

## Chapter 5

# Getting along: Sustaining Community

*“People feel better from living here and children who grow up here are healthier.”* [Resident of Solbyn]

The residents of the ecovillages are remarkable happy. The social appeal of the ecovillages may be the most important aspect of life in the ecovillage. The design, planning, and ecological elements of the ecovillage are integral to the success of the projects, but after the project is built and everyone moved in, the success of the ecovillage depends upon actions of neighbors. *“We called it an ecovillage, but it was just a name, a cluster of buildings. The residents made it an ecovillage.”* [Architect Wiberg, lecture on Solbyn and Myrstacken]

The perception by many is that living in an ecovillage requires too much work, but does not appear to be the case for most residents. Too many responsibilities can create an emotional strain and generate negative associations with one’s home environment. The benefits of living in an ecovillage appear to outweigh the associated responsibilities as evidenced in the Happy People section of this chapter.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the composition of the ecovillages. The reasons for a generally homogenous composition and the implications of this are discussed. The high level of resident satisfaction is explored. Followed by a discussion of the elements of social organization and how they can contribute to the overall well-being of an ecovillage. Finally the influence of life in an ecovillage on the ecological behavior of the residents is addressed.

### **Composition**

Who lives in the ecovillages? How might this impact the lives of those who live there? The general profile of a household in an ecovillage is a family with two parents (age 40-45) with two to three children of school age. Most often, both parents work outside of the house in professional fields (teaching, medicine, business). Most residents are of Swedish decent.<sup>1</sup> Naturally, shared backgrounds create a common ground (common experiences) which contribute to the success of decision making. The statistics in this section represent only those who responded to the survey. On site visits, I consulted with members of the communities to confirmed the implications of the statistics to ensure adequate representation.

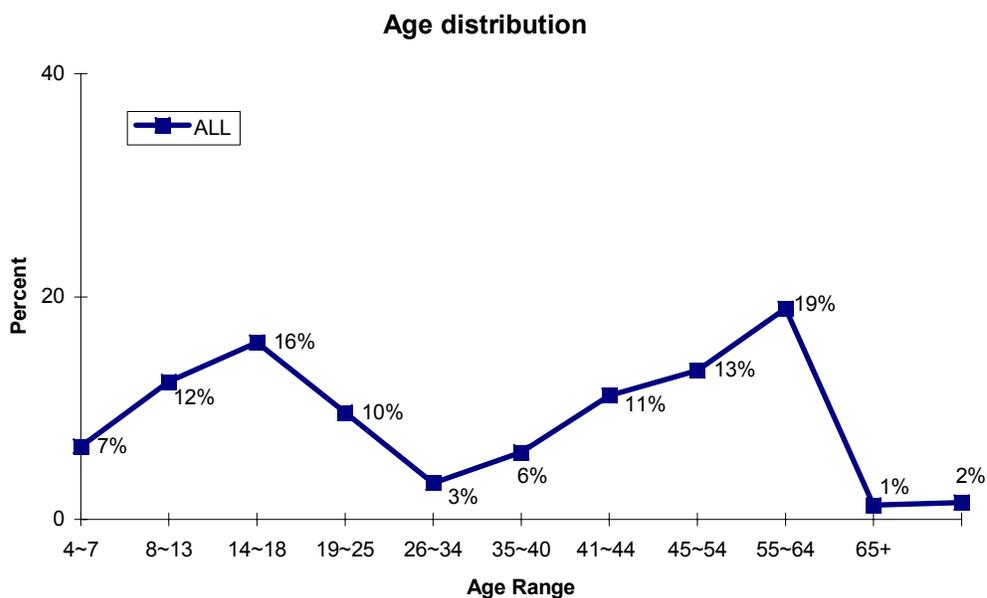
The demographic homogeneity of residents is useful to bear in mind when assessing the results of the survey. It appears to be a help and a hindrance. It is helpful because people don’t have to spend as much time explaining their motivations for decisions. For example, it is *“great to live in an area which ‘automatically’ means you are an environmentally friendly ( miljölygglig) person.”* [Understenshöjden] ( #42) It can be a hindrance because it is easy to make assumptions about other people’s interests based on the belief that similar backgrounds will lead to similar wishes. I admit to making blanket assumptions about “residents” as well. I base these assumptions on “majority” views, however, “majority rules” can feel oppressive when you are in the minority. Greater diversity

could help diffuse this feeling.

I requested the respondent's date of birth and that of all other members of their family, from this I derived statistics on the number of household members and their ages. The ages represent the resident's age in 1997. I did not adjust backwards for how old the residents were when they moved in. The residents in newer ecovillages naturally have a lower average age than those in older projects. A quick estimate shows the residents of Tuggelite and Solbyn to be 30-40 with few children (total) upon moving in. The average age of the adults and children in Understenshöjden upon moving in seems to be older, 40-50 with young children (5-10). This may be a reflection of the economic situation in Sweden, particularly Stockholm where families are buying homes later. Many of the families in Understenshöjden lived in apartments prior to moving in.

Most families seemed to have moved as they were starting families, or with young children. Three and four-bedroom houses are most common which reflects the predominance of two-parent families with 1 to three children. Older residents, couples and singles without children fill an important niche in the social fabric. People are more and less able to be active in the community at different points in their lives. Couples and singles without children may have more time to spend on administration and upkeep of the community, whereas families with children may be more involved with the lives of their and other's children. Diversity promotes a well-balanced neighborhood.

