



EXPLORING ECOVILLAGES IN RURAL AREAS

MOTIVATIONS,
PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES OF
ECOVILLAGE INHABITANTS

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Abstract

The ecovillage movement is a recent phenomenon in the Netherlands. Ecovillages come in various shapes and sizes but what they have in common is their desire to live sustainably in a close community. Most of the ecovillages can be found in rural areas because of financial considerations and the availability of space. The goal of this research is to get insight into the prior motivations and current experiences and practices of ecovillage inhabitants in rural areas. The biggest motivation to move to an ecovillage turned out to be the desire to live in a close community, away from the individual focused mainstream society. Furthermore, the inhabitants wanted to live in a more sustainable way and also share information on this with people outside the ecovillage. The actual realization of ecovillages turned out to be a long and difficult process due to financial issues, building regulations, and government zoning. In order to ensure the realization of an ecovillage, the endorsement of the local municipality appeared to be vital. During the establishment of the ecovillages, many challenges emerged. Especially the construction, the creation of a close community, and the achievement of sustainable living practices were experienced as hard work. But in the end, these challenges were regarded as an opportunity for learning and self-development. This touches upon the desire to inspire people to live more sustainably and implement small changes in their lives. And not to be the perfect example of what living sustainably should look like.

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1 | Introduction

People have always been trying to find ways to live in groups harmoniously. An example of a communitarian living form is an ecovillage. Confronted with a global ecological crisis and social segregation, the creation of ecovillages came up as a possible answer to this (Dawson, 2006). Ecovillages come in various shapes and sizes. For example, they can have the size of a big family of around 20 people living in one or several houses or even consist of entire small towns of around 2000 people (Kasper, 2008). Furthermore, they can vary in different themes such as architectural, climatic, cultural and economic as they exist all over the world. What ecovillages have in common is their aim for self-sufficiency and sustainability. They aim not to be harmful to the environment and so they hope to continue existing in the indefinite future (Litfin, 2014). Thereby they have ecological ambitions such as the energy transition, increasing biodiversity or setting up a circular economy. Besides these more technical aspects, ecovillages can also aim to contribute to social aspects of sustainability by creating a close community and by attracting new residents, tourists, and economic activities. These opportunities are created through an open appearance wherein local links are reinforced. This leads to an exchange of products, services, and knowledge (Meijering et al. 2007).

In short, ecovillages can be defined as diverse settlements that have the aim to improve social and environmental living conditions in society by living and working together (Meijering et al., 2007). These values are in contrast with the more individualistic mainstream society as they tend to distance themselves from mainstream norms and values such as consumption, individualism, and materialism (Cresswell, 1996; Escribano et al., 2017). Previous research (Andreas, 2013; Dawson, 2013; Meijering, 2006, Meijering et al., 2007) showed that ecovillages are increasingly becoming integrated into their locality. This is due to changes within the society itself, as well as changes within the eco-communities. A better integration secures the continuity of the ecovillage (Meijering et al., 2007) and introduces other people to a sustainable way of life (Dawson, 2006).

Most ecovillages are built in rural regions owing to the availability of space, natural resources and reduced legal and economic obstacles (Dawson, 2006). Especially in these rural areas, ecovillages may have a high potential to contribute to the area in terms of development, attracting inhabitants, and economic activities. It is believed that ecovillages can contribute to these factors through their transformative aims (Meijering et al., 2007). In multiple European countries, as well as in the Netherlands, the population in rural areas is declining. This can, amongst other things, negatively influence the availability of facilities, the quality of the living environment, and the economic growth (Van Dam et al., 2006). These areas are increasingly searching for ways to increase the liveability and to attract development opportunities (Stockdale, 2006). The transformative potential of ecovillages can be especially interesting here. According to the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), which bundles the knowledge of ecovillages worldwide, ecovillages can reverse this trend in the area that they are established and provide an increase in local opportunities. For example, they can support local businesses and transmit innovative knowledge of sustainability practices (GEN, 2018).

Because ecovillages may offer a contribution in multiple ways for rural areas it is interesting to know how ecovillages are realized. Acknowledging the development of rather alternatives ways of living, municipalities in rural areas are increasingly searching for possibilities to allow

ecovillages to settle in their region. For example, the aim to attract ecovillages was included in the depopulation policy of the province of Groningen (2015) and Noord-Brabant (2017). It might be valuable to get insights in the realization process of ecovillages and what challenges there are experienced along the way. Therefore the main aim of this research is to identify the motivations of people for joining an ecovillage in rural areas. Also, it explores how the planning and construction of an ecovillage were experienced and current living practices are analysed. Insight in this can give helpful information to future ecovillage initiatives as well as involved parties such as local governments. Therefore the main research question is:

What were the motivations to move to, and current experiences and practices of people living in ecovillages situated in rural areas?

The main research question will be answered with the following sub-questions:

- *What were the prior motivations that eventually led to the move to an ecovillage?*
- *How is the process of creating an ecovillage experienced by the ecovillage inhabitants?*
- *What are the current experiences and practices of living in an ecovillage?*

Chapter two presents a literature study that describes the ecovillage movement worldwide and in the Dutch context. In chapter three the qualitative research methods are discussed whereby the process of interviewing and the ethical considerations that come with it are taken into account. Then in chapter four, a short description of the studied ecovillages is given. Subsequently, in chapter five, the study results will be presented. And finally, in chapter 6 the conclusions and findings on the research questions will be described and recommendations will be given.

2 | Theoretical outline

2.1 Ecovillage definition

The term ecovillage came into use in 1991 by a report from activists Robert and Diane Gilman. Herein they described settlements that were in a transition towards a more sustainable way of life (Dawson, 2015). Hereafter, already existing communities identified with this concept and also emerging communities started to call themselves ecovillages. Ecovillages come in various forms. This is a consequence of the several origins that ecovillages derive from (Dawson, 2015). Currently, the definition of ecovillages from the GEN (Global Ecovillage Network) is as follows:

“An ecovillage is an intentional, traditional or urban community using local participatory processes to integrate ecological, economic, social and cultural dimensions of sustainability in order to regenerate social and natural environments” (GEN, 2017).

This broad definition covers the heterogeneity of the concept. According to Dawson (2013), it is possible to make a distinction between two predominant types of ecovillages considerably in the Global North and the Global South. In the Global North ecovillages are generally small intentional communities. Contrary, in the Global South ecovillages often consist of traditional communities or community networks. However, this does not apply to all locations. Furthermore, Dawson (2013) argued that all ecovillages share foundations such as global justice, poverty reduction, respect for spiritual and cultural varieties, economic re-localization and a post-consumerist culture.

The term ecovillage came into use as a particular form of an ‘intentional community’. Intentional communities can be identified by a deliberate attempt to accomplish an alternative way of life apart from mainstream society. In these communities, the inhabitants are sharing their time and space for a collective ideology (Ergas, 2010). Intentional communities can be very different in lifestyle and philosophy, however, they give a high priority to encouraging mutual support and a sense of belonging that seems ever more hard to find in the mainstream society (Avelino and Kunze, 2009). Different waves in types of intentional communities can be distinguished. The first wave was characterized by religious themes (up to 1845), the second wave focused on economic and political themes (up to 1930), and the third wave on psychosocial matters (Kanter, 1972). The current ecovillage movement is part of the fourth wave of intentional communities. This latest wave was encouraged by growing concerns for the environment in recent decades (Litfin, 2013). In most ecovillages, the emphasis is on ecology. This underlies the fundamental principles of organization and design of these villages that are focused on ecological responsibility (Cohen, 2011). But apart from the ecological and communal aspects, a degree of spirituality can also be present (Meijering et al. 2007).

Furthermore, ecovillages can be perceived as grassroots innovations because they are community-led solutions for sustainability (Boyer, 2016). These bottom-up activities leave room for experimentation with alternative methods of consumption and production (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). Also, ecovillages are perceived as social innovations because of their aim for societal transformation as their goal is to change social relations by implying new ways of doing, framing, knowing and organizing (Avelino et al., 2019). However recently, also top-

down initiatives have appropriated the term ecovillage. These projects aim to change rural villages into sustainable eco-communities. Nevertheless, also bottom-up initiatives are involved in top-down participation as they need to go through consultations and negotiations with the local government (Dias et al., 2017).

2.2 Goals ecovillages

Nowadays our society is facing significant challenges due to the current non-sustainable situation. From the Industrial Revolution on, population growth as well as the power to consume resources enlarged exponentially. This increased demands on the planet's natural systems (Biggs et al., 2011, Steffen et al. 2011, Rockström et al., 2009, Vitousek et al., 1997). The increasing speed and scale of our impacts on the environment are inescapable. This is now resulting in, for example, climate change and biodiversity loss (Steffen et al., 2011). These environmental and ecological challenges are accompanied by issues regarding population growth and social inequity (Greenberg, 2015). These issues are so complex that the possibilities are evenly extensive. Ecovillages possibly represent one answer to this environmental and socio-economic crisis. This is because of the leading objective that is to create a more ecologically, economically and socially sustainable living form (Killián, 2009). This, for example, includes sustainable building techniques, maximizing benefits for the environment, decreasing exorbitant use of resources and encouraging community interaction (Kirby, 2003). Also, self-sufficiency in the production of energy and food is often a desirable goal. However, it is argued that a genuine sustainable living style is still not common and is often considered not feasible. In order to reach self-sufficiency, farming skills and hard work is required (Dias et al., 2017; Pepper, 1991; Jacob, 1997).

The aim to create a strong community is another characteristic that defines the ecovillage ideals (Bang, 2005). They are developing community-building qualities through communal living, common aims and participatory decision-making processes (Kunze, 2012). Ecovillages have proved to increase the quality of life conditions in terms of coexistence with others, security, choice of lifestyle and combining family lives and work (Kunze, 2006). This is accomplished not only by applying diversified practices and technologies but mainly through the high degree of commonality. This comes forward in, for example, shared living spaces, common possessions, and the proximity of living and working spaces (Dawson, 2006). Through active relationships, the community creates a collective identity that is continually developing (Wood, 2002). In this, the formulation of collective actions and goals plays an important role. This collective vision of an ecovillage is often clearly documented with the goal to guide the activities, the members, the organization, and the daily life in the community. In short, this can be described as the guiding paradigm of the community (Kasper, 2008). Kirby (2003) highlighted that a connection with the ecovillage itself creates a feeling of community and support with other residents. This eventually leads to a sense of belonging and a cooperative community in accomplishing a common goal.

However, Miles (2003), argued that group relationships were often experienced as challenging in communities. Intentional communities are dynamic, relationships are changing and also conflicts happen. To resolve problems and facilitate the community process, space is needed where the members are able to debate, reflect and negotiate an issue. When the community feels like a protected space, this has a positive effect on the internal dynamics and the collective vision (Sargisson, 2007).

Along with the motivations for environmental conservation and communitarian relationships, societal change and social justice are also important factors (Ergas, 2010). Ecovillages often present themselves as initiators of global social change by overcoming the dualism between culture and nature in Western societies (Kasper, 2008). The majority of ecovillages aim at exchanging knowledge and experiences with their surroundings. They do this by demonstrating sustainable lifestyles that can act as an example (Kasper, 2008). Previous research found out that ecovillages have the potential to foster change and function as living laboratories for experiments and to test sustainability models and techniques. With this role, they have the possibility to find and spread solutions to multiple social and environmental issues (Dawson, 2006).

2.3 Development of ecovillages

But ecovillages did not always have this integrated approach. When looking at how ecovillages are maintained and change over time, Andreas (2013) used the 'island motif' to explain the centralized focus of ecovillages. He uses the metaphor of an island because the external connections are often limited and the ecovillages tend to have a centralized focus. This can be explained by the establishment of ecovillages. They did not grow organically, they are just established at a place where this was possible. However, the pursuit of regional connections is increasingly more encouraged. Thereby the island motif is fading and the 'outside role' is increasing. According to Andreas (2013), this change is caused by transformations in the wider society and not because of choices made within the community. Values of communal and ecological communities have become more accepted such as the protection of the environment, communal living and personal growth (Ray & Anderson, 2000). Also, changes in policy formulation and implementation made ecovillages increasingly relevant (Dawson, 2013). Meijering emphasized that communities have also become more accepted through changes in the communities themselves. Originally the communities rejected mainstream society and now they increasingly become a part of it. This makes an ecovillage more comparable to the mainstream norms and values (Meijering, 2006). So, ecovillages have secured their position in the society by internal as well as external changes. They are shaped by mainstream society but society is also shaped by the values of eco-communities. Previous research has shown some positive effects for ecovillages if they are becoming more embedded in their surroundings by creating an external network. This will secure the continuity of an eco-village (Meijering, 2007) and introduces other people to the sustainable way of life within ecovillage (Dawson, 2006). Also, technologies and knowledge can more easily be shared (Seyfang et al., 2013). So overall greater embeddedness will have positive effects for the community itself and it will lead to a higher contribution to the locality (Meijering et al., 2007).

In this way, ecovillage ideologies have transformed into the role of pioneers working together with formal and informal alliances in today's society. The relevance of experiments undertaken in ecovillages is increasingly recognized far beyond the fences of an ecovillage. Alliances are created between ecovillages and central and local governments as well as local organizations that share similar values and visions. Technologies and expertise developed in ecovillages are taken out into regular communities and organisations. Renewable energy systems, energy-efficient housing, organic agriculture, and biological waste treatment are becoming more common and mainstream topics. In this light, ecovillages are experienced as

regional hubs for networks of sustainable initiatives (Dawson, 2013). Ecovillages are also becoming more closely connected with each other. In 1995 the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) was founded which contributes to the development and creation of ecovillages by creating networks of ecovillages. This organization facilitates and supports ecovillages, organises education and discussion programs and is a driving force in spreading the movement across the world (Kasper, 2008).). Nevertheless, the impact of ecovillages is also criticized. For example, Fotopoulos (2000, 2006) argues that the impact is only concentrated on the wealthier part of the population.

