



ECOLOGICAL DESIGN

What is an ecovillage?

Robert Gilman, in his book, *Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities*, offers this definition and explanation:

An ecovillage is a human-scale full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future.

Human-scale refers to a size in which people are able to know and be known by the others in the community, and where each member of the community feels he or she is able to influence the community's direction.

In a full-featured settlement, all the major functions of normal living—residence, food provision, manufacture, leisure, social life, and commerce—are plainly present and in balanced proportions.

The idea that human activities be harmlessly integrated into the natural world brings the "eco" into the ecovillage. One of the most important aspects of this principle is the ideal of equality between humans and other forms of life, so that humans do not attempt to dominate nature but rather find their place within it. Another important principle is the cyclic use of material resources, rather than the linear approach (dig it up, use it once, throw it away forever) that has characterized industrial society.

The principle of support for healthy human development recognizes that ecovillages are, after all, human communities, and without genuine human health at the core, these communities are unlikely to be successful. Healthy human development involves a balanced and integrated development of all aspects of human life—physical, emotional, mental, and

spiritual. This healthy development needs to be expressed not just in the lives of individuals, but in the life of the community as a whole.

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The ecocity is the next step in the evolution of our urban environments: built to fit its place, in cooperation with nature rather than in conflict; designed for people to live whilst keeping the cycles of atmosphere, water, nutrients and biology in healthy balance; empowering the powerless, getting food to the hungry and shelter to the homeless; creating a place for everyone, in every land, for all time.

—Paul Downton,
Urban Ecology of Australia

Sustainable design is not a new building style. Instead, it represents a revolution in how we think about, design, construct, and operate buildings. The primary goal of sustainable design is to lessen the harm poorly designed buildings cause by using the best of ancient building approaches in logical combination with the best of new technological advances. Its ultimate goal is to make possible offices, homes, even entire subdivisions, that are net producers of energy, food, clean water and air, beauty, and healthy human and biological communities.

—from *A Primer on Sustainable Building*, Rocky Mountain Institute

The sustainability principle-that the community can be successfully continued into the indefinite future-forces a kind of honesty on ecovillagers. Without it, it would be easy (or at least easier) in the short-term to create human-scale communities that seem to be harmoniously integrated into nature and to be full-featured, but in fact are in some not-so-visible way living off the capital accumulated in other parts of the society; or dependent on unsustainable activities elsewhere; or not inclusive of a major aspect of life (such as childhood or old age). The sustainability principle brings with it a profound commitment to fairness and nonexploitation-toward other parts of today's world, human and non-human, and toward all future life.

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