[Table: I. d age/size of household members]



*“A blend of ages, family types and sizes.”* [Smeden] was seen as a positive social feature of Smeden. A variety of ages and family compositions create a richer community. People commented both positively and negatively about the homogeneity of the residents. Their similarities establish a shared base of values and experiences which is helpful in decision making. On the other hand, the homogeneity was seen as a tad boring. Diversity is more lively, for better and for worse.

Residents were interested in increasing diversity.

*“Don’t build just for nuclear families, all generations should take part.”* [Smeden]

*“... attract a greater variety of people.”* [Understenshöjden]

*“Blend large and small households so that the residents are more varied.”* [Understenshöjden]

Solbyn is perhaps the most diverse in terms of age and family size. It has 20 two room apartments and consequently has a larger number of singles and couples without children. Solbyn has more residents who are retired than any other. They have a lot of experience and knowledge to contribute to the community, but expressed concern about what to do when they are not physically capable of taking care of all the responsibilities of living in the ecovillage (taking out the trash and compost, emptying composting toilet, etc.) Smeden members anticipated at the time planning (1990) that there would be a greater demand for four and six room duplexes than two room duplexes. However, at the time of building (1994) the demand for two room duplexes prompted the conversion of four of the four room plans to two room plans.

### **Single parents**

I was surprised not to find more single parents. The ecovillages are an ideal place for a single parent with children. A single parent said she would have never dared to move into a house if it wasn’t Tuggelite. *“Here I know I can get help with things I couldn’t manage by myself.”*<sup>2</sup> The social network is especially helpful for a single parent. Another parent *“As a single parent I wanted to live in a better social network.”* [Mjölntorpet] *“I didn’t want to be isolated as a single mother.”* [Solbyn]

### **Number of Households**

Diversity is desired, but not at the expense of a manageable size. *“Fifty households is surely the maximum. Don’t build too big, large scale.”* [Solbyn] *“Don’t be too many.”* [Understenshöjden], remarked a resident of Understenshöjden with forty-four households. Even thirty-seven households was seen as too large by a resident in Myrstacken. She would have preferred twenty or so households. Apparently 16 - 25 may be closest to ideal. *“Eighteen households with seventy people is just right.”* [Myrstacken]. Decision making is not too onerous at this size. However, there are enough people to divide responsibilities manageably and to be able to interact with a variety of people.

## **Gender**

Didn't ask about gender because I wanted to focus on overall experience, not nit pick about who participated in what. I was often able to ascertain gender according to handwriting, type of comments, especially comments such as, "my husband takes does that job." I feel I had a relatively even number of men and women responding without a large difference in responses except an occasional reference to the delegation of tasks in the home. I have no strong reason to believe that gender distinctions among residents of the ecovillages are significantly different from comparable socio-economic groups in Swedish society.

## **Occupation**

Residents predominantly work in professional fields as: teachers, doctors, nurses, architects, engineers, government employees, etc. Overall, the ecovillage movement currently consists largely of university educated professionals. It is reasonable to assume that the residents' interest in the environment and/or ecovillages was sparked while university students in the 1970's (and later) which coincided with the growth of the environmental movement. Later consideration of home ownership and creating a family led them to embrace the ecovillage concepts and put into practice beliefs they had gained earlier.

As pioneers these residents have provided for others models of a lifestyle which is becoming increasingly attractive to many. As the ecological movement continues to grow more citizens, from all walks of life, are looking for lifestyles which provide an outlet for the expression of their ideals and beliefs. Therefore, the occupational diversity of residents may diversify as the goals of the ecovillages are embraced by people from a greater variety of backgrounds.

## **Motivations for moving to an ecovillage**

Why would one move to an ecovillage? Isn't it possible to live in an environmentally friendly manner without moving into an ecovillage? My research shows that although residents were interested in environmental protection, residents sought more; a social network, quality of life for themselves and their children, nature, beautiful homes in a great location, gardens, democracy, healthy homes, safe homes, and shared values and shared responsibilities.

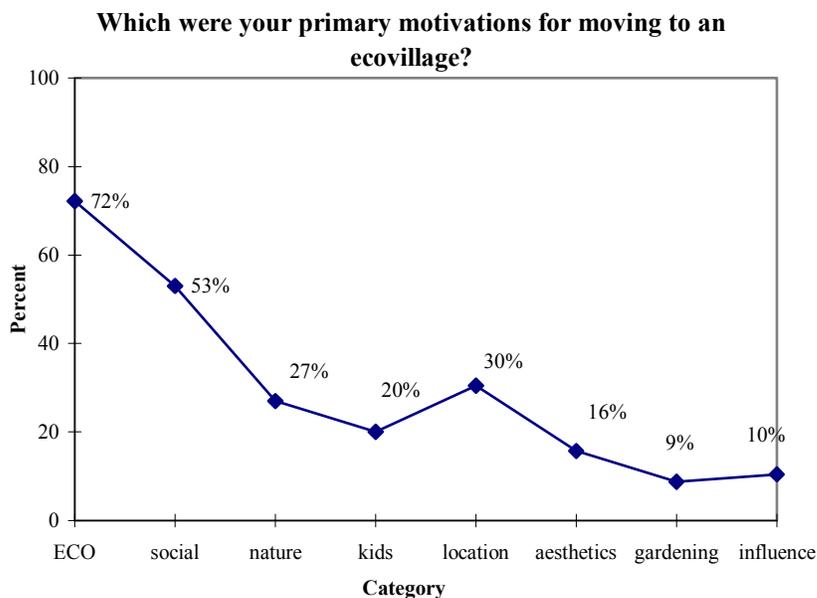
*"To live as one learns. To strive for environmental sustainability in my daily life."*<sup>3</sup> [Understenshöjden]  
*"A longing after an alternative to our throw away society."* [Solbyn]<sup>4</sup>