2.4 Motivations for joining an ecovillage

In literature on establishing intentions, multiple motivations for joining an ecovillage came forward. Joining a community comes with a form of commitment to the general goals and missions of the ecovillage (Kasper, 2008) however the individual motivations can vary greatly. In research environmental, social as well as personal goals came forward for joining an ecovillage. Firstly, ecological aspirations were emphasized as an important motivation for joining an ecovillage. Living in an ecovillage offers an answer to the desire to live close to nature and offered solutions to increased environmental damage (Kirby, 2003; Kasper, 2008). Thereby self-sufficiency is regarded as important with the aim to gain control over food, water, and energy resources. This can fulfil the desires to live in harmony with nature (Moravciková and Fürjészová (2018)

Furthermore social motivations are very significant. Kirby (2003) emphasized that social motivations even outweigh environmental aspirations to settle in an ecovillage. The residents were seeking connections with like-minded people whereby trust, a safe environment, and interdependence is created through a communitarian living style. This can be explained by trends in modern society such as the sense of disconnection caused by a decrease in levels of community bonds (Putnam, 2000). Residents hope to find a high level of social capital that is provided by the physical and social aspects of the organisation which is characterized by a high level of cooperation and shared facilities (Ruiu, 2015). The communitarian living style of an ecovillage can offer a protective environment, contacts with likeminded people and support from other residents (Westskog et al., 2018; Ruiu, 2015).

Also, personal goals can play a big role in the decision-making process. Inhabitants are searching for personal growth, self-actualization, and freedom (Kirby, 2003). Also, Escribano et al. (2017) emphasized these ambitions to adopt a new way of life. Finally, environmental and social activism were important themes. Many residents are seeking to find ways to educate others or themselves about these matters (Kirby, 2003; Ergas, 2010). Also, Westskog et al. (2018) found a desire to live a pioneering lifestyle and thereby being an example for others in an ecovillage in Norway. Here most people had ambitions aiming for social change pertaining to housing, communitarian relationships, consumption, and transport.

2.5 Rural ecovillages

Most ecovillages are situated in rural areas since this mostly offers reduced legal and economic barriers and more natural resources and physical space (Kasper, 2008; Ergas, 2010). This geographical location makes ecovillages more isolated which can influence the social impact and their connection with the mainstream society. However, nowadays in an

interconnected world, the remote location does not unavoidably lead to isolation (Dias et al., 2017).

In the Western world from 1850 on, there is a trend of depopulation of rural areas in Europe happening (Brown, 2011). This is especially the case in marginalized regions, characterized by difficult accessibility, low economic productivity, and little socio-cultural amenities. Rural areas have become less appealing in attracting economic activities compared to urban areas (MacDonald et al., 2000). That is why they are searching for new ways to improve their position by mobilizing social and economic development (Blichfeldt and Halkier, 2014). Because of the increase in communication techniques and mobility opportunities, rural and urban areas have become more connected. As a consequence, traditional urban functions such as housing, services, recreation, and manufacturing were spreading to rural areas (Van Dam et al., 2002). The countryside as a place of agricultural activities was diminishing while the countryside as a place for recreating, working and living was increasing. Rural areas increasingly became a space of consumption (Smith and Philips, 2001).

In the beginning, the focus of population decline policies was on attracting new residents by building new houses. Creative attempts were made to attract new groups of residents and by trying to improve the image of the region. However, these attempts did not gain much (Verwest et al. 2009). As a consequence, there was an oversupply of housing, vacant homes, stagnation of the housing market and a concentration of low-income groups. Nowadays the approach is increasingly on decreasing, adjusting, improving and preserving the housing stock (Verwest et al., 2008). In the population decline policies of the provinces of Groningen and Brabant, ecovillages were included. In the province of Groningen, the realization of ecovillage 'Ter Apel' is seen as an opportunity for knowledge sharing and re-zoning of cultural heritage (Provincie Groningen, 2015). In the province of Noord-Brabant ecovillage 'Boekel' is created with support from the province. Here, the emphasis is on nature and sustainability. With the establishment of an ecovillage the province hopes to attract creative and innovative people (Groen and Rikkoert, 2017). According to Lüpke (2012), Lockyer and Veteto (2015) ecovillages fulfil reforms in every aspect of life on the level of a municipality. Thereby they show techniques and methods on a local level that support a sustainable living style. For example with the introduction of new environmental technologies and rural services, local alternative economic models and by the implementation of innovative strategies that could inspire sustainable rural development.

3|Methodology and research ethics

3.1. Research method: semi-structured interviews

The aim of this research is not to generalize the data into a general theory, but to offer a nuanced understanding of individual experiences. Because of this aim, the chosen method is qualitative. Qualitative methods enable researchers to gather in-depth information on experiences, information and social structures (Cameron, 2016). These qualities make the method in particular suitable for this research question in which motivations and experiences are researched. A semi-structured interview is characterized by a verbal interchange whereby the interviewer aims to obtain information from the respondent by asking questions (Longhurst, 2010). In advance of the interviews, the researcher assembles a list of questions. However, apart from the predetermined questions, participants are offered a chance to touch on subjects they find important. In this way, it is possible to gain in-depth information about personal experiences, motivations, and opinions regarding living in an ecovillage.

3.1.1. Advantages and disadvantages of semi-structured interviews

According to Dunn (2016), qualitative research with semi-structured interviews can gather a variety of experiences, opinions, and meanings. This allows respondents to reflect on personal experiences and enables them to reconstruct certain events. Furthermore, it contributes to collecting the data in a partially structured and therefore orderly and conscious way (Longhurst, 2010). On the other hand, the focus on verbal behaviour can be regarded as a limitation of this method (Bryman, 2012). In this way, non-verbal behaviour and context factors are less likely to be regarded as important information. Furthermore, the contact between the interviewer and the participant and the interview setting are likely to have an effect on the acquired data. According to Dunn (2016) interviews where both the participant and the interviewer are feeling comfortable generally result in more valid and insightful data than when this is not the case. This is also the case for interview locations. If the interviewee feels comfortable in the space, then the participant is more likely to be communicative (Dunn, 2016). Finally, the predetermined interview guide, on the one hand, ensures structure and support during the interview. On the other hand, it can give too much guidance to the subjects and issues that are discussed. This can cause unexpected issues related to the research subject that are less likely to be addressed than in the case of an unstructured interview (Bryman, 2012).

3.1.2. Selecting Participants

Ecovillages in rural areas in the Netherlands are selected for this study. According to Statistics Netherlands (2019), rural areas are defined as areas with an address density of fewer than 1000 addresses per square kilometre. I used the database on the website of GEN (Global Ecovillage Network) to search for ecovillages. This database does not give a full representation of all ecovillages in the Netherlands. It works with open registration and thus includes 'ecovillages' that would often not be recognized as such. The other way around, there are certainly many ecovillages that did not register in this database but who comply with the definition (Lockyer, 2010). Also, the term 'ecovillage' is self-assigned and thus there are examples that perfectly match the criteria and others partially. Moreover, the ecovillage movement has been experimental and extensive from the start. Enclosing the term with strict criteria does not benefit the movement (Wagner, 2012). I made sure that the ecovillages that

I approached all were bottom-up initiatives and that they touched upon social as well as sustainable goals according to the definition of GEN (2017).

During the period from 18 September until 7 November, 8 interviews were conducted with (future) inhabitants of ecovillages. In approaching potential respondents I was faced with non-response. During the selection of respondents, it turned out to be difficult to get in touch with eco-village inhabitants because they were often very busy with working on the ecovillage project or they did not respond to mail or phone contact attempts. Because of this, I decided also to approach future inhabitants of ecovillages. The respondents were selected based on multiple forms of purposive sampling. First of all, the respondents were selected based on their experience regarding the research subject (Longhurst, 2010). For the current inhabitants, their experiences with living in an ecovillage make them experts with the subject. In the case of the future inhabitants, I made sure that the respondents were very much involved with the creation and organisation of the ecovillage. One of the three interviewed future inhabitants already lived on the plot in a temporary home where the ecovillage is going to be created, one the respondents had already worked 7 years on finding a place for an ecovillage and creating a community. The last future inhabitant had prior experiences with living in an ecovillage and was also working on the creation of an ecovillage for several years. In most cases, the ecovillage decided to point out one of the residents I was allowed to interview. This can create bias because the ecovillage selects a participant on the basis of access and willingness (Longhurst, 2010). Also, residents with rather positive experiences in the ecovillage can put forward.

Seven respondents were approached by contact via a general mail address from the website of the ecovillage. After that, I was brought into contact with an individual resident by mail address or phone number. One respondent was individually approached by telephone contact.

	Pseudonym	Eco village	Gender	Age group	Resident Status	Region	Interview location
1	Christiaan	Land van Een	Male	50-60 years	Current resident	Surhuizum	At home, Hof van Een
2	Pieter	Boekel	Male	60-70 years	Future residents (terrain under construction)	Boekel	Telephone interview
3	Mirjam Opsturen!	Aardehuizen	Female	50-60 years	Current resident	Olst	At home, Aardehuizen
4	Anja	Noordeland	Female	?	Future resident	Ter Apel/Groningen	Academy building, Groningen
5	Jeroen	Ppauw	Male	?	Current resident	Wageningen	Betonbos, Groningen
6	Marieke	Het Levende Dorp	Female	40-50 years	Future resident	Dalfsen	At home, Dalfsen
7	Dina (Joke)	Hof van Moeder Aarde	Female	?	Current resident	Neede	At home , Hof van Moeder Aarde
8	Esther (Anita Baart)	Ecodorp Bergen	Female	30-40 years	Current resident	Bergen	At home, Ecodorp Bergen

Table 1: Respondent characteristics

3.1.3. Interview setting

According to Longhurst (2010), an interview setting should be informal and relatively neutral. In the choice for a location, the main consideration is that a place is chosen where both respondents and the interviewer can feel at ease. It can also be useful to let the interview take place in the environment under study. For these reasons, the aim was to arrange the interviews at the ecovillage itself. This was the case with 5 interviews. The interviews took place in the house of the respondent or in a common space in the ecovillage. With the remaining 3 respondents, other agreements were made. One interview was conducted at 'the Betonbos' in Groningen as the respondent's partner was living there. The Betonbos is a small autonomous community in Groningen. Furthermore, one interview took place at the Academy building in Groningen as the respondent was a future resident of an ecovillage and currently living in Groningen. And finally, one interview was conducted by phone because the ecovillage was difficult to reach by public transport from Groningen.

The house and common spaces of the ecovillages were trusted environments and an informal location for the respondents. At the same time, this was an important geographical setting for the research. Visiting the ecovillages gave a sense of what it is like to live there. However, this personal space made that the setting was not a neutral location (Longhurst, 2010). But in the case of this interview, this was considered less important because the research is focused on the living environment of the residents.

3.1.4. Interview guide

Prior to the interviews, an interview guide was composed (appendix A). An interview guide encompasses a list of subjects and questions that have to be covered in an interview (Dunn, 2016). The guide consisted of 3 main themes related to the three main sub-questions which are: 'prior motivations of living in the ecovillage', 'thoughts about the location and type and ecovillage design' and 'current experiences and practices'. Each of these themes was divided into primary and secondary questions. The primary questions are used to introduce a new topic and the secondary questions were used to encourage the respondent to elaborate on the question (Dunn, 2016). The questions were not asked in the listed order. In this way, the participants were offered to examine the subjects they considered important (Longhurst, 2010). At the end of the interview, it was checked if all the questions had been addressed.

3.1.5. Conducting interviews

Prior to the interview, the residents were asked to read an information letter and sign the letter of informed consent (Appendix B). Herein the goal and applications of the research were stated. Also, permission was asked about making an audio recording in order to make a transcript afterward. The presence of an audio recording can create a more formal setting which can have a negative influence on the willingness to share information with the interviewer (Longhurst, 2010). However, by making a recording this allows the interviewer to focus entirely on the interview instead of putting much effort into taking notes (Valentine, 2005). The duration of the interviews differed from 51 minutes to 2 hours and 14 minutes. At the start of the interview, I gave a short explanation about the goal of the research and the aim of this interview. Then I followed with some short warming-up questions about the personal situation of the respondents. This easy to answer questions make the respondent feel at ease (Dunn, 2016). During the interviews, every respondent seemed to feel

comfortable while sharing information with the interviewer. Also, the respondents seemed proud and willing to share their experiences of living in an ecovillage. However, some respondents seemed to only address the positive sides and were more reluctant to go in-depth about more negative issues.

During the interviews, I tried to actively take part in the interview. In doing so I reacted directly to the statements of participants and tried to avoid a summary of the interview guide. Also, I summarized statements and asked participants if this was correctly interpreted. Sometimes the interviews touched on topics that were not relevant in this research. Then I often found it hard to steer the questions back to the topic because the respondents were very enthusiastic and I personally find off-topics such as the technical background of the building of ecological houses very interesting. Afterward, the respondents were asked if they had additional remarks, questions or feedback that they felt like sharing with me. After this, I thanked the respondents for their participation in the research and asked them if they were interested in receiving the final thesis.

