

From the Global Ecovillage Network (<https://ecovillage.org>):

## What is an Ecovillage?

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An ecovillage is an intentional, traditional or urban community that is consciously designed through locally owned participatory processes in all [four dimensions of sustainability](#) (social, culture, ecology and economy) to regenerate social and natural environments.

What is an Ecovillage? GEN's definition of 'ecovillage' is broad, allowing for many different kinds of communities and projects to be recognised. Because each ecovillage is designed by the people who live there, according to their vision, context, culture and interests, no two are alike. You can find more specific definitions for ecovillages in our [GEN Glossary](#). While every ecovillage is unique, GEN categorizes them into two general categories, which can be found in either rural or urban settings:

- **traditional** – existing rural villages and communities that decide to design their own pathway into the future, using participatory processes to combine life-sustaining traditional wisdom and positive new innovation.
- **intentional** – created by people who come together afresh with a shared purpose or vision.

Today, GEN reaches out to around 10.000 communities on all continents. We have learned that, while there is no one way of being an ecovillage, there are three core practices shared by all:

1. Being rooted in local participatory processes

2. Integrating social, cultural, economic and ecological dimensions in a [whole systems approach to sustainability](#)
3. Actively restoring and regenerating their social and natural environments

### **What ecovillages are not**

- An Ecovillage is not a particular outcome, but an ongoing process. Each ecovillage is a living and learning centre for a regenerative future, a place of continuous exploration.
- Ecovillages are not designed by outside developers, architects or experts, but by communities themselves.
- Ecovillages do not focus solely on ecology, even though many ecovillages start with a strong focus on the ecological dimension. Preservation and restoration of nature can only succeed when the social fabric is strong, cultural heritage is celebrated and people find ways to marry their love for the planet with their need to make a living. Experience has shown that, given enough time, ecovillages will naturally develop to encompass all four dimensions of sustainability.
- Ecovillages are not islands for the rich and middle class. Some of the most vulnerable and marginalized communities in the 'Global South' and communities with the lowest recorded eco-footprints in the 'Global North' are engaged in GEN. Ecovillages in the 'North' typically focus on simplifying lifestyles to bring their ecological impacts below local and global carrying capacities. They have some of the lowest recorded eco-footprints with respect the national averages in their countries. Ecovillages in the 'South' typically focus on preserving precious low-impact traditions, while improving living standards.

- Communities do not need to call themselves an 'Ecovillage' in order to be recognised by GEN.

## FOUR DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY

### Social

Ecovillagers tend to actively work to build trust, collaboration and openness between people, and to make sure they feel empowered, seen and heard. Ecovillages often provide a sense of belonging through community relationships, common projects, shared goals, and social processes, but do not demand that everyone is the same – unity and strength through diversity is important to the ecovillage movement.



- Nurture diversity and cohesion for thriving communities
- Develop fair, effective and accountable institutions
- Practice conflict facilitation, communication and peacebuilding skills
- Empower collaborative leadership and participatory decision making
- Ensure equal and lifelong access to education for sustainability

- Promote health, healing and wellbeing for all

## Culture

Ecovillages aim to build or regenerate diverse cultures that support people to empower and care for each other, their communities and the planet. Many actively engage with practices that encourage people to feel deeply connected to each other, to the planet, and to themselves. Celebration, art, dance and other forms of creative expression are often embraced as central to thriving human life and communities. Most ecovillages find their own ways to talk about, connect with, respect and support life and the beings and systems that sustain it.



- Clarify vision and higher purpose
- Nurture mindfulness and self-reflection
- Enrich life with art and celebration
- Honour indigenous wisdom and welcome positive innovation
- Engage actively to protect communities and nature
- Reconnect to nature and embrace low-impact lifestyles

## Ecology

Ecovillages aim to access food, shelter, water and energy in ways that respect the cycles of nature. They aim to integrate humans with the rest of nature in ways that increase biodiversity and regenerate ecosystems, and that give people a chance to experience their interdependence with systems and cycles of life on a direct and daily basis.



- Grow seeds, food and soil through regenerative agriculture
- Clean and replenish sources and cycles of water
- Move towards 100% renewable energy and transport
- Innovate and spread green building technologies
- Work with waste as a valuable resource
- Increase biodiversity and restore ecosystems

## Economy

Ecovillages aim to build economic practices and systems that contribute to sharing of resources, mutual support, and strong local economies and networks that serve the needs of local people and ecosystems. Most ecovillages actively work to provide sustainable alternatives to the mainstream economy and monetary system, and reclaim ways of thinking about wealth and progress that include all aspects of life. Local currencies, sharing, social

entrepreneurship, circular economy and collaborative forms of ownership are central to many ecovillages.



- Reconstruct the concepts of wealth, work and progress
- Commit to responsible production, consumption and trade
- Cultivate social entrepreneurship for local regeneration
- Increase economic justice through sharing and collaboration
- Ensure equitable access to land and resources
- Use banks and currencies that strengthen communities

## Integral Design

Some principles apply to all Areas of Regeneration, and help bring them together in holistic designs for resilient communities and systems. In GEN, the integral design approach to design and regeneration is paired with a strong focus on collaboration and participation. This means that the principles of integral design are put into practice in ways that actively include everyone concerned and encourage transparency at every level.



- Learn from nature and practise whole systems thinking
- Identify assets, needs and leverage points
- Adapt solutions to scale and context
- Be aware of privilege and use it for the benefit of all
- Build alliances across all divides
- Engage all stakeholders in designs for the future
- Spread core patterns of regeneration
- Listen to the feedback of the world