Concern for the environment was the leading motivation for residents to choose live in an ecovillage, 72%<sup>5</sup> cited the environment as their primary motivation for moving in. Residents wanted to "strive to live in harmony with a nature." [Solbyn]. They were interested "in having quality of life and environmental concerns baked into one's life (boende) so it would be easy to do what one wants, i.e. buy eco-friendly, that it is prepared (förberett)." [Mjölntorpet]

*"A better home (boende), safer (tryggare), calmer, more stimulating,"* [Mystacken] and *"to live in a social network,"* [Understenshöjden] was the second most predominant motivation for moving in, (61%). I imagine there would have been a tie between social and environmental factors had I asked what is best about the

ecovillages today. Following sections of this chapter demonstrate how greatly residents value their social network. When I spoke to people about their lives they spoke first about quality of life and secondly about the environment. Everyone had a list of complaints about the ecological aspects, but few had anything negative about the social climate.

[Table I. a. main reasons you moved to ecovillage]



“*To live by the woods,*” to live near nature, this is Swedish tradition. The forests are considered a national treasure by many Swedes, these residents are no exception. The primary motivation for 31% of residents was, in every site except Myrstacken, that it lie near the woods, for most, within a stone’s throw. The desire for a connection with nature is separate from environmental protection, however, reverence for nature can inspire a conscience for protecting the beauty that surrounds these homes.

Residents were seeking a better quality of life: to live near nature, to live “*in the country, but still in town,*” [Smeden], to have a house instead of an apartment, to have “*the opportunity to live according to my values.*”

[Myrstacken], to be in “. . . a good place for the children to grow up with lots of nature all around.” [Solbyn], and to have “grass under my feet without chemicals.” [Mjölntorpet] Location (42%) and attractive homes (50%) were a considerable draw for Smeden residents. The opportunity to influence the creation of one’s own home, to take part in a microcosm of democracy was prominent in the thoughts of members of Mjölntorpet and Understeshöjden.

## **Happy People**

*“The social is better than I could have believed. The technical can always be fixed.”* [Understeshöjden].

*“Everybody knows everyone in a good way,”* with *“open and close contact with neighbors”* and a *“blend of ages, family types and sizes.”* However, it is *“important not to socialize too much,”* otherwise it starts to seem, *“too much like one big family.”* The residents of Smeden happened to write these quotes, but they could have come from any of them. Some sites have created a stronger social network than others, but overall they are pleased with their quality of life, their interactions with each other.

I found it exciting to see how positive residents feel about their experience even in the face of a long planning process, long meetings, and persistent technical problems. Some skeptics suggested to me that perhaps the unhappy people just didn’t respond to my survey. Apathy is the most likely culprit. Those with strong opinions, positive or negative, are the most likely to reply to a survey. Current results cite that 90% of residents feel their social network is “better” or “much better” than “regular” housing. Hypothetically, had I received 100% of the surveys back and everyone else said they despised living there, this would still mean 50% (rather than 90%) would have indicated “much better” or “better.” I feel confident in saying the ecovillage residents are a pretty satisfied bunch.

First I will demonstrate how I have concluded that people are so happy. Then I will discuss the details of how residents interact and what, in particular, they are satisfied with. What I had anticipated to be obstacles to resident satisfaction: planning problems, social conflicts with day to day life - maintenance and organization, and design/technical problems are discussed in other sections. These obstacles did not prove to be sufficient to quell overall satisfaction.

## **Expectations**

Expectations can be dangerous. It is easy to get our hopes up and be left feeling disappointed. Our homes evoke many emotions. Our dreams of what we want our homes to be are often grand and can be unrealistic. I asked residents to evaluate whether their expectations of living in an ecovillage were: exceeded, met, marginally met, or disappointed. Most could have justifiably answered that their expectations were only partially met because our dreams so easily exceed reality, but they didn’t. They chose to express a positive view. Two residents who stated their expectations were met, wrote remarks which I believe represent the feelings of many of the 59% of

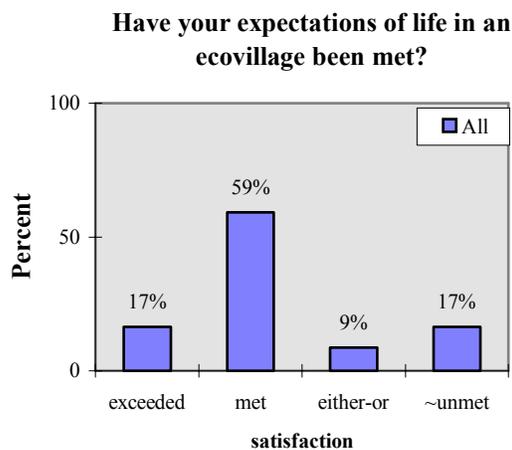
residents who chose to write their expectations were met.