3.1.6. Quality interview data

With qualitative research, the aim is to strive for data saturation, after this point the researcher is not gaining new information from respondents (Cameron, 2016). In this research, I tried to reach every ecovillage on the website of the GEN, the ecovillages that already found an area to create the ecovillage and also communities that were actively seeking an area. With the ecovillages that agreed on making an interview appointment, I conducted an interview. In the contact prior to the interview, I asked if there possibly would be more people to arrange an interview appointment with. Often the interviewees stated that they would ask other residents of the ecovillage but this didn't result in more interviews. Also, some residents rejected this question because they got many requests for interviews and other residents were too busy. In this way, I cannot say that the point of data saturation was achieved. However, in my experience, I was not able to arrange more interviews. Because I had a difficult experience in arranging the interviews I could not strive for a diverse group of residents. However, the respondent group resulted in variation based on location, gender, and age.

3.1.7 Additional context information

During the visits of ecovillages also additional information was gathered. In every ecovillage, I visited I got a tour through the ecovillage. While walking around you get a good sense of how an ecovillage is designed and what this way of life looks like. In this way, I was able to put the information from the respondents into the context. Furthermore, I attended a cooperation day at one of the ecovillages. On this day I participated along with residents and other visitors in jobs that had to be done. This was also an important source to experience a normal day in an ecovillage.

3.2 Research ethics

Due to the close interaction between the participants and the researcher and the unstructured nature, research ethics are an essential part of qualitative research (Roth & von Unger, 2018). Research ethics can be described as a set of moral principles aiming to prevent participants from being harmed by the research process as well as the researcher (Dowling, 2016). To begin with, qualitative research methods often entail privacy violations by for example asking private questions. Ethical responsibilities can be ensured by the use of an informed consent wherein the ethical motives are formulated. When informed consent is used the participants know exactly what they are consenting to (Dowling, 2016). Prior to the interview an information letter and an informed consent were given to the respondent which they agreed on (appendix B). With the information letter, the respondents were informed about the goal of the research, the interview setting, their rights when taking part in the research and the possibility to always withdraw from the research. Also, there is mentioned that the research outcomes are threatened in a confidential manner.

In order to protect the privacy of the respondents, pseudonyms are used and their exact age is not mentioned. Furthermore, permission was asked to take pictures on the ecovillage site. The interview recordings and transcripts are kept outside the public domain. Finally, it must be ensured that both the respondents and the researchers do not incur physical or emotional damage by taking part in the research (Dowling, 2016). This can be avoided by threatening the information in a confidential manner, creating a safe and comfortable interview setting and by striving for equal power relations between the researcher and the respondents. This can be done by for example create reciprocal research relations in which both the researcher and the respondents can gain knowledge about the research objects (Dowling, 2016). Multiple respondents mentioned that they found it interesting to reflect on their personal journey by answering my questions. Sometimes they had to think back many years in time or they had not asked themselves why things were handled in a certain way. Furthermore, Esther asked me some questions at the end of the interview about my experiences in other ecovillages. At that time I had already done 7 interviews and I could give a short summary of my findings which she mentioned to find interesting. On the other hand, the fact that I asked and defined the interview questions and subjects has logically contributed less to a reciprocal research relation.

3.2.1. Positionality

Positionality refers to the social, ideological and cultural position of the researcher in relation to the respondents and the research topic (Dowling, 2016). According to Mansvelt and Berg (2016), the positionality of the researcher has to take into account not only during the interviews but also later on during the analysis of the data, given that the social and cultural position of the researcher influences the social interactions in the research. Thereby it is also important to take into account if the characteristics of the researcher make them an insider or an outsider within the research context. An insider is similar to the respondents in many ways while there exist substantial differences in the case of an outsider. Both positions can have potential benefits and disadvantages for the research. In the case of an insider, the collected information and the interpretations may be more valid than in the case of an outsider. However, when being an outsider, people can make more exertions in explaining certain feelings, circumstances, and events to the researcher which benefits the research (Dowling, 2016).

Especially during the first interviews, I was more an 'outsider' than an 'insider' regarding the respondents. This was due to the fact that I visited ecovillages for the first time and that I only took note of ecovillages through media and literature sources. For example, I was not familiar with the terminology as a 'biofilter' or a 'composting toilet'. Also, I was unaware of the difficulties in applying for a mortgage by Dutch banks. This was reflected in me asking basic questions about these subjects. Also, many respondents mentioned spiritual movements and personal development methods that were important in their motivations for living in an ecovillage, with which I was not familiar. Moreover, my position as a university student could have an effect on social interactions with respondents. It seemed that some respondents emphasized the positive aspects of ecovillages because they saw the interview as an opportunity to attract more positive attention to the subject. On the other hand, this position made it easier to gain knowledge because respondents were interested in the focus of my research. Some respondents indicated that they found research about ecovillages very interesting and important.

However, there were also matters that contributed to an insider position. For example, I share interests with the respondents about a more sustainable lifestyle. Also, I decided to wear rather casual and second-hand clothing during the interviews in order to fit in with the appearance of the respondents. Despite the existence of different codes of conduct than that I am used to, I tried to adjust to these codes to gain a more insider position. For example, I shared a vegan lunch and kombucha tasting with one of the respondents. And almost every respondent greeted me with a welcoming hug. According to van Hoven and Meijering (2011), participation in cultural experiences like sharing a meal with respondents can give a more meaningful understanding of the collected data. This was also why I decided to engage in a participation day at one of the ecovillages. On that day I assisted with activities in the vegetable garden which is a regular activity for the residents of the ecovillage.

3.3 Data analyses

Through the analysis of qualitative data, meaning can be given to the collected interview data. In this way, the data can be categorized, prioritized and interpreted in order to apply the data to the research. In this process, the following steps are being applied; describing the data, classifying the data and connecting the data (Cope, 2016).

3.3.1. Describing the data

The interviews were recorded using a recording program on a laptop after which they were transcribed using the website Otranscribe.com. A transcript is a written reproduction of the interview (Dunn, 2016). On average it took one hour to transcribe 15 minutes of the recording. Some parts of the recordings were difficult to understand, especially the recorded phone conversation due to the poor connection. This resulted in that the recording had to be replayed multiple times in order to understand the respondent. At the top of each transcript, the date and the location of the interview were mentioned. The texts in the transcripts are divided based on the initials of the respondent and the researcher. In doing so it becomes clear who said what during the interview. Furthermore, symbols are used, '(...)' when the conversation topic was unrelated to the research subject, () when a word or phrase was unintelligible.

3.3.2. Classifying and connecting data

Based on the interview guide and the interview data an ‘open coding’ method was applied to classify the data. Coding is a process whereby the interview data is divided into sections that are being labelled with codes. In this way, each section is placed in a certain category. Through the process of coding, the researcher can get a grip on the research data because it contributes to the organisation and analyses of the data (Cope, 2016). In comparison with quantitative data, the coding of qualitative data is a more repeating and flexible process. Qualitative data contains more ‘thick description’ in which events are described in a more detailed and comprehensive way. Such descriptions provide in-depth information about motivations, reasons, intentions, and understandings that surround an experience or event (Mansvelt and Berg, 2016). This information is examined on indicators for concepts and themes which can be linked to the central goals of the research. These indicators are being compared to see which literature concepts match these indicators. In this process, the researcher is constantly reflecting on this process and is vacant to new and unexpected connections in the data (Cope, 2016).

According to the ‘open coding’ method, the researcher started with dividing the data into the three main categories of ‘initial codes’ (Cope, 2016). These codes are derived from the interview guide and research questions, respectively: ‘1. prior motivations of living in the ecovillage’, ‘2. thoughts about the location and type and ecovillage design’ and ‘3. current experiences and practices’. These initial codes are then divided into more specific subcodes that came forward in the interviews. The coding scheme was not fixed but was constantly adjusted during the process of coding.

Firstly, pieces of the transcript were labelled with a short description. Similar data units were allocated to the same label. These labels are based on terms that the respondents used themselves. These are called ‘in vivocodes’. The second phase is axial coding: different codes were being merged into a number of codes with a higher level of abstraction. In doing so subcodes are emerging (Table 2). This coding scheme was not fixed. When relevant text sections did not fit in the coding scheme, certain sub-codes were added, split up or given a different label. Other codes were merged or deleted.

Initial code	(Sub)code	Description
1. Prior motivations	1.1 Personal	Respondent talks about personal background.
	1.2 Motivation	Respondent talks about personal motivations, incentives and thoughts related to living in an ecovillage.
	1.3 Prior living situation	Respondent describes the living situations before moving to an ecovillage.
2. Location and design	2.1 Location	Respondent describes the location and processes concerning finding and managing the location.
	2.2 Construction ecovillage	Respondent talks about the construction of the ecovillage.
	2.3 Description ecovillage	Respondent describes the ecovillage as an organization, its inhabitants and the culture.
	2.3 Vision and mission	Respondent describes the vision, mission and goals of the ecovillage.
	2.5 Innovations sustainability	Respondent describes innovations in the ecovillage regarding sustainability.
	2.6 Activities	Respondent talks about activities that take place in the ecovillage.

	2.7 Finance	Respondent talks about financing methods and revenues of the ecovillage.
3. Current experiences	2.1 Experiences living in a community	Respondent talks about the experiences concerning life in an ecovillage.
	2.2 Community building	Respondent describes the process, methods and experiences regarding community building.
	2.3 Lifestyle ecovillage	Respondent describes the way of living in the ecovillage.
	2.4 Decision making	Respondent describes decision making processes and experiences in the ecovillage.
	2.5 Introduction process	Respondent describes the introduction process of new inhabitants of the ecovillage.
	2.6 External communication	Respondent describes methods of communication, the different parties, way of profiling of the ecovillage and knowledge transfer.
	2.7 Spirituality	Respondent describes the role of spirituality in the ecovillage.
	2.8 Challenges	Respondent describes challenges and difficulties regarding life in an ecovillage.

Table 2: Codebook made with axial coding

4 | Case descriptions

The previous chapter provided the method to gather and analyse information from the cases that have been selected for this research. In this chapter, the selection of cases will be explained and a short introduction of the individual ecovillages will be given. Corresponding to Kasper (2008), there exists a great variety in the design and the emphasis of ecovillage projects. These varieties can be explained by the fact that ecovillages are outcomes of community processes. Also deviating local circumstances produce different ecovillages. Therefore the characteristics of each ecovillage will be described in short. Data derived from the interviews is used as well as the information and documents derived from the websites of the ecovillages.

4.1 Land van Een

'Het Land van Een' is an ecovillage located in Surhuizum, a village in the province of Friesland. A small group of 5 people went here to live in a farmhouse in 2015. The area is 3 hectares fringed with trees and it has a small lake. There is also a small vegetable garden and a common room made out of straw. The inhabitants currently live in the farmhouse which is renovated and rebuild into different living units. Their aim was to live in a beautiful piece of nature with a group of people that were all interested in spirituality. The emphasis of the community is community building, personal growth, and spirituality. Part of this is also the care for the earth but the ecological aspects are less important and derived from the focus on community aspects. The ecovillage is self-sustaining regarding electricity, there is a composting toilet and attention is given to make conscious decisions regarding building materials. In the common building multiple activities are organized which are accessible for people outside the community. Most of them are focused on spiritual themes. For example, a course about herbs, yoga sessions, singing mantras, and family constellations. Earnings from the activities are used for the terrain.

4.2 Ecodorp Boekel

Ecovillage Boekel is an ecovillage situated in the province of Brabant, near the town Boekel. At this moment the village consists of 22 adults and 8 children. The inhabitants are now living in temporary homes as the construction period of the ecovillage has started in November 2019. The sharing of knowledge is an important goal of this ecovillage. The aim is to create open-source solutions for sustainable living and share this with the world. The plan is that eventually 36 houses will be build, an education centre, a community centre and treehouses for rental. In the end, the ecovillage can host between 70 to 90 people. Furthermore, a biodiversity plan is made to attract many animal and plant species. The whole village is going to be a nature area based on permaculture principles. Eventually, the aim of the ecovillage is to be fully self-sufficient.

4.3 Aardehuis Oost-Nederland

'Aardehuis Oost-Nederland' is an ecological neighbourhood consisting of 23 houses of which 3 are rental houses, a common building, and a permaculture garden. It is situated in Olst, a village in the province of Overijssel. The construction started at the end of 2011 and went on 7 days a week. Most of the jobs were done by the inhabitants themselves and volunteers and only the difficult tasks were outsourced to professionals. The aim of this ecovillage is to live

in balance with nature and with each other. The area is nature inclusive, the gardens blend into one another. The houses are designed on the principles of 'Earthships' from the American architect Michael Renalds. These are houses that provide their own energy, have their own system for water purification and are built with the use of (local) rest materials. Furthermore, these houses have composting toilets, drinking water comes from a groundwater source and the wastewater is cleaned with a biofilter.

4.4 Ecodorp Noordeland

A group of people who were already involved in other ecovillage projects started in 2012 with the idea to create an ecovillage in the Northern part of the Netherlands. Ecovillage Noordeland is situated in the east of the province of Groningen in the village Ter Apel. On the terrain, there is an old potato flour fabric. For 35 years the terrain was empty. Now there are living 4 people on the location in temporary homes like a yurt and caravans. They are working on purchasing the terrain and starting with the sanitation and construction. The initiative group is expanding. Now they are actively informing and involving interested people in the process. There are 6 people who are currently in the intake procedure. Eventually, the goal is to create 30 small ecological houses. They are also striving for a high degree of self-sufficiency in the field of food, sanitation, and energy. The focus has always been very much on community building. Building a strong community has always been more important than a quick realization of the ecovillage plans in practice. In the future, they are planning to realize many activities such as a restaurant, tee house, information centrum, camping, and spaces for small companies.

