefore shelved away together with other "utopian projects". It was not until a year later, in 1998, after a course about creating the life I wanted, that the dream was taken down from the shelf and I decided that now I would do it. I did not want to risk ending my life without having tried.

I made a small note with the main keywords of my dream and presented it at a health fair in Copenhagen in March 1999. Very quickly a small group of interested people had signed up. At the first meeting, 18 people showed up, all captivated by the idea. We made a strategy and a group drafted a constitution for the support association for the project, which in the meantime had been named Village 2000. In May 1999, a founding general meeting was convened. About 40 people showed up and we were off!

In the time leading up to the general meeting, my phone was glowing red. Interest was huge. Information was being gathered about a lot of different things. I had been advised to make sure to have a location ready from the start. Experience shows that you could do a lot of preparation, but when you had to find a site, someone from the group would live by the water, someone by the forest, some with a view to open fields and others close to a big city. Which could risk splitting the group - and then you could start all over again. I was sure from the beginning that it should be in mid Sealand and I had the idea that 50 acres of land was a proper size. I started out by calling the technical departments in all the municipalities in that area: Hvalsø, Ringsted and Lejre. First, Lejre was not interested. Ringsted did not have any land of that size available but found the project interesting. Hvalsø would very much like a project like ours. They also had some land, but not nearly as much as we would like - and it was not very charming. Then I wrote a letter to a local landowner asking if he would sell us 50 hectares of his land (many hundreds of hectares belonged to him, so he could probably do without it, I thought).

Time passed and I did not hear anything, but it turned out that he had never received the letter. Unfortunately, he did not have 50 hectares, but he had around 33 hectares which we could buy. Now we just had to have a meeting with the municipality, then it was done - but we became much wiser: First, we had to wait a long time for that meeting at the municipality. Here they told us that it was in the "open country" (like 500 meter outside the city limits) and it was not possible for us to build there. When we proceeded with our case to the county, they listened to us nicely, gave us the same explanation as the municipality had done, and then drew a map where they pointed out an area within the urban zone, which the county already had laid out land for urban development, so there was "just" a local planning process ahead, then we would be able to build there. It all sounded good - if the area was for sale? We found out and got to negotiate a price for the land fairly quickly, and then it was just a matter of moving on - we thought. It turned out that citizens of the nearby town for 8 years had objected to the county's regional plan, which laid out this piece of land for urban development. It turned into a turbulent process where the local citizens protested quite massively against our project. It cost us up to a year of dialogue meetings between a committee set up by the civic association in the town and us from Village 2000. In the end, we agreed (together with both the civic association, the municipality and the county). Almost everything should be in order, but again, we got wiser. Suddenly, the landowner would not sell anyway. It was a big blow for our project.

In the autumn of '99, when everything was still really bright, we met every Friday in a Community house in Copenhagen. We also had several weekends together. First a ‘Future Workshop’ weekend for visioning, then a "democracy weekend", where we established our democratic structure and finally a permaculture weekend where we, among other things, made the anticipated ground plan for our settlement. All in all, these many weekends got the group thoroughly shaken together, and there was plenty of enthusiasm. But after all this work and the blow of having to give up, a lot of people thought that it was not fun anymore and could no longer cope with the new and longer prospects. Some people dropped out of the project – and that was hard.

We were swallowing disappointment with both loss of land and loss of people. But the county in their new regional plan opened for the possibility of 5 pilot projects outside the normal urban development areas. Therefore, we once again contacted Ringsted municipality to hear what they felt about us landing in Ringsted. Were they just happy to have got rid of us now that it could not be done at the first location? Would they still be interested in housing our project within the municipality's boundaries, despite the local protests and the turmoil it had created? They did.

Armed with a municipal plan, a regional plan and some good maps, we now went to inspect areas of the municipality, exploring where we could imagine settling down. We were lucky to find a piece of land that was already run organically in Valsømagle, a village with only 35 households. To make a very long story short, a small group of us bought a farm – Hallingebjerg – which could form our base.

So far so good! We now had a property with over 1000 m2 under roof and 25.3 hectares of beautifully situated agricultural land. Some of us moved into the farm and I personally was lucky to get hold of one of the neighboring houses overlooking our land. Then we should "just" get all the formalities in place with the county, municipality and then a local plan, then we could settle down. Again, things would take longer than we thought. First, the county had to approve us as one of the 5 pilot projects. To get things on the agenda for political meetings takes time - but we succeeded, and we were approved. The city council had taken a position and unanimously decided that they wanted us in the municipality, as "they found our ideas of a sustainable community exciting".

A bit over a year after we had bought the property and half a year after we had taken it over, we were going through a consultation period, where the local citizens were to be consulted on whether they liked the idea. The dialogue meetings showed that some people thought that our project was too big for such a small town - and that there would probably become too much traffic. Fortunately, some also thought it was a good idea to breathe new life into an otherwise almost dead village. But unfortunately, not most of them. Then followed a nerve-wracking wait of 3 months before the City Planning and Housing Committee (a political committee) got us on the agenda to decide whether they would start a local plan for our project. 4 of the committee's 7 members voted for and 3 against. But the case was taken to the city council - here, the project was unfortunately voted down by 13 votes to 8!

Another blow. But along the way, we had become wiser and yes, more realistic. The project was then adapted to better fit into an already existing village. The size was minimized to 23 homes and the idea of our own school and kindergarten dropped. My intended treatment home for the 6 children was dropped. The hospice dropped. The vision of a big settlement was reduced to a much smaller ecovillage-project, which was more like a housing community. And we succeeded to get it approved. Understanding that our visions could create fear in people. We had to ‘normalize’ and align our dream quite a lot, to be able to establish a project.

To be honest, I had never dreamt that it was such a big job to create an ecovillage. That it would take so long. But despite replacements in the group, we were still a wonderfully mixed bunch of people that I was very much looking forward to having as neighbors.

INFO: Since the common house in Hallingelille was built in 2005 as the first building on the land, 23 individual ecohouses have been built. During the first years from 2004-2008, many families lived in temporary buildings, awaiting the building permits. Straw, hemp, seashells etc. were new to the municipality. Today the farm Hallingebjerg is the home for a collective with 8 adults and 2 children. Hallingelille has 50 adults and 30 children.