*“Not all of my expectations were met but they were also somewhat unrealistic.” [Åkesta]*

*“I had high expectations but I was prepared for glitches - it was experimental in many ways - which we knew ahead of time.” [Understenshöjden]*

One resident chose to tell it like she saw it. She was disappointed, however, when asked how long she intended to stay, *“always,”* she wrote.

**[Table: I b - Expectations been met? ]**



Socially, residents expressed great satisfaction. Many moved in for ecological reasons and wound up being more pleased with the social network than anticipated.

*“We were afraid of too much social contact. [We were] pleasantly surprised that our homes are private and you can seek social contacts by going outside.” [Solbyn] (expectations exceeded)*

*“My satisfaction (triveseln) with the house, ecovillage, and the people is great.” [Mjölntorpet]*

*“Community (gemenska), pleasant neighbors and economy more positive than we expected.” [Smeden]*

The technical side, however, did not receive equally rave reviews.

*“The social has exceeded my expectations, but some of the techniques . . . have not worked so well.”*

[Tuggelite]

“At the same time there have been many technical aspects which haven’t worked and incomplete/ inadequate work by the builders.” [Smeden] (expectations met)

“More technical problems than expected.” [Mystacken] (expectations met)

**Longevity**

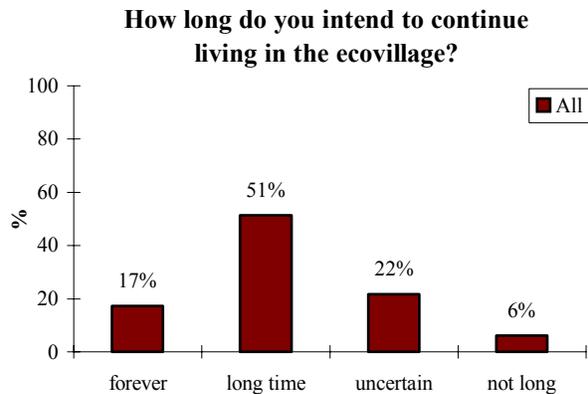
How long residents have lived in the ecovillages and how long they intend to stay is a way to measure their success socially, economically, and in their design. Quality of life, socially and ecologically appears to be the greatest draw for residents. Twenty residents proclaimed again and again to remain: “Forever.” [Bålarna], “The rest of my life.” [Mjölntorpet], “My whole life” [Understeshöjden] (38 years old), “Till I die.” [Myrstacken], “Always” [Tuggelite], “Till my life gives out.” (Tills livet mig tryter.) [Solbyn], “My 11-year-old daughter says, ‘Till I can’t manage any more, or die!’ [Tuggelite].

[Table: I f - How long have you lived in here?]

**When did you move to the ecovillage?**

%	ALL	TG	SOL	AK	MY	SM	MJ	UN
from start	71	71	46	45	43	67	92	100

[Table: I g - How long do you expect to live here?]



Those not ready to commit “to death do us part” were optimistic about staying a long time, 51% of the respondents indicated they intended to stay “*as long as possible*.” [Mjölntorpet], or similar statements. The 22% who were uncertain of how long they might stay were often being realistic; they might get a new job somewhere else, or did not want to predict the future.

Physical and economic concerns constitute the primary reasons for people to move: the house became too small for our family, we may move when the children are grown, it is too expensive, or I got a new job.

Overall, 70% of the residents moved in when the houses were first built, not all of these people took part in the planning (60% took part in planning), but they have remained from the beginning. The low turnover is a positive reflection on the ecovillages, however, some ecovillages have had a greater turnover than others. Solbyn, Åkesta and Myrstacken have had a large turnover. Solbyn has never had any trouble renting vacant homes (for the first nine years there was a constant waiting list), but many people moved for physical and economic reasons. Åkesta had a great deal of economic trouble in the beginning. Several families had to move due to high costs but their economy has stabilized since then and so has the turnover rate.

### **Myrstacken - an aside**

Myrstacken still appears to be struggling on all points. The turnover is relatively high. They are having difficulty selling vacant homes. They have had technical problems, but which ecovillage hasn't? The social climate in Myrstacken is good, however, in comparison to “regular” housing it does not appear to be strikingly better as it is with other projects. Rather than repeatedly discuss Myrstacken as an exception I will discuss the social climate in depth here. Based on my survey responses alone I do not feel comfortable commenting on the social well-being of Myrstacken. I received 7 responses from 37 households. The lowest response rate of any ecovillage. I distributed surveys one time and did not follow-up, however, I still received better initial results in most of the other ecovillages.. Another researcher, Imke Fittschen also had trouble receiving responses from residents. After repeated efforts to obtain responses in person and by telephone he received responses from 21 of 36 households. Myrstacken does not have the same level of commitment to sharing its experiences with others when compared to ecovillages such as Tuggelite, Solbyn, Mjölntorpet, and Understenshöjden. They do not have tours or other promotional activities indicating a lower level of community spirit and pride.