4.5. Ppauw Ecodorp Wageningen

Ecovillage Ppauw is located in Wageningen. The name Ppauw derived from the name of the hospital that used to be on this terrain. The terrain was squatted 5,1/2 years ago. At the time that this area was squatted, it looked like a wasteland. During the process of squatting the initiator had to deal with the local government and the police. But because he showed that he can give a positive substance to this area the project now tolerated. Now there are 11 people living on the terrain. Most houses are caravans and there are also tiny houses. All the houses have to be mobile in order to allow for a move to another place if needed. There is also a common room. Buildings are constructed out of rest materials. There are all sorts of projects going on in the ecovillage. For example, creating efficient wood stoves, a food forestry project. In the case of food, the community can be sufficient with the help of local initiatives. Their main aim is to promote a cyclic way of living. This is done by many experiments and pioneering projects with the aim to show that it is possible to live in a different way. Recently the community has squatted a second area nearby. People that recently joined the project moved to this new area.

4.6 Het Levende Dorp

The foundation 'Het Levende Dorp' (The Living Village) is founded in 2016. Here the emphasis is on creating houses out of living trees by means of the shaping and fusion of trees. The foundation is still looking for a municipality to embrace its plan. At the moment the initiators are traveling with a van to tell their story and search for a sufficient location. Partially they live in a recreation home where they are already building with living trees. Their aim is to encourage building with trees and to share this knowledge by providing open-source

information and to function as an example for other similar initiatives. They want to show the world that it is possible to create a whole village with these building practices.

Every year 'The Living Village festival' is organized and focuses on community building and sustainable living. Awareness is created through workshops and lectures. The festival creates a platform to meet likeminded people, share knowledge and present new ideas of sustainable living. After three editions the festival is attracting more and more people and is thereby gaining more money.

4.7 Hof van Moeder Aarde

Hof van Moeder Aarde is an ecovillage situated in Neede, a small village in the province of Gelderland. The site was bought in 2016. The 8 inhabitants are living in an old farmhouse in which multiple dependent housing units are created. This means that the households have their required space and privacy but they also share a couple of amenities. All the members work together in the cooperation. Together they manage the group accommodation, the workshop space, the practical training room, the camping with a couple of vacation homes, annual pitches, the vegetable garden, a shop with biological products, and a common room 'La Cantina'. In this way, an area is created where people besides the member group can experience the way of living in this ecovillage. Guests experience how they can live with the earth, out of a sustainability perspective. This can be a simple thing like separating waste. Or for example, experience personal development by joining a meditation or yoga session.

4.8 Ecodorp Bergen

The ecovillage is situated nearby the town Bergen, in the province of North-Holland. The area used to be a military terrain. Seven years ago the initiator saw this terrain as an opportunity to carry out the dream to realize a sustainable living- and working community. Thereby the emphasis is on a transition from the materialistic individually focused society to a sustainable community-focused society. This also entails a shift from a central to a local organization. Eventually, a testing ground for multiple ways of living on the basis of community building and sustainability will be practiced. Acquainted knowledge and experiences will be available to everyone.

The terrain is 15 hectares. It is partly polluted and it has to be sanitized before the actual construction of the houses can begin. Now there already is a common room and guest rooms. There are living 8 people on the terrain in cabins and there is also a tiny house. The biggest part of the terrain will consist of permaculture gardens. Eventually, the plan is to live self-sufficiently on the basis of water, food supply, energy, water purification, and waste management.

5|Results

In this chapter, the study results will be analysed on the basis of literature concerning ecovillage motives and practices. First of all, the underlying personal motives for joining an ecovillage will be discussed. Examples of motivations are the possibility to live in a close community, with a low impact on the earth and to the desire to inspire other people. Secondly, the process of searching for a location and creating the ecovillage will be examined. Finally, the current experiences of living in an ecovillage will be discussed by means of the given motivations.

5.1 Prior motivations ecovillage inhabitants

To get insight into the matters that motivated (future) residents in their desire to move to an ecovillage, this question was asked in the beginning; *'Can you explain what influences and factors played a role in the decision to move to this ecovillage?'*. From this question, the respondents created a story of their course of life. This created a sequence of various experiences and situations that found their convergence in the movement to an ecovillage. The intrinsic motivations of wanting to live in an ecovillage were, for example, to live in a close community with likeminded people (§5.2.1) and to live in a sustainable way (§5.2.2). Other motivations were that the respondents wanted to show the world how to live in a more sustainable way and share this information and experiences (§5.2.3). Furthermore, living close to nature was also a driving force (§5.2.4). The sequence of the paragraphs is based on the significance of the motivations according to the respondents in this research.

5.1.1 Seeking a sense of community

For most of the respondents in this study, the social motivation for joining an ecovillage outweighed the environmental motivations. For five respondents the creation of a community was the most important factor, as for three respondents this was mainly environmental considerations. This was also the case in the research of Kirby (2003) and Kasper (2008) that showed that the social motivation for joining an ecovillage exceeded environmental motivations. The narratives of respondents resonate a feeling of disconnectedness with social patterns in our society:

'But people are being so individualized. In this society. Used to putting yourself at the centre, what do I need? What feels good to me? What is important to me? What do I need? That sort of questions. Which are contrary to life in a community. How can I be there for the community? How can the community take centre stage? This is an arch of tension. And.. that expresses itself in multiple ways where you have to compromise with.' – Christiaan (Ecovillage Land van Een)

'In Alkmaar we lived in an anti-squatting home and we were looking to find what we think is important in living. And I remember that we lived in an anti-squatting home, on the first floor, and I saw all those houses like that. Terraced houses, living side by side with fences in between. And the one neighbour was barbequing and the other neighbour was reading the newspaper. I thought can this be different? What would happen if all the fences would disappear? What would happen? What would occur? I was actually dreaming like why are those fences here? Ok, people need privacy. But do they need so much privacy? Or can we organize this differently? This got me thinking.' – Esther (Ecovillage Bergen)

These quotes signal that the respondents felt uncomfortable with trends in mainstream society, such as 'individuality'. They wanted to move to an ecovillage to experience a more

communitarian form of living. According to Kirby (2003), this longing for a close community mainly derives from personal experiences and a feeling of disconnectedness. Respondent Anja:

'I felt very fractionated. Out of different pieces. So also out of the need to live from the whole and to be able to realize that. And therein you are learning, to each other and with each other. To feel good, actually that. To grow as a person, in different ways.' – Anja (Future resident ecovillage Noordeland)

The respondents are looking for people to connect with and to be part of a larger community. The responses especially indicated a desire to form a connection with likeminded people. As a result, they hoped to feel connected through similar worldviews and likeminded people. Also, they desire to build a close community on the basis of mutuality and trust. On the basis of this, they also selected new residents. Also the research of Andreas, 2013; Ergas and Clement, 2016) showed that inhabitants of ecovillages have a desire to form new relationships. In addition, Kirby (2003) addressed that more specifically this concerns connections with like-minded people. Mirjam describes her experiences with meeting other residents:

'And in that conversation I noticed, hey everything I say, who I am and what I am talking about that is just real. And these people get it and they see for themselves that you can come across this or that. And that you can get hurt. But how do you deal with that? So that felt very good.' – Mirjam (Ecovillage Aardehuizen)

This quote shows that Mirjam felt being on the same wavelength as other residents. Notable in this research was that many respondents mentioned that they were not only like-minded in the practical visions on the way of life in an ecovillage. Half of the respondents mentioned their desire to live in a community that focuses on spirituality. Many respondents had a background in one or multiple spiritual movements. In addition, they address that they find it important to live with a group of people that are open to different forms of spiritualities. They see this as an important aspect of the community. The inhabitants of the community have to be willing to open up for spiritual thoughts and experiences. This is also what Esther addresses:

'Here spirituality is also a thing, that is appreciated. But there are different currents. That is what I like, the diversity there is here. I like that very much, there is no one way.' - Esther (Ecovillage Bergen)

Sargisson (2007) also touches upon this focus on spirituality. She argues that the individuals of intentional communities often seek for self-development and have a desire to be closer to the spirit or nature. These aspirations can be expressed in the form of many different practices. An important aspect of this is that the inhabitants are receptive to these different forms on a spiritual and emotional level.

Besides the desire for connection with other people, the respondents also mentioned feeling connected with the earth and especially its nature. Goldman and Shurman (2000) addressed this as the indivisibility of the concepts 'nature' and 'society'. Thereby the boundaries of a community are enlarged and also include nature and the earth. This is also what the respondents in this research are referring to. The community and the earth are interconnected. Respondent Christiaan describes this:

'Togetherness, that is the central concept. And then.. The togetherness with each other. The community, and then also together with the earth. With nature. Both. With the earth and with nature.' – Christiaan (Ecovillage Land van Een)

5.1.2 Sustainable living

A major motivation for living in an ecovillage among (future) residents within this research is to live in a more sustainable way. The aim of the residents is to minimize their ecological footprint and to live in harmony with the earth and its nature. According to Kasper (2008), life in an ecovillage is the outcome of aspirations to act on ecological concerns. Respondents Pieter, Christiaan and Anja describe their concerns around global warming, decreasing biodiversity and declining resources:

'There I discovered that things are going so badly with the climate and that I found that we have to do something about that. If we are not going to change our behaviour than the world is going to left behind very differently than we encountered when we were a child. So then the idea of an ecovillage was born.' – Pieter (Ecovillage Boekel)

'Well, let me put it this way. When the world, humanity does not move towards it then in 60, 70 years there will be no more people on this earth. It is as simple as that. I mean now it may seem like an idealistic project but that was, let me say 25 years back, the same with people that became vegetarian.' – Christiaan (Ecovillage Land van Een)

'And also that it just goes completely wrong ecologically, all of that. Just what I say, you all have your washing machine and yes. That is actually nonsense. So when I first lived in my first community and I came back. Yes, it was shocking to me. Really, that everyone in those houses all has their own thing. What a huge pollution, what a huge waste.' – Anja (Future resident Noordeland)

According to the research of Kirby (2003), especially the initiators of ecovillages have desires to live in an environmentally friendly way. The other community members are less likely to describe themselves as particularly focused on sustainability. This was also the case in this research whereby 4 initiators of ecovillages were interviewed from which 3 had mainly ecological aspirations. Furthermore, one of the respondents that entered the project explained that here interest in sustainability issues only developed while in the project, respondent Esther:

'Originally I did not receive it from my parents. I grew up on a farm so that wasn't really a topic we were talking about. In my case, the interest has gradually grown.' – Esther (Ecovillage Bergen)

A consequence of living more conscious regarding sustainability is that it is less often comfortable than a normal house. Most ecovillages have their own energy and water supply which can result in fewer resources. Furthermore, the houses are often much smaller than a regular house. So when people are moving to an ecovillage their living environment will become less comfortable. Therefore the residents have to adjust their consumption patterns in the case of energy and water. However, for Marieke and Jeroen living with less comfort is also a motivation.

'Of course people used to do that in the past. And that is yes, so give up a bit of luxury. But nobody wants to know anything about that. But what will replace it? A very loving, warm heart, and feeling good. And yes.. That is also wealth. But in a very different way.' – Marieke (Future resident The Living Village)

And then I had a lot of things and then I moved to Wageningen again. And there I was in a flat for a while and that was very comfortable in a kind of addictive way. But after a few years I thought I would try again. I thought it was all a bit too neat compared to the past. – Jeroen (Ecovillage Ppauw)

5.1.3 Setting an example

During the interviews, the respondents often addressed that a motivation for joining an ecovillage was to be an example and show their way of life to others. They do not just want to live in a sustainable way in their own small community but they want to show their way of living to the outside world.

'We started it because we saw that eeh... A lot of things go wrong if we don't ... And if we make a small place where it works for us and we don't propagate it, then the rest of the world will have nothing at all about it. So then it only gets worse. And you can't put your head in the sand for that. And that is why we wanted to film as much as possible what we do during construction. And at least we want to propagate what we have learned in it. But we will also try to bring up all kinds of open source solutions. And to offer, to share with the world.' – Pieter (Ecovillage Boekel)

'Really a village with all kinds of things. And really carry that out. We had that right away. We don't want to be an oasis in the jungle of existence. From today's society, but we also wanted to radiate and also making contacts. We also wanted to collaborate with yes, other organizations.' – Anja (Future resident ecovillage Noordland)

Setting up an ecovillage offers a solution for two important problems in the eyes of the residents. Namely, the perceived loss of community and the increasing harm done to the environment (Dias et al. 2017). The emphasis is on causing a social change in the areas of housing, communitarian living, and food consumption. Environmental and social activism were frequently discussed subjects during the interviews. Five of the eight respondents mentioned the aim to educate other people about matters concerning life in an ecovillage. The respondents noted that they want to demonstrate what sustainable living implies and to inspire other people. Ecovillage residents consider themselves as predecessors of a cultural shift.