Karin Palm Lindén found the value of the social network to be relatively low, 47% of surveyed residents see the social side of Myrstacken as its best quality, while 32% list social factors as the worst quality. (with 36 and 34 people responding, respectively) In comparison, in Solbyn, 73% list social factors as the best quality and 19.5% as the worst. [Lindén 35] Solbyn has, however, had a few more years to establish a strong social network.

I believe the social problems Myrstacken is experiencing stem from the failure to adequately involve residents in the planning process. Only two households who took part in the planning process moved in and their experience with the process was not ideal. Pride in the community is lacking. Community pride should have begun in the planning process and spread to new residents. Nor is the physical design of the project is not highly conducive to social interaction (see Design chapter). Myrstacken is surely a fine place to live, but its experience exemplifies

how important it is consider the long term implications of resident influence in the planning process. Åkesta also had troubles at the beginning. I believe their location, somewhat isolated, and their on-site daycare, and the temperament of the people living there has resulted in a distinct improvement in the social climate. Åkesta has also had a couple more years to work on their social network. Myrstacken may still succeed in fostering an ideal social climate.

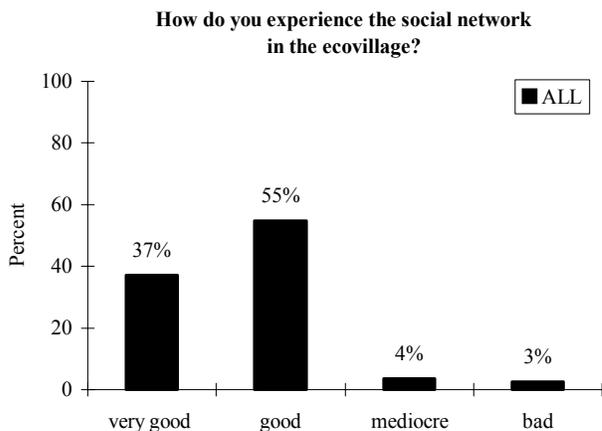
### The social network

**“It is fantastic.” [Tuggelite]**

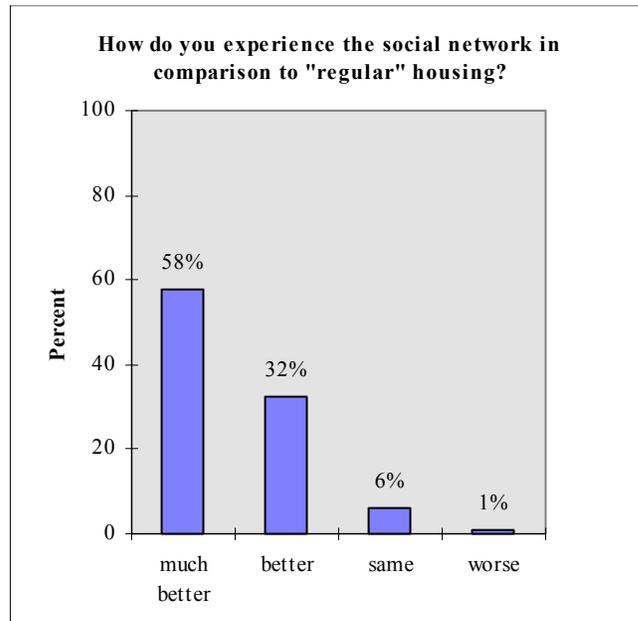
*“Perfect! Socially it couldn’t be better. We meet our neighbors often, both outside and at different meetings.” [Mjölntorpet]*

The hidden treasure of the ecovillages is the social network. Although not without its flaws, the social community between neighbors is seen as an improvement upon residents’ previous living situations. When asked how residents experienced the area as a social unit the answer was resoundingly positive. Again, when asked how residents experienced their social network in comparison to “regular” housing the answer was overwhelmingly positive.

**[Table: VI a - Ecovillage as a social whole?]**



[ Table: VI b - Compared to 'regular' housing ]



### Advantages

What is it about the social network that is so appealing? An open ended question, What are the greatest social benefits of living in your ecovillage?, prompted a variety of answers. One type of comment stood out from the rest; 42% of the residents wrote comments that alluded to a sense of community, as the greatest social benefit. The catch phrase, “a sense of community” has been adopted in American English to describe a feeling that is defined in Swedish as *gemenskap*. Dozens of people wrote *gemenskap*, either by itself or within a larger sentence. We can identify it when we feel it but it is difficult to define.

#### A sense of community exists when:

“Everyone knows everyone in a good way.” [Smeden]

“We know everyone and socialize with some.”<sup>6</sup> [Understenshöjden]

“You know your neighbors better than you otherwise would because you work and have fun together.”

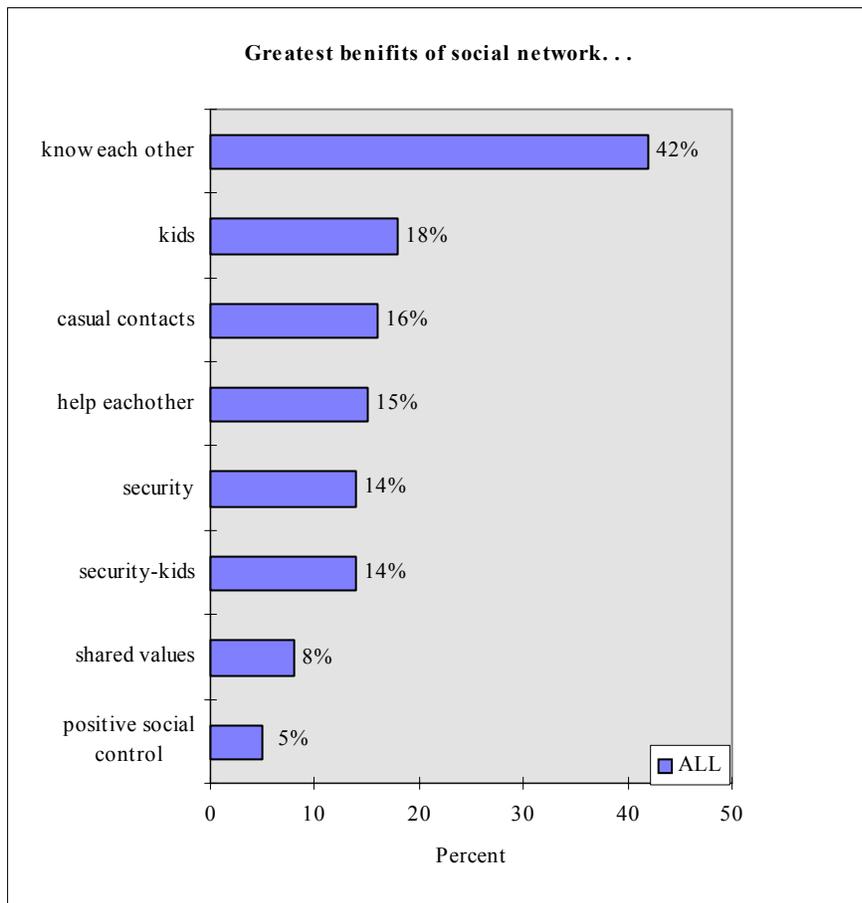
[Solbyn]

“[You have ] *daily close social camaraderie (gemenskap).*” [Myrstacken]

A sense of community is: fellowship, an affinity for a group out of a sense of belonging, an unspoken bond between members of a community.

Other social benefits contribute to and arise from the sense of community; friendships, trust, a sense of security, helping one another, shared values, and a positive environment for the children (benefits for children are discussed in a later section)

[Table: benefits of social network]



*“High quality spontaneous meetings”* [Understenshöjden] reinforce a positive sense of community. It is *“pleasant to live where people are visible and motivated and we meet each other in different groups and situations.”* [Understenshöjden]

*“Neighbors, to an extent, substitute the contact one had with relatives in earlier times.”* [Solbyn] You *“don’t feel lonely”* [Tuggelite]. There is *“always someone to talk to,”* [Understenshöjden] and *“something in common to talk about.”* [Solbyn] I expected *“certain common fundamental values, such as ecological concerns,”* [Understenshöjden] to have mentioned more often. Nine people (8%) wrote about *“shared values on living and behavior”* [Mjölntorpet] as a positive social benefit.

Knowing you can count on your neighbors provides a sense of security. *“If you have a problem there is always help nearby for babysitting, company, rides, learning things.”* [Tuggelite]

### **Social control**

A fine line exists between positive social control and negative social control. Social control is the spoken and unspoken expectations placed on residents to behave in a particular way; to recycle, to attend meetings, to be cordial to one another. Some expectations may be agreed upon by the group as a whole in a verbal or written contract such as participating in maintenance, others are understood, such as being cordial to one another. An individual determines whether an expectation is perceived to be positive or negative. One person may be thankful for a reminder to compost while another person might take offense to the same type of comment. Six residents made appreciative comments positive social control. *“More simple than I imagined. Less demanding than I thought. Just the right level of social expectations.”* [Mjölntorpet]

A fine line also exists between close and too close. Despite close and frequent interactions with ones neighbors ecovillages are *“Not cooperative living. Distance is necessary.”* [Solbyn]

### **Disadvantages**

Disadvantages to the social network are inevitable. Although the advantages of the social network far outweigh the disadvantages. Nineteen residents (17%) wrote that there are no disadvantages to the social network. Dozens of people left the open ended question blank. For those who did express a particular concern, their comments centered around: negative social pressure, decision making being long and difficult, being too close, isolation from the surrounding homes or city, and homogeneity. The number of comments on these subjects ranged from 13 to 4, in the order listed.

As discussed above, there is a fine line between positive and negative social pressure. Social pressure has an important role to fill. Our lives are filled with social pressures: get a good job, do not cheat or lie, respect one another, get married, have children, etc. The ecovillages place additional pressures on individuals to adhere to a shared set of values, especially for the environment. On one side you have the environmental activist, *“quite a*

*few lack the knowledge and will to fulfill the demands of living here which means that feelings are not always the best between neighbors.*” [Understenshöjden] On the other side you have people less motivated to devote all their time and energy to environmental concerns, *“Some are dogmatic in their environmental interests.”* [Understenshöjden] It is important for the group to reach a consensus on what expectations exist for environmental protection. Some people may have to relent and devote a little more time to the effort while the other side will have to agree to keep quiet. Nothing will prevent a person from reusing their plastic grocery bags 70 times, but, unless this is agreed upon, snide remarks or glares by the devout environmentalist should be contained.