'That's so nice that you actually kind of pollinate everyone. That opens up to the information that is there. And sometimes that information is not 100% or not entirely clear. But again start thinking differently and looking at things differently. I think that's where we all live our lives on this earth and on this country and what do I do with it? What is my life and what is it worth? And how can I shape that? That is possible in all areas. And so that is in building, living and living.' – Mirjam (Aardehuis Oost-Nederland)

'Yes I have a certain calling like I am very grateful to all ancestors and my parents who have made it all so prosperous for us. And I would have done the same thing but I would have made the same mistake of thinking linear rather than cyclically. And now it is the time of our generation to correct that mistake and make sure our children are just fine again. And not only the children, because they are closely linked to the fate of the earth and the ecosystem. So yes, those are just a few changes that I am trying to promote. And showing that it is possible is a very important thing. "- Jeroen (Ecovillage Ppauw)

However, the respondents mentioned that it is important not to impose things on people. People that visit the ecovillage are not expected to live the same way as the ecovillage residents. The aim is to inspire visitors to make small changes in their life. This is addressed by Mirjam, Marieke and Jeroen:

'So it is not my intention to let you become a vegetarian now or to live in an earth house. But because I enjoy it you can see hey! Oh, gosh! What can I take from that? In my life.' - Mirjam (Aardehuis Oost-Nederland)

'Yes, that is often asked. Yes, do you think everyone should live like you? No I do not want that. But I do believe that you. There are some eccentrics who give the example which direction it can go and then the masses can come along.' – Marieke (Future resident The Living Village)

'Which is not the case is that everyone has to live like us. Not at all. Because we live by the grace of the disposable society in this way. And you must be quite a pioneer. You can take a beating and you name it. This is really for a few people. But it is true that we motivate many other people. It really should not go the way we do. Because these are all experiments. It is just like in nature, in the fringes there you just have all kinds of plants. If the monoculture or the majority now get an illness or whatever, then out of the fringes... Then from the fringes there will come a plant or something that can do it. And that will come. So it is allowed to harvest from us. In terms of ideas, in terms of life vision, everything.' – Jeroen (Ecovillage Ppauw)

Besides the focus on external education, some respondents also addressed the topic of educating themselves. They expect that living in an ecovillage can teach them things in many ways. For example on the basis of experiments with sustainable living styles and life in a community. Kirby (2003) also addressed the motivation for self-education in his research on ecovillages. Often residents are looking for a meaningful life fulfilment that allows for self-actualization and personal development. It is important that this takes place with a bigger community whereby interpersonal relationships create the setting for personal growth. This aspect of personal growth is also mentioned by Marieke:

'And that is a part where we really stand for in the Living Village. It is that piece of personal growth. And so... Who is that teacher in the other? What can he teach you? What does it mirror me? And how can I do it differently? And I am not saying that everyone should be able to do that right away. And I don't either. Heh, but with that vision. You also say yes to that growth in yourself. In such a community and not put on your mask and hide in your house or .. Yes .. Maybe just a moment. I'm not saying you can never hide in your house. So that it keeps moving. Yes, yes.' – Marieke (Future resident The Living Village)

5.1.4 Living close to nature/ rural areas

The final motivation that came up during the interviews was the desire to live in nature. The respondents experience being in nature as a place where they feel at ease and often they experienced a strong connection with nature. This is what Dina and Marieke are addressing:

'Yes, and I'm just an outdoors person too. So eh .. It is just nice that I still have a garden, there I can fully recharge.' - Dina (Hof van Moeder Aarde)

'Well, there are just a lot more steps to be taken if the somewhat larger masses see that you also become very happy with nature. That the greenery around you really does something. And that that is heart-warming and that you will then start to relax more. Well, really literally.' – Marieke (Female, future resident The Living Village)

The research of Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995) shows that besides the house itself, the surroundings are equally important for the residents. The surroundings are seen as an extension of their personal living space. For most (future) ecovillage residents within this research living in a green environment was an important aspect of their personal living space. Cohen (2011) addresses that individuals who move to an ecovillage have a desire to live in greater harmony with the land. One of the practices to live in harmony with the earth is to apply permaculture and food forestry. This is also mentioned by the respondents:

'And then, I had a book for a while. And I didn't want to start with that. But then I knew. It was a dummy, with all blank pages. I just wanted to start it for something that I really wanted. And then I wrote yes what I really want? Well, I want to live in a community with old trees. And, edible nature. Permaculture had come my way before. So

I already knew about that. Create a garden with permaculture. I want more in nature, together with nature with alternative people. - Marieke (Future resident The Living Village)

5.2 Location & Design

The second focus in this research is on the current practices and experiences of people living in ecovillages. In particular, this paragraph focuses on the realization and construction phase of the ecovillages. First of all, the search for suitable land is analysed. On the basis of what aspects were the location of ecovillages chosen and what role did the location of the ecovillage played in the choice for a particular ecovillage? Furthermore, the design of the ecovillages is discussed and how the ecovillages are constructed. Every ecovillage is different in the way that they use the site and apply building methods.

5.2.1 Location preferences and search

Finding a location to start an ecovillage can be a difficult process according to the respondents. Often it takes multiple years to find a suitable location. However, some researched ecovillages were relatively fast with finding a location such as 'Ecovillage Bergen', 'Land van Een', and 'Ecovillage Ppauw'. Ecovillage Bergen was lucky in a lottery for a piece of land, Land van Een consisted of a relatively small community with a high purchasing power and Ecovillage Ppauw squatted a piece of land. The latter will be further examined later on in this paragraph. For most ecovillages, finding a suitable location takes a couple of years. In the case of 'Aardehuis Oost-Nederland' it took 3 years to find a location and with "Hof van Moeder Aarde" it took around 5 years. 'Ecovillage Noordland' and 'Ecovillage Boekel' needed both 6 years to find a suitable location. 'The Living Village' is still searching for a location from 2016 on. Also, Kasper (2008) and Ruijter (2016) showed that one of the biggest challenges for ecovillages is finding land and money to realize their plans. Often it happens that it takes years until people find their final location. Additionally Christian (2003) shows that the realization of an ecovillage is often a difficult process. She claimed that probably 90 per cent of the plans for ecovillages and community groups are never realized. According to her, this is because these groups are not able to find suitable land, they struggle with internal conflicts or they experience financial problems. Also, the initiators are often not aware of how much effort, money, and organisational skills there is needed to realize a certain project. The financing of the project is identified by the respondents as a difficult aspect of the establishment of an ecovillage. Dutch banks do not provide loans for these projects. Most of the projects organised crowdfunding actions and financed their projects with personal loans. Also, some ecovillages requested subsidies and got support from funds aimed at sustainable subjects.

The respondents in this research indicated that the choice for the location of the ecovillage is related to economic factors, familiarity with the region and the willingness of the municipality to cooperate. Also, multiple exterior criteria were mentioned. For example the presence of nature, enough space to fulfil their plans and a location near public transportation facilities. Five out of the eight ecovillages searched for a location in the region where the initiators already lived. They wanted to live in a place where they were already familiar with. These locations were often situated in predominantly rural areas such as the province of Gelderland and Groningen. Also, the Northern provinces were preferred because of the affordability compared to other provinces. This is also what Kasper (2008) points out in her research about ecovillage communities. She states that in most cases costs are the biggest obstacle. This is

the main cause of why communities focus on rural areas. Here the land is cheaper but also building laws tends to be more flexible (Kasper, 2008). Additionally, Dias et al. (2017) argued that rural areas give the opportunity to have sufficient physical space and resources to achieve the desired level of self-sufficiency.

Furthermore, every single respondent addressed that it is important that the municipality is willing to cooperate and support the emergence of an ecovillage. Without this support, it can be difficult to for example get approval for alternative building techniques and the project is more likely to be delayed. Christian (2003) mentioned that when the land is purchased this does not mean that the inhabitants can design the village the way they want. The founders have to take zoning regulations and building laws into account. The importance of the cooperation of the municipality is also what Marieke addresses:

'The entrance to land is actually very versatile. No, from many sides. Because you have to bring the municipality with you first. You can find land but if you don't bring municipality with you ...' – Marieke (Future resident, The Living Village)

The best practices in this research were the projects that found their piece of land through contact with the municipality. This was the case for the ecovillages Boekel, Noordeland, and Aardehuis Oost-Nederland. These municipalities had heard of their plans and were enthusiastic about it. With their help, they were able to fulfil their plans. This is what Mirjam and Anja are describing:

'In Deventer we kept on searching. There was not really a place where they thought well here we want to settle down with each other. And then there was a councillor in Olst who heard about it and he said, how many square meters do you need? Well, uh .. So much. Well look, we have a piece of land here. It is suitable for residential construction, we have prepared it for that. We have been grubbing-up the orchards and euh .. What do you think? Well, it's ideal! 5 minutes from the station. Actually in nature. We are on the south side of Olst. Actually on the outside.' – Mirjam (Aardehuis Oost-Nederland)

'One person who joined after 2 years.. And she immediately brought the terrain with her. Because he lives near Ter Apel. Where the terrain is situated. The AVB factory with a site of 9 hectares. And he lived in the neighbourhood, Vlagtwedde. And she heard from her neighbour, who is a PvdA alderman or councillor. She had heard that the PvdA had written in their program that they wanted an ecovillage in the municipality. So she came up with that, and the possibilities were explored. And then this came out. So gradually the municipality became very connected with us.' – Anja (Future resident ecovillage Noordeland)

In these examples, the municipalities were willing to welcome the ecovillages from the start and they could support them by finding a suitable piece of land. Also Christian (2003) argues that the legal barriers to sustainable development are an important consideration. Examples are composting toilets, water catchment, and prohibitions on natural building materials. When the municipalities are opposing these kinds of development it will get very difficult to realize their goals and needs. Also, Kasper (2008) noted that usually ecovillages plan to employ alternative forms of construction, energy and sewage systems.. It can be difficult to get this approved by the local governments. Therefore it is very beneficial for an ecovillage to have the municipality on their side from the start.

Moreover, it was notable that three respondents indicated that they did not have a preference for a location on forehand. The location could have been anywhere in the Netherlands. Their most important criterium was to have a positive feeling with the people and the location. In

doing so often words like 'energy' and 'feeling' were mentioned. Also, the respondent knew in advance that the possibilities were limited and that they were not in the position to have high demands. Also, they just wanted to see what crosses their paths and have an open attitude to different possibilities:

'Yes Yes. I got Olst as something extra. Because we heard about the project but had it been in Groningen or in Maastricht we would have gone there.' – Mirjam (Aardehuis Oost-Nederland)

'You are just in a beautiful piece of nature, including the environment. There is also water in the area. There are enough spaces and so on. Yes, it immediately felt like ... We're being called by this place. It felt more like that. Instead of .. That is still true. It doesn't feel like our possession.' - Christiaan (Ecovillage Land van Een)

'No, we have always said we will never look for a location. The location should come to us. Then you start on an equal level, if you say of gosh, we want to have this ground then the ratio suddenly changes completely.' - Pieter (Ecovillage Boekel)

Ecovillages have bought different types of land. Some bought raw pieces of land, others already developed land with utilities and buildings. It was remarkable that two ecovillages bought a plot of land where the soil was contaminated. Therefore they were able to purchase the land for a lower price. However, remediation will cost a lot of money in the future.

'Look, this is filth what is there. And that has remained like that for a very long time. And the owner did not do anything with that. In terms of sales. And the municipality did not do anything with that either. To make that cleaner. And we have to pay for that. Anyway, that's the deal we have. We pay a symbolic amount for 9 hectares. And then it is up to us to clean that up.' - Anja (Future resident ecovillage Noordeland)

Also, 2 ecovillages have bought a piece of land with a farmhouse that could be rebuilt, in this way they saved time and costs. The three remaining ecovillages bought a raw piece of land. According to Christian (2003), each type of land has its advantages and disadvantages. For example, in the case of raw land, the founders have to pay less, but it will cost more to turn the land into a liveable place. Also, it is easier to design the site according to the needs and wishes of the community. In the case of an already developed land, the community has a place to live from the start and it is possible to save money in the long-term because rebuilding will cost less money.

An exception in the choice of a location is the ecovillage Ppauw. Jeroen is the initiator of this project and he believes that land cannot be owned by people. That is the reason why he squatted a vacant terrain near Wageningen. After quite some resistance from the local government, the ecovillage is now able to maintain a good relationship with for example the major and the police. The ecovillage community showed that they stick to agreements and they have turned a polluted wasteland in an interesting area on the basis of sustainable living experiments. Jeroen describes his relationship with the Major of Wageningen:

'But he just has an oral agreement that I, as a manager, make sure that everything is in order there. Well, that's very handy for him. Because he was called all the time to get rid of that asbestos. And now it's not even being dumped anymore.' - Jeroen (Ecovillage Ppauw)

5.2.2 Design process

As soon as the founders found suitable land to start an ecovillage, the design process can start in practice. The aim is that all residents take part in this process. Often they work with

architects to fulfil their collective vision. Together they create the design of the ecovillage and try to achieve accordance with what the ecovillage should entail. In doing so a shared vision, mission, and goals are composed. According to Ruijter (2016), the collective design process is an important part of the community forming process. The residents all take part in this together which is often assisted by architects and construction professionals. In this process decisions are often made by the use of a 'consensus-decision-making system'. The aim for consensus forms one of the central elements of the ecovillage philosophy. This will further be elaborated in paragraph 5.3.3.

During the planning phase, many decisions have to be made and often financial considerations gave pressure to speed up the construction process. This was also the case for 'Aardehuis Oost-Nederland'. On the one hand, people wanted to put time and effort into community building practices and shared decisions. But on the other hand, the longer the building process takes the more money it costs. Many ecovillages are searching for a balance between time and costs. They are aware that when there is too much focus on making fast decisions and moving ahead, people can develop resentment which will also not benefit the project.