*“Different perspectives on some things such as organization and care of common spaces,”* [Åkesta] workdays and meetings should also be clarified. Social expectations that are *“dependent on all individuals functioning appropriately”* [Åkesta] may need to be reevaluated.

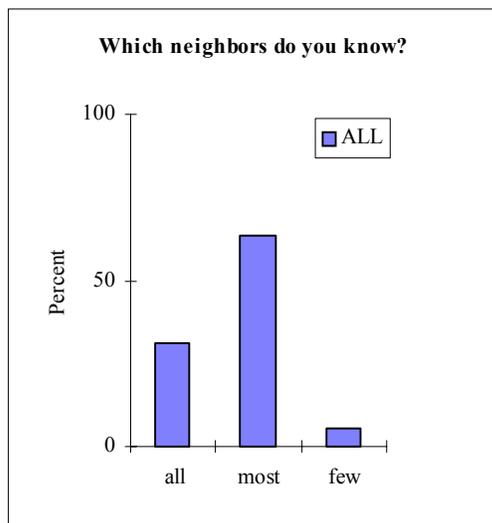
All these decisions about expectations leads to another difficult area, long meetings. *“Because we live so close, conflict can be long winded/drawn out.”* [Smeden] Decision making *“requires flexibility and a willingness and ability to solve conflicts [from everyone].”* [Bålarna] It can be *“trying to be dependent on others. Certain individuals are capable of disturbing a lot.”* [Åkesta] (See the Social organization section for a discussion on how to deal with difficult group members.) Decision making also requires time, something which few of us have an abundance of. Individual’s demanding schedules can impact the social cohesion of the whole group. *“The type of people who live here are very active in their free time and careers so there is little time left over for social contacts.”* [Solbyn] Heavy demands on individual’s time can lead him or her to reduce the time they devote to the community, cutting back on participation in meetings and work days and missing opportunities for spontaneous social interaction. *“Periodically [it is] hard to balance engagement in the ecovillage with studies, work, family, and own private interests and friends.”* [Solbyn]

Individual concerns can easily become everybody’s concern. *“Sometimes it is too close. Everyone knows about everyone.”* [Tuggelite] Personal boundaries are not always clear, or even discernible, *“sometimes neighbors borrow food at inconvenient times.”* [Tuggelite] No one wants to feel their *“neighbors don’t respect [their] opinions and meddle too much.”* [Mjölntorpet] If anything, being over protective of people’s privacy may help. It is *“easy to get caught up in other families’ problems.”* [Mjölntorpet] Residents may need to make a concerted effort *“not to socialize too much.”* [Smeden] You may be more likely to engage in heated discussions with your nearest neighbor than with other members, therefore, extra care should be taken to maintain positive relations with them.

*“It’s us against the world.”* [Understenshöjden] We are *“a social ‘elite’ in relation to other homes in the neighborhood.”* [Understenshöjden] This is not the point of the ecovillages, but the concern was shared by at least seven residents. It is natural that a group of people connected by a strong sense of community, will not have as strong ties to the larger community. The larger community may even feel a sense of jealousy or fear about the group because of their connection to one another. The only recourse for the group is to actively seek out interaction with the surrounding community, if they so desire. *“There is a segregational effect in this type of project. It is important to be aware of this and, if possible, moderate it.”* [Understenshöjden]

## Connections

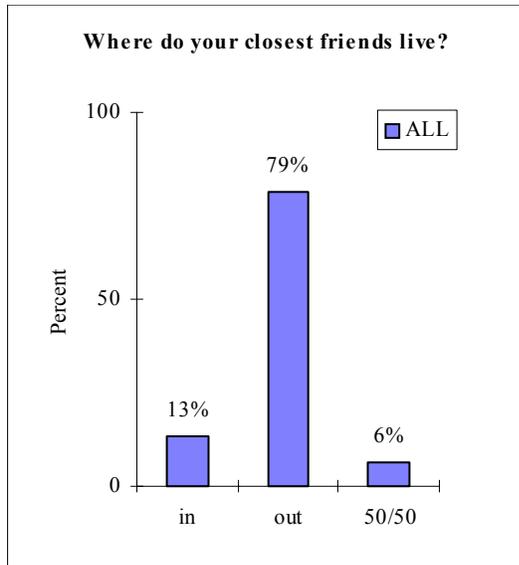
Connections between residents are important. Knowing everyone is a great social benefit, this is not, however, the same as being close friends with everyone. I asked residents who they knew in the ecovillage, as acquaintances (name, where they live, children, occupation) and where their closest friends live. I anticipated everyone would know everyone, 95% wrote all or most. I was surprised by the large number of people, 64%, who wrote they know most, but not all, of the people in their ecovillage. The question may have been misleading. I chose to use the word, *känna*, to know, in the question “which neighbors do you know in the area?” In Swedish to know someone is to more than just to know of them (*känna till*), recognizing their face but nothing more. To know someone is to be acquainted with them or be friends with them. I think the answers I received reflect the number of acquaintances people have in the area. In this light, 64% is a very high number and 31% of the residents knowing everyone is extraordinary. There is a limit to how many people you can know, keeping it under 150 good.



Six people wrote they knew few people. One person had just moved in, another had been there a year, and felt the information he had received upon moving in was inadequate. Two of the residents made it clear that they interpreted the word, *känna*, as being friends. A resident who had lived in Myrstacken for five years marked “few” and underlined *känna*. Another resident had had a bad experience overall, had taken part in planning, and intended to move after three years in the ecovillage.