'Because we have also been very busy with bureaucratic matters. Consult with the municipality and the zoning plan. Well there is one of us in particular who has put a lot of time into it. Also in the community formation group. Which therefore also has less to do with it. Someone else was actually the driving force of 3 groups at that time. And .. And the statutes there had to be worked on. So a lot of brain work. And eh, I think yes. It is a bit, this whole community formation that has come a bit to the side. But we still do things.' - Anja (Future resident ecovillage Noordeland)

Also, the aim of all ecovillages is to conjointly manage their site and have a couple of shared facilities and spaces. Most of the studied ecovillages consist of multiple private homes. However, the ecovillages 'Land van Een' and 'Hof van Moeder Aarde' are living in one big farmhouse which is divided into multiple living units wherein single or multi-person households are living. Furthermore, the homes in the studied ecovillages vary greatly on a number of aspects. Some are very small, others have the size of a normal house. Also, some are very basic and others are more comfortable. Kasper (2008) touched upon this variety in the design of homes. This is because the homes are built to the liking of the residents and their needs and visions. Most of the ecovillages consist of permanent houses. However, ecovillage Ppauw is made up of mobile homes such as tiny houses and caravans in order to move to other sides when this is needed. Jeroen describes why ecovillages Ppauw consists of mobile houses:

'Well besides, I'm not averse to temporary things. I like building things up. So that makes it very logical to squat or temporarily use land. I also think we will all be climate refugees soon. We are in the water below sea level. So yes, temporarily the new is permanent, that is my new slogan. Because such a house with wheels you can put somewhere else. So you could call that more permanent than a house 20 meters below nap. And you bought it then. That is yours. Yes, whatever that means. Yes, I am a bit careful about spending money.' - Jeroen (Ecovillage Ppauw)

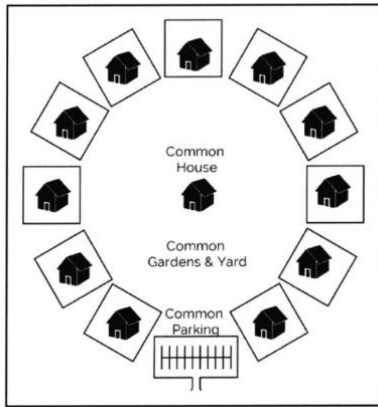


Fig. 1: Neighbourhood clusters with a common house, shared yard area, and side parking (Cohen, 2011)

Typical for all the ecovillages is that they have one common living room area where the residents can have dinner or meetings together and where activities are organized. This place is often situated at the heart of the ecovillage (Fig 1). In this way, it is easy to access for all members. According to Cohen (2011), the presence of a communal meeting room that is big enough to fit the entire community is fundamental for organising the group and having a collaborative community. Besides this, all ecovillages have shared facilities such as a laundry room, a kitchen, a barn, and showers.

The outside area is an important section for all the ecovillages. Since the interior living areas are often quite small and the inhabitants want to be in touch with nature. They try to integrate nature into their living area. Often, the principle of permaculture is applied in the design of the vegetable gardens and natural areas. In short, permaculture uses design principles that focus on improving the resilience of nature. Part of permaculture is agroforestry which combines forestry and agriculture (Cohen, 2011). Furthermore, most ecovillages try to implement room for multiple activities and enterprises in their design. However, most of these plans are not realized yet. 'Hof van Moeder Aarde' is situated on a campground. In the ecovillages 'Aardehuis Oost-Nederland', 'Bergen', 'Ppauw' and 'Land van Een' activities for people from outside the ecovillages are organised focused on for example sustainable living, permaculture or spiritual workshops. In particular, the ecovillages Noordeland, Boekel, and Bergen have big plans for the creation of enterprises such as a restaurant, tea room, accommodation facilities, and sustainable businesses.

5.2.3 Construction process

Characteristic of the studied ecovillages was that most of the respondents addressed that the community did most of the building themselves. This was mostly done to reduce costs. Only the more complicated tasks were carried out by professionals. However, most residents were not yet familiar with the building of houses. They had to learn most building techniques and many respondents experienced this as hard work. Ecovillage 'Aardehuis Oost-Nederland' is the only studied ecovillage where new houses have been built and which is already fully completed. The other ecovillages have rebuilt existing properties or are not finished yet. Mirjam describes the process of building Aardehuizen:

'We worked 7 days a week. We did have fixed times but some people also went ahead and it was of course quite a tough job. Because we all had something like oh, wow! Learning to bricklaying, carpentry, electricity, I want to know it all. At least that has been my approach. I want to be able to do all of that and I think I can. So uh, come on.' - Mirjam (Aardehuis Oost-Nederland)

'Yes, and if something was wrong or something had to be done again. Yes, then you lie down at night and think and recalculate the time schedule. And what ... That head is the most stressful, and that brings the pain and the physical. The stress, the tight shoulders, the sore back.' - Mirjam (Aardehuis Oost-Nederland)

Despite the heaviness of the building process, the construction of the ecovillages is regarded as positive for the community. They are working on most projects together and experience also the tougher times with the group as a whole. According to Mirjam, this creates a close community and also the personal value of the buildings is regarded as high because of the efforts that were made by the residents themselves.

'And then we thought like we're not going to do that. Ehm, yes and then we were suddenly able to build an Earth house with a very nice group of people. Which we did not know then. But where do you live now that you know your neighbors through and through? What you have carried with you, built, cried, gathered, cooked, with the children ... Euh, yes.' - Mirjam (Aardehuis Oost-Nederland)

'There is a story behind everything. And then you see them still standing on the stairs and they said that and that. And then I said uh, uh, uh ... You know that! And so every house has its own places. And, uh ... It was done together.' - Mirjam (Aardehuis Oost-Nederland)

According to the research of Ruiu (2016) on cohousing communities, the residents developed closer relationships with other members during the designing process. The residents get to know each other better and learn how to solve internal conflicts during this process due to different opinions and needs. Especially in the cases where members physically took part in the building of the communities the members stated that this was an important part of the community building process. They had spent a long period of working together which contributed to the creation of a close community. Because of active participation, the residents feel part of the community.

Self-building was also the initial approach of Ecovillage Boekel. However, later in the process, the residents decided to outsource more work to the contractor. Pieter explains why they had to make this decision:

'We actually wanted to do a lot of self-building, but we noticed that it is very difficult in the Netherlands to do because you ... Every month things take time... So then you have to make sure that you receive income as quickly as possible. If you then take 3 years to relocate then you are already bankrupt before you can start. So we had to decide to work with a contractor.' - Pieter (Ecovillage Boekel)

This quote addresses that the residents always had to make a balance between time and costs. The longer the construction period took, the higher the costs. This is also addressed by Mirjam. She experienced delays and this led to financial worries for many residents:

'But what is important to know is that along the way we encountered many bears on the road. Not only in thought but also in real.. Something suddenly stood there, or that we thought oh, how should we solve this now? How should we do this now? Euh .. it all took much more time than we thought. That meant that there were people who had a double mortgage and had to pay much higher costs. It also meant that the time of construction and therefore spending that day in the week on construction also became much longer. And then we could sort of go bankrupt.' - Mirjam (Aardehuis Oost-Nederland)

Also in the choice for building materials, financial considerations have to be made. The respondents all tried to make decisions on the bases of sustainability and durability. For example, they used recycled or natural materials. Sometimes the most sustainable choice is

not the most durable one. Mirjam and Christiaan mentioned that they are trying to find a balance between these aspects:

'Finance is always a major stumbling block, and sometimes you make less sustainable choices as well. For example, this roof, the insulation in this roof, is tempex. That is not really environmentally friendly. But there are several families who say we put hemp in it. It is 10 times more expensive, but then it is environmentally friendly. Because if the house is dismantled again in 50 years, then it can simply go back into nature. While that tempex remains tempex.' - Mirjam (Aardehuis Oost-Nederland)

'Well, we make a choice in everything. We weigh everything. Whether it is the paint or the house. There is no ecological paint on it. Here at the straw house, that's ecological paint. But not on the house. Because, it's very simple. If you use ecological paint on the house, you have to paint every five years. Well, now there's just a plastic layer over it and that will last 10 years. That is just very practical. Very simple. Well and so, and also with this building there are .. Almost everything is ecological but not everything.' - Christiaan (Land van Een)

Furthermore, they tried to create a sustainable living environment by 'living off the grid'. All ecovillages except from one have composting toilets, they are not connected to the sewer. So they also have to arrange their own water purification and they do this with a constructed wetland. Furthermore, all of them used solar panels. Mirjam describes these off-grid practices:

'Composting toilets and bio filters. We are not connected to the sewer. We have our own drinking water with a well. We have received exemptions for this. If you show that you investigate it thoroughly and that you are keeping it up to date. For example our wastewater from the shower and the toilet and everything that goes first in 3 pre-filter wells. Then it enters the bio filter. And then it is piloted on the surface water. That is sampled every year, and in the beginning a few times a year. Tests, samples, how clean is it? Does this work? This way you can show it works, it is really possible. Given the chance to prove it. If it is not, then we will not do it. Then we break it down again. And in this way you can actually handle everything.' - Mirjam (Aardehuis Oost-Nederland)

5.3 Current experiences

The third focus in this research is on the current practices and experiences of people living in ecovillages. After the initial planning phase, how is the daily life in an ecovillage organised? How do the respondents experience this? These questions are analysed according to the three most important motivations for moving to an ecovillage. First of all, the way of living in an ecovillage is described. Here the focus is on sustainability practices. Furthermore, the processes of community building and organising the community are described. Extra attention is given to the method of consent decision-making which is an important characteristic of ecovillage communities. Finally, the external connections of the ecovillages are examined which touches upon the motivation to have an educational role.

5.3.1 Sustainable living

Every studied ecovillage aims to live in a sustainable way and with a small impact on the earth. Therefore the ecovillages try to be self-sufficient to a certain extent. This is mainly the case regarding food, energy, and waste. For most ecovillages, a certain degree of resource and energy independence is desired. Jeroen explains that this has a positive impact on the residents because living more self-sufficient increases the awareness of consumption patterns. Also, Kasper (2008) argues that living in an ecologically conscious environment reinforces to implementing a sustainable living style. This is what Jeroen describes:

'Well, I thought that was a very good thing because then you will become a lot more aware of what you have to drag into the terrain and remove again. So that is an extra, yes, thing that makes you think every time. Where do I get that water from? And well, that way you are going to be more economical and enjoy it more. That is collecting water, and electricity is of course solar panels. But now it's winter again, so you have to completely change your entire consumption pattern. And yes, we have gray water that we want to purify. Well, we certainly don't try to make it that dirty. So only organic biodegradable cosmetics and so on. And soaps. And that goes into the helophyte filter and then there are people who have green fingers and they are working on the helophyte filter again.' - Jeroen (Ecovillage Ppauw)

However, the respondents experience that this can be very difficult and that it is hard work and difficult to achieve. Especially concerning food production, none of the studied ecovillages are fully self-sufficient at the moment. Some of the ecovillages are trying to increase their self-sufficiency over time by learning and improving techniques. Pieter and Christiaan explain that this is a time consuming and difficult process:

'There is a lot involved in doing that right. Certainly for such a group. Well then you really have to ... So it is the starting point, the aim, but we cannot make it happen. But we do eat as much organic as possible.' - Christiaan (Ecovillage Land van Een)

'What we are going to do is also grow our own food so it will take a few days a week. But if you divide that among very many people, it might be much less.' - Pieter (Ecovillage Boekel)

For some ecovillage self-sufficiency was not the goal from the beginning. Every ecovillage has a vegetable garden but this functions more as a supplement to their daily food intake. Besides this, many residents try to eat mainly biological, seasonal and local food. Also, some ecovillages try to collaborate with other local initiatives. This is a trend that is frequently observed in ecovillage literature. Earlier on, ecovillages tended to see themselves as an 'island' and as opponents from the mainstream society. Part of this internal focus was the seek to achieve self-sufficiency (Dawson, 2013). However today, the ecovillages are increasingly trying

to be a part of society. Their goal is to function as an example of sustainable living practices. This has led to a decrease in the focus on achieving as much self-sufficiency as possible (Dias et al. 2017). Their focus is now increasingly on functioning as part of networks that are committed to sustainability. This is addressed by Jeroen and Christiaan:

'No, I don't really like the word self-sufficient because everyone has their own TV and you name it. That is a very much consumption and preppers-like word. I just find it together sufficient. Everything within cycling distance is interesting. And a few of us who work in gardens in nearby CSA's (Community Supported Agriculture). Well, if there is a little too much harvest there, we can take that and the other way around we can bring it and that way you won't try to consume less or, or, or keep it all small or something. No, the more people participate in that local party, the better say.' - Jeroen (Ecovillage Ppauw)

'Well, we are not able to do it at all. Because the one who ... Because we ourselves have too little experience with vegetable gardens. And the one who did, that didn't work here. So at the moment the vegetable garden is a bit of yes.. how are we going to do that. Well I thought myself if we are going to combine that with such a care farm you have here. The Odlands Hoeve or something and you can also get organic vegetable packages. And that is not so far from here. I've been there once. And to combine that in that way. And the vegetable garden and what they donate. The starting point is there but we cannot live up to it.' - Christiaan (Ecovillage Land van Een)

5.3.2 Living in a community

Within every studied ecovillage, the community is the central element. The way in which the community is organised in practice is different in every ecovillage. The starting point in all communities is to live with a group of like-minded people who are open to participating in a community. Sargisson (2007) formulates this as space wherein members share a joint mission, vision, and related practices. These are drawn up in the planning phase of the project and every new member has to agree with this. In every village, this comes down to caring for other people in- and outside the community. This is important in order to nourish community relationships and maintain cooperative labour practices. When working together harmoniously it is believed you can achieve more. This is carried out in the form of varying practices such as consensus decision-making, sharing of food and community activities. Anja and Christiaan describe the importance of the community within the ecovillage.