The residents are close to one another, as evidenced above, but how close are they? Is there a tendency for residents to isolate themselves from a larger social sphere once they move in? Evidence shows this is not the case.

[ Table: VI f - close friends]



Residents have maintained close friendships outside of the immediate community, extending their social sphere beyond the ecovillage. Social diversity can help avoid feelings of social claustrophobia. Conflict can arise when people are living “too close.” The community is not meant to be “one big family.” It is a collection of individual families living together with shared values and maintenance but individual lives.

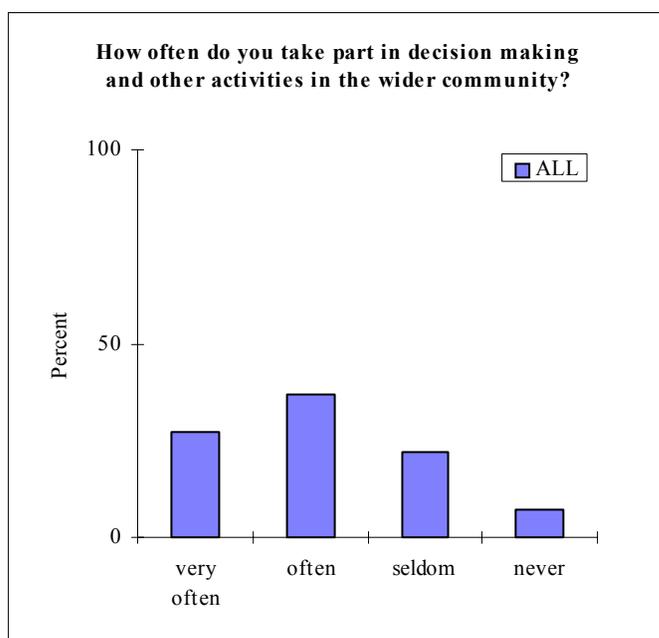
Bålarna and Tuggelite were the only ecovillage where the majority of residents’ closest friends live in the ecovillage (9 of 14 residents answered their best friends are in Tuggelite) The majority of Tuggelite and Bålarna residents knew each other before moving next to their friends.

### **Collaboration with larger community**

To further explore the relationship of the residents with the larger community I asked how often residents took part in activities and decision-making in the larger community. The answers I received are not completely reliable. Several people wrote a question mark after the question rather than answering it. On the other hand, some residents wrote that they are members of local government or other community organizations. I think it is reasonable to assume from the answers that a fair number of people, although perhaps less than the 64% in the survey, do participate in activities in the larger community often or frequently. Swedes have a long tradition of

participation in organizations and local government. It is only natural that the residents, who have expressed their commitment to environmental values by moving to an ecovillage, would also be active in other interest groups. The participation of residents in other types of groups is further evidence the integration of the ecovillages with society at large.

**[ Table: VI j - participate in larger community ]**



### Safety

A good sense of community promotes a good sense of security, physically and psychologically. Solbyn has had “no break-ins in ten years - thieves avoid an area where they can be easily detected.” [Solbyn] Casual surveillance, or “eyes on the street”,<sup>7</sup> helps to reduce crime and other problems. Residents notice strangers. They either direct the person to the right place or would deal with it if there were a problem. The more residents who are moving about the area, out gardening, or glancing out their windows, the greater the physical security. This casual surveillance also provides a psychological security. “Security!” is a great social benefit for this Mjölntorpet resident. “We rely on each other 100%, such as watching out for the kids.” [Mjölntorpet]

There is comfort in security. The Swedish word “*trygghet*” was used by sixteen residents when describing social benefits. In English, security, is often associated with an object or person being physically secure from harm or danger. *Trygghet*, as commonly used in Sweden, implies a level of psychological stability; confidence, and freedom from anxiety or doubt. “*Shared maintenance<sup>8</sup> helps us to get to know one another which gives a sense of security.*” [Mjölntorpet] This is a reflection of confidence and assurance of “all is well”, not so much a freedom from danger. Both types of security enhance the quality of life for the residents.

### Children

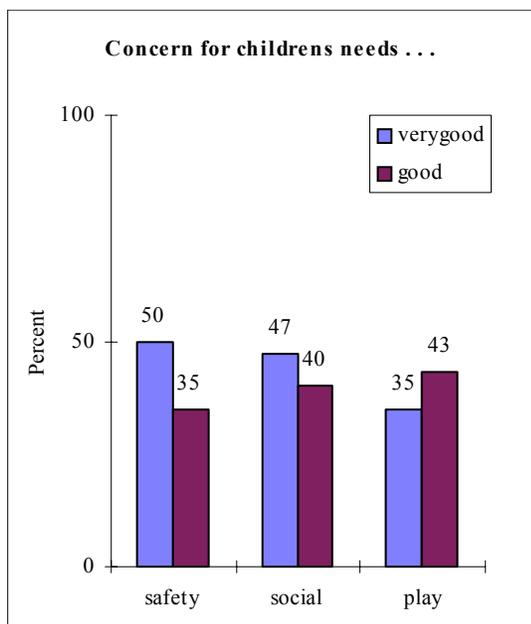
“*Ecovillages have