'It is not only that you are going to make a house, you are going to make a nice ecological house. Living, you don't have that many costs anymore. So we tell people immediately when they come in contact with us. It is not an eco-neighbourhood. The intention is that you are prepared, and that you should also want to connect more with each other.' - Anja (Future resident ecovillage Noordeland)

'It is not the ecological focus that is central for us, but the depth of the connection. So with your own core, with your own essence, with the other, with nature, with the essence itself .. Everyone does it in a different way here. But that deepening, that connection, that broadening of consciousness is central.' - Christiaan (Ecovillage Land van Een)

The residents of ecovillages often live close to each other due to the shared spaces, cooperative work, common activities. Ruiu (2016) argues that residents of co-housing communities felt that participation in common activities and the organization of daily life in the community contributed to the building of the community. However, according to the respondents, just the collaboration in activities is not enough to create the desired community. The respondents mention that in order to create a well-functioning community it is important to share experiences and create a mutual understanding. Then the residents will feel secure and they can be more open to each other. The ecovillages try to foster this in

multiple ways. Most of these practices are based on giving room to share thoughts with the group and create closer connections. The respondents explained this as follows:

"Yes, then we have a general member meeting once every two weeks. And that always starts with sharing. And that sharing is meant to give everyone the chance to tell what they are doing and what is bothering them. Yes, what makes someone happy lately, what doesn't make someone happy. That is also very important. Because the more people hear from each other, the easier they are when someone does something weird." - Pieter (Ecovillage Boekel)

"If some emotional tensions arise then a care walk or an empathy session or whatever is organized. That we just use the talking stick and everyone can just express his feelings and his things" - Jeroen (Ecovillage Ppauw)

"And that is a way to make the circle happen within which you can experience safety. To also tell what is affecting you and what you are working in the group. Everyone listens, full attention. And then the groups give you mirrors, that's how it's called then. It is a way to penetrate deeper into yourself and to get to know each other. You can also use that in ... I won't say conflicts. But it is a way that can actually work as conflict prevention. Because you are free to get to know yourself down to the deeper layers. This is how we started." - Anja (Ecovillage Noordeland)

Within some communities, practices around community building are of a compulsory nature. For example, they have mandatory meetings and dinners or activities at which everyone is expected to join. In other communities, there are no obligations and the inhabitants are free to choose to what extent to participate. Here it is less controlled. This is, in particular, the case in the ecovillages 'Aardehuis Oost-Nederland' and 'Boekel':

'And if you fancy a chat, there is always someone there. But if you do not feel like meeting people for a week, then it is also okay. Not just anyone comes to your door for no reason.' - Mirjam (Aardehuis Oost-Nederland)

'No, we would never oblige to eat together, I think. We do have connection days, which are more or less mandatory. That is actually right away, then there are a lot of certain topics that we deal with that work connecting. That sometimes takes a day and sometimes half a day.' - Pieter (Ecovillage Boekel)

In terms of community, Aardehuizen is a special case. They started off with many obligatory meetings and this has decreased over time. During the construction period, the residents had many obligations and have put a lot of time into this. After this, many residents needed some time for themselves to recover from this project. That is why the focus on community building has diminished over time. Now every resident is free to decide whether to join an assembly, potluck or activity.

The respondents often address that living in a community is experienced as hard work. The process of community building is never finished and regularly there are tensions between residents. This is also what Sargisson (2007) addressed. Every resident wants to pursue a good life according to their view. But this can lead to conflicts when people have a different opinion on this. Kirby (2003) showed that often residents experience the creation of a close community that can demonstrate and experience a socially sustainable way of life as the biggest challenge of an ecovillage. However, many respondents see this as an opportunity for learning.

"Look .. Just designing such a terrain. Then we will come together. What comes where and who gets which piece. And then it is certain that emotions also come into play. Because everyone ... we are all people. And yes everyone has certain triggers. So yes .. And everyone who is there, so it happened. Yes, so it is certain that everything will arise there. But we are looking forward to that." - Marieke (Future resident The Living Village)

Furthermore, the process of community building is regarded as an opportunity for personal development. Many respondents point out that through other members of the group people are learning more about themselves. Also, they are learning about communication and conflict solving practices. According to Cohen (2011), life in an eco-community creates enormous opportunities for self-growth and self-reflection. People learn how to create intimate relationships with other people, they learn about the work that is required to nourish relationships and they pick up skills to resolve conflicts.

"Yes, that you are open and honest with each other. And that you just really, that you can just say it. That you can just speak out without someone else immediately starts standing up. While, of course, that happens sometimes and then you can also talk about it. But that does not necessarily mean that you have a fight. So you can do something .. And even if you know so... What is that lesson for you? If you do this now ... Someone always mirrors you. So you can say something like yes but you. But what does that say about me?" - Marieke (Future resident The Living Village)

"One of the things to work in a community ... A number of things are important. and that is that you have good self-reflection. That you are noticing when you project something onto someone. That the other person is doing something. While that is actually your story what you are making on something that happens. Well, that's a fundamental quality. Well, the second is that you can tune into that other person. Well ... well just are aligned in a consultation, that you can communicate well. "- Christiaan (Ecovillage Land van Een)

Furthermore, respondents mention that it can be hard to put effort into community building practices while they are busy with developing their site. They recognize that it is important to keep paying attention to the building of the community but it can be difficult to find a balance between more practical- and socio-emotional issues.

"They also organized a women's evening once, but that was very rare. But it helped a lot. But almost nobody had the energy to organize such a thing while it yields so much so to say. But yes, if you have to pull yourself forward already .. But it is very nice that that happened then. Occasionally. "- Mirjam (Aardehuis Oost-Nederland)

'We could do that a little more. Because we have also been very busy with bureaucratic matters. Consulting with the municipality, and the zoning plan. Well there is one of us in particular who has put a lot of time into it. Also in the community formation group. Which therefore also has less to do with it. Someone else was actually the driving force of 3 groups at that time. And .. And the statutes there had to be worked on. So a lot of main work. And eh, I think yes. It is a bit, this whole community formation that has come a bit to the side. "- Anja (Future resident ecovillage Noordeland)

The sites of the ecovillages are always collectively managed but the communities decide in what way this is practiced. In most cases, workgroups are created to take on certain tasks. Also, the residents are required to work a certain number of hours per week. Often this is not controlled strictly but organised on the basis of trust. In most cases, this is voluntary work. One ecovillage is experimenting with small fees to reward inhabitants that put more time than average in the ecovillage. Cohen (2011) argues that through personal investment and the feeling of belonging a sense of community is maintained. The residents that are made responsible for certain tasks feel more satisfied and connected with the community. Ruiu (2015) showed that the connection with a community is also increased with the sharing of facilities and things, for example carpooling, shared laundry and communal meals. A 'sharing economy' is often practiced in ecovillages:

"And who has something like to who belong all these things. From me, but can we do that .. What does it look like if you share it all together? Is that because you can say no, you cannot use it. I don't like that at all. So that's why I did something like that, it's all mine and everyone can use it. "- Jeroen (Ecovillage Ppauw)

"If someone goes on vacation then that person emails that they need a suitcase. Who still has a suitcase? Well, within 5 minutes there is a suitcase at your door. And vice versa, when I have food left as a chef after a catering. I never throw anything away. So then I email it or I go door to door. I say, did you already have dinner because I still have a very nice salad here. Well, then we'll exchange it or we give it. It's very easy. Or someone cleans up his house or his shed and he says oh, I have this or that left. Someone had a chainsaw left. Well, who wants it. Before I bring it to the cycle or put it on the marketplace. Is there anyone here who wants that? And that is actually a very nice system. "- Mirjam (Aardehuis Oost-Nederland)

5.3.3 Decision-making process

According to the interviewees of the studied ecovillages, the method of 'consensus decision-making' is one of the most important characteristics that define ecovillages and ensures a well-functioning community. In this method, there is no hierarchy and every inhabitant has an equal voice. Meetings are organised to examine complaints, community issues, and solutions. When decisions have to be made, there is always searched for a middle way with which everyone is satisfied. When a resident is disagreeing with an idea then that person has to come up with relevant reasoning whereby the community as a whole is kept in mind and not just personal opinions. Pieter describes how consensus decision-making is practiced in the ecovillage:

"And if a decision is made, it must be really supported. We have a rule, if someone really, really has an objection to a decision. Then it won't happen. But if someone has difficulty with a decision and the majority wants it. Then you try to formulate it in such a way that the other person is at peace with it. Nothing is ever decided here over the heads of one or more people. " - Pieter (Ecovillage Boekel)

According to Cohen (2011), this decision method is able to counteract polarization within the community. It functions because it makes sure that each individual member is heard. And it does not create a division as in the case of democratic voting whereby a minority leaves unsatisfied. However, in practice, the implementation of consensus decision-making methods was seen as a blessing, as well as a curse. For example, it was described as a great alternative to democratic decision-making. But it was also experienced by some individuals as frustrating and time-consuming. On the other hand, it might negatively affect the internal cohesiveness if inhabitants are not able to find a compromise. Esther expresses her frustration with the consensus decision-making process:

'Sometimes I get frustrated because it also causes an energy leak. I already had 4 meetings, 8 hours. It's enough. I'm now saying to myself. Okay, this topic goes on endlessly. I will go another 4 times and then I withdraw. And then the group can make a decision. That's something I'm trying now. Also to bring a consciousness into it. We can also talk endlessly. But my time is not endless.' - Esther (Ecovillage Bergen)

Also, Ruiu (2016) argues that inhabitants of cohousing communities that use a consensus decision-making system experience the decision-making system as exhaustive. This is due to the extent of the process which takes much longer compared with democratic decision-making. According to Sargisson (2007), consensus decision-making method often requires much time, willingness and patience to eventually solve problems and make widely supported decisions. Furthermore, the respondents recognize that it is almost impossible to give everyone an equal voice in every decision. There are always residents who are more dominant and outspoken than others. The respondents are actively working to develop and improve their decision methods. This is what Dina and Anja touched upon:

'And we practiced very much together. There is a person who knew a lot about it. He also had a lot of experience with that, Marjan. And she has strongly guided us in this. And still when things are going on. And then it is really about not having a predominant objection. So if there is a difference of opinion we are talking about that.' - Dina (Hof van Moeder Aarde)

'You have ... That also adjoins that certain people are exercising more power. That is the informal power. That is there anyway. Someone has a lot of expressiveness and knows how to bring it in a good way. And another less, that is the informal power. It is incredibly fascinating and sometimes very tiring, the entire process. And there is a lot discussed, and it also demands a lot.' - Anja (Future resident ecovillage Noordeland)

Also, nonviolent communication practices are often mentioned by respondents. This relates to the importance that is given to open-communication and trust within a community. Non-violent communication is used to ensure a safe environment for the residents where the residents can express themselves. Jeroen and Anja explain the importance of nonviolent communication:

'Well, in many places there is already a toxic culture of well-being attacked. Verbal, violent communication you call that. If you want to stay soft and open to life, all life on earth. While people bash at you all the time. That isn't nice, it doesn't work. That hurts too much. Then you let it come in. Then you have to put up a wall around your heart or whatever. And then you get a little bit .. That makes you a somewhat colder person. So yes, to be inclusive and let everyone's flourishing, what life meant for such a person. Or plant or whatever. You need to be able to communicate non-violently. Or at least not too hard that there is room for it in which you cannot be laughed at or you name it.' - Jeroen (Ecovillage Ppauw)

'We also use nonviolent communication. We try to train people in this. If there is a conflict that you know a little bit about how you can handle it except one says and the other responds. That there are other options. And sometimes it is very good to shoot a bit. At least I think that's great. Then you feel that you are totally coming along and not just doing things from your head. But then that you know afterwards that you said that and that if there was something hurtful about it, you would come back to it. That is important again.' - Anja (Future resident ecovillage Noordeland)

Because the decision-making in ecovillages can take a lot of time the ecovillage community is often divided into different subgroups that all manage specific tasks. These are mostly called 'circles'. According to Cohen (2011), the form of a circle related to the feeling of similarity wherein everyone is heard. Examples of circles are gardening, finances, cooking or maintenance. These groups can discuss internally if certain decisions need to be reviewed with the entire community. During general assemblies, the subgroups can present their proposals to other members. In this way, the tasks can be divided and people can participate in groups that they are interested in. Also within these circles decisions are made by consent. This way of organising the community is called 'sociocracy' (Cohen, 2011). According to Ruij (2016), the different subgroups also offer a solution to the lengthy decision process. But even with these subgroups, it can take a lot of time to come to a shared decision.

5.3.4 External relations

The final factor that was an important motivation for the respondents was the desire to demonstrate the possibility of an alternative lifestyle to others. The ecovillages are connected to their surroundings in a variety of ways. According to Westskog et al. (2018), outward outreach creates the possibility to attract new residents which is especially important in the beginning phase. Furthermore, it functions as a bridge between the residents and the local population. From the beginning, most ecovillages connect with their surrounding community. In doing so they explain their plans to the local community, local government and other actors.

In this, they try to remove existing prejudices and keep an open attitude. Anja and Dina explain how they benefit from organising an information meeting:

'And we have also made an effort, a number of times we have .. Have we presented ourselves. First invited the nearby environment. Then we couldn't be at the terrain at all. So we rented a community center and invited people and eeh .. Plans presented. And let people speak. We also want a campsite .. I was not there myself, but I heard that. That people were then afraid of nuisance and stuff. A campsite, hassle and .. No, a small-scale campsite. We want to guarantee peace.' - Anja (Future resident ecovillage Noordeland)

'And we also invest in that, also with the neighborhood. Because we are a little bit different. We organized an information evening in the beginning. In the village, Noorddijk. There was a large turnout. Noorddijk is a village, a neighborhood. With 3 streets but 700 people live there. Yes, so we wanted good contact with those people, because they are our neighbors. We are located really on the edge of the village. That information evening was very good and well attended, we still benefit from it. We are well known in the village because we are very open and say what we are doing here.' - Dina (Hof van Moeder Aarde)

The ecovillages are connected with their surroundings in varying degrees. Some studied ecovillages are very active in engaging people to take part in activities in the village and are very outspoken. Others are less active in this and are focusing more on the internal processes. However, each studied ecovillage offers opportunities where visitors can get to know the ecovillage. Cohen (2011) touches upon the opportunity to have an educating role. Ecovillages demonstrate a sustainable community in practice. They offer answers to climate change and a community-oriented way of living. With this they can educate visitors, local residents and government authorities on a local and even national level. By meeting the residents, seeing the life in an ecovillage in practice, observing permaculture designs and sustainable building techniques, visitors are leaving with a greater knowledge of sustainability practices. A tour through the ecovillage is the most common form of exhibiting their community. All of the discussed ecovillages provide formal tours or allow visitors to their terrain. In doing so they explain the origins of the community, show the visitors around through the buildings and across the terrain and answer questions. Mirjam and Esther addressed this:

"Yes, but then we actually refer them to the tour. Many things are not locked here. And it's not that nice either. You just walk the terrain and you don't know what the story behind it is. And the tour lasts 2 hours and then you will be taken everywhere." - Esther (Ecovillage Bergen)

"And we also do a number of things in Olst. Or Olst-Wijhe so to say. So it doesn't just have to stay in this neighborhood. In the meantime we have become friends with a lot of people in Olst, who might just live, but are also interested in or have a feeling for or friends with us. And we can share things with them. There is sometimes a performance here in the middle house. Well, anyone can come. Well, later you can see the neighborhood vegetable garden with the tour. Well, everyone can come there too." - Mirjam (Aardehuis Oost-Nederland)

Most ecovillages have a place where they can receive visitors and have guest rooms. Furthermore, it is common that dinners, workshops, classes, and festivals are organised around various topics. Also, some ecovillages host organisations that provide an educating role in sustainable building, green energy, permaculture but also mental care. Finally, many ecovillages provide accommodation in the form of a campground, guest rooms, tree houses or campers. This creates an easily accessible opportunity to introduce visitors with life in an ecovillage. Dina explains what role the campground plays in her ecovillage:

'We were not going to be a campsite, but we are now. And I think it now has real added value. Because people when they are here for two or three weeks, experience how you can live much more with the earth. From

sustainability. Or can do much more with meditation. Can do things based on personal development. And I like to share things. I am always a bit of a teacher and I like to tell and not that people have to do it. But those are the things that I find important, no that's not the right word. This is another way of doing it. And now with that campsite, yes, you can do show that.' - Dina (Hof van Moeder Aarde)

The ecovillages 'Bergen' and 'The Living Village' organised a festival oriented on ecovillage living practices and personal development. At this day people that are interested in anything related to the ecovillage way of life gather and can share knowledge. Marieke explains the growth of interest in the festival:

'Because then we have around 3000 people walking on the site. Yes, because it is so big. If you set it up really wide. Then you have a lot of space. So it is very nice to have it all more compact and yes from that. Yes, that it is growing so it shows that people really want it in a different way. And it is not necessary .. Yes, that is often asked. Yes, do you think everyone should live like you. No I do not want that. But I do believe that you .. You have some eccentrics who set an example in which direction it can go and then the mass can come along.' - Marieke (Future resident The Living Village)

Also, many ecovillages try to profile themselves in the media. For example, they take part in television programs and newspaper interviews. In this way, they are able to tell their story to a wider audience. Some ecovillages welcome every news medium with open arms. Others are more careful with what they engage in. They are afraid to be portrayed in a negative way because they have experienced this in the past. Dina and Esther experienced this:

'In the local newspaper all sorts of crazy things came up, like that's a cult that comes there and they are all sleeping in one bed together. All of those stories. They were letters sent. And someone from Noorddijk, we don't know who, who responded then you should have come to the information evening. They are all very ordinary people. Stop whining. Yes. And then it ended. After that, we have not been negative in publicity either.' - Dina (Hof van Moeder Aarde)

'With the media for example, we sometimes receive requests from BNN or the Vara for an interview. And we almost always say no. Certainly with television but we have also experienced with newspapers that we did say yes and then we are put down again and then I think now .. I have seen 3 articles now. With the first one I almost cried. That I really thought no, the ugliest building. The broken toilet or something has been photographed. And it looks like some sort of garbage dump. And then read what it says and then I think ooh, curling around. Yes, what do you want to hear? What is sensational.' - Esther (Ecovillage Bergen)

All the ecovillages are certainly not lacking media attention. According to Cohen (2011), the attention for ecovillages has increased a lot in the past years. Despite the relatively small size of the movement, ecovillages create a huge spread in sustainability awareness. This is due to recognition from the United Nations that awarded the ecovillages Damanhur in Italy and Findhorn in Scotland. This also increased the attention for other ecovillages around the world. Furthermore, Litfin (2014), showed that ecovillage practices have been integrated into mainstream society. For example, community and decision-making principles, as well as ecological technologies, are adopted by organisations and movements. The increasingly interconnected world helps to increase their reach potential and thereby their possibilities for impact.

Despite this, Dawson (2013) argued that the 'replicability' potential of ecovillages is much lower than the movement originally expected. The formation of ecovillages in the Global North is becoming increasingly difficult due to building regulations, government zoning, and high land prices. The establishment of new ecovillages happens often in very specific scenarios

and with the success of considerable financial investments. This is also often the case with the discussed ecovillages whereby the land was obtained under exceptional circumstances. However, the influence of ecovillages is mainly found in the exchange of ideas and practices that can be allocated in different social contexts in a variety of ways (Dawson, 2013). In this way, it concerns society as a whole and not only the networks of people that are interested in this way of life.

6 | Conclusions and Recommendations

In this chapter, the conclusions of this study will be given on the basis of the research questions. Furthermore, recommendations will be given for further research on ecovillages.

To begin with, the biggest personal motivation to move to an ecovillage appeared to be the desire to live in a close community with like-minded people on the basis of views and ideas. This motivation expressed the dissatisfaction with the individual focused mainstream society. This was notable since sustainable living is often assigned as the main aim of ecovillages as a whole (Cohen, 2011; Meijering, 2012; Würfel, 2012). However, the will to live in a sustainable way was the second most important motivation. Respondents seemed to have big concerns regarding climate change and wanted to live in a sustainable way which in practice means, living self-sufficient, in a circular way. A less comfortable life with a smaller consumption pattern as a consequence of self-sufficiency was also a motivation for ecovillage living. Furthermore, a big motivation was to be an example and show the way for others to a sustainable way of life. According to the respondents, the ecovillage was an answer to the perceived loss of community and the increasing harm done to the environment. Finally, the ecovillage residents have a big desire to live in contact with nature in a natural environment.

When the goals were visualized and other future community members were found, the search for a sufficient location could begin. This turned out to be a very difficult and lengthy process due to high land prices, building regulations, and government zoning. Often the respondents composed multiple criteria for a location in advance but the willingness of the municipality to cooperate turned out to be vital. Without the endorsement of the municipality, it would get very difficult to realize sustainable living practices. The best practices in this research were the cases whereby the municipality supported the arrival of the ecovillage from the start and assisted with finding a location. When the respondents had found a suitable piece of land, the design and construction process appeared to be an essential part of the building of the community. This was seen as a cooperative process whereby the shared vision was finally realized. Also in the actual design, the fostering of a close community was taken into account with the emphasis on a common room where the community can gather. Besides the search for a location, the construction period was also experienced as a difficult process. Most ecovillages constructed the buildings themselves with often little experience. This process was experienced as very heavy, not only physical but also mentally due to time and financial pressures. Despite the heaviness, this process creates a close community and the personal value of the buildings is regarded as very high because of the efforts that were made.

When the ecovillage was constructed other challenges came up. The initial desire for self-sufficiency appeared difficult to achieve in practice. In particular, in the case of food, this takes much time, effort and space. That is why some ecovillages are collaborating with other local food initiatives. Through this, ecovillages see themselves as a part of networks with the aim to become more self-sufficient together. In every ecovillage, the emphasis was very much on the community. Community building practices are performed in order to nourish community relationships and practice cooperative labour. A well-functioning community is created through the sharing of experiences and the creation of mutual understanding. The method of 'consensus decision-making' is an essential part of the organisation of ecovillages. In this method, there is no hierarchy and every inhabitant has an equal voice. Through this, the

continuity of the community is ensured. However, this method is also experienced as exhausting. It takes much time and willingness to eventually solve problems and make widely supported decisions. Despite the sometimes difficult decision-making processes, the respondents all agree that this method is the way to go. This decision method encourages dialogue and aims at finding shared solutions that can satisfy the whole community. However, there is still a lot of learning to do and this will be an ongoing process that is always continuing.

Finally, all ecovillages are very much aware of the connection with their surroundings. They try to keep an open attitude, invite visitors in, take part in local activities and they also portray themselves in the media. This open attitude connects with their aim to act as a role model on sustainable living practices. However, it can be difficult to use the practices from this research for future initiatives because most ecovillages were established under very specific circumstances. Also every ecovillage is a unique project, shaped by different factors which makes it difficult to use these examples as models. Nevertheless, it is not the aim to turn the whole society into an ecovillage but to inspire people to make small changes in their lives regarding sustainability. Also, these ecovillages are aware that they are not a perfect example of sustainable living. The respondents see ecovillages as a process and not as a finished product. They want to live in good relations with each other and the environment and are constantly looking for improvements. They see this as a dynamic and neverending process.

6.2 Recommendations for further research

This research only focused on the internal experiences of ecovillage residents. It appeared that many residents have a desire to educate other people and show them their way of life. It would be interesting to get insight into the actual external outcomes of an ecovillage in a region. Dawson (2006) argued that ecovillages have the potential to foster change and to act as role models of sustainable living. However, Fotopoulos (2000, 2006) argues that the impact is only concentrated on the wealthier part of the population. It would be interesting to know what the impact is of an ecovillage in the Netherlands. Insight in this can be relevant information for local governments but also the ecovillages themselves.

Appendix A

Interview guide

Prior situation/motivation

1. What was your living situation before moving to this ecovillage?
2. When did you first come across the idea of living in an ecovillage?
3. What attracted you to this living form?
4. What were your biggest motivations for you to eventually make the decision to move to this ecovillage?

Location

5. How did you become familiar with this ecovillage?
 - a. Where there other options/ why did you decide to move to this ecovillage?
6. Can you describe the process of getting into contact with the ecovillage to eventually moving here?
7. Were you familiar with this region before moving here?
8. What did you think of the region before moving here?
9. How important was the location of the ecovillage for you in the process of deciding to live in an ecovillage?
 - a. If important, why this location?
 - b. If not important, why not?
10. How do you experience this region now?
 - a. Are there things that did not match your expectations, positive or negative?

Current experiences

11. What does a typical day look like for you?
12. How do you experience living in an ecovillage?
13. What does living in this close community mean to you?
14. Can you describe things that are different from what you expected?
15. Can you describe the main ideas/ideologies/important issues of this ecovillage?
16. Do you think that the ecovillage has a certain effect on the region?
 - a. In what ways?
17. What would you like to see improving/change regarding your way of life here?

Appendix B

Information letter and consent form



university of
 groningen

faculty of spatial sciences

Informatiebrief voor participanten van het masteronderzoek ‘Motivaties en ervaringen van ecodorp bewoners in Nederland’.

In deze informatiebrief zijn de randvoorwaarden van het masteronderzoek ‘**Motivaties en ervaringen van ecodorp bewoners in Nederland**’ opgenomen, als onderdeel van het Masterthesis traject binnen de Master Culturele Geografie aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Mocht u vragen of opmerkingen hebben na het lezen van deze brief, dan hoor ik dit graag.

Centrale doelstelling

De centrale doelstelling van het masteronderzoek is het verkrijgen van inzicht in de motivaties van bewoners om in een ecodorp te wonen. Daarnaast zal er in gegaan worden op de ervaringen van de bewoners.

Wat houdt uw deelname in?

Als participant van het onderzoek gaat u deelnemen aan een semigestructureerd interview met een totale duur van ongeveer 60 minuten. Uw deelname aan het interview is geheel vrijwillig en u kunt op elk gewenst moment besluiten om –zonder opgave van redenen- niet langer hieraan deel te nemen.

Wat gebeurt er met uw antwoorden?

Wanneer u hier toestemming geeft zal het interview opgenomen worden met een audio recorder. Het opnemen van interviews stelt de onderzoeker in staat om zijn of haar volledige aandacht te kunnen richten op het interview, zodat er na afloop geen belangrijke details vergeten worden van hetgeen u gezegd heeft. Hierbij is het van belang om te vermelden dat de door u verstrekte informatie op vertrouwelijke wijze behandeld zal worden en dat uw anonimiteit gewaarborgd blijft. De onderzoeksresultaten zullen enkel gebruikt worden binnen het kader van het Masterthesis traject aan de Rijkuniversiteit Groningen en zullen soms besproken worden met mijn scriptiebegeleider, dr. Tialda Haartsen. Indien van toepassing kunt u aangeven welke antwoorden niet verwerkt mogen worden in de masterscriptie.

Toestemmingsverklaring

Indien u akkoord gaat met bovenstaande wil ik u vragen de onderstaande toestemmingsverklaring te ondertekenen. Het doel van de toestemmingsverklaring is dat u uw vrijwillige deelname bevestigt en dat u op de hoogte bent van de bovengenoemde randvoorwaarden van dit masteronderzoek.



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Toestemmingsverklaring voor het masteronderzoek 'Motivaties en ervaringen van ecodorp bewoners in Nederland'.

Ik,....., bevestig hierbij dat ik de informatiebrief ten behoeve van het masteronderzoek 'Motivaties en ervaringen van ecodorp bewoners in Nederland' heb gelezen en hiermee akkoord ga.

Handtekening:

Datum: / /

Ik verklaar hierbij dat ik de participanten volledig geïnformeerd heb over het masteronderzoek 'Motivaties en ervaringen van ecodorp bewoners in Nederland' en de gestelde voorwaarden in de bijbehorende informatiebrief zal respecteren. Naam van de onderzoeker:

Frederieke Kolthof

Handtekening:

Datum: .. / .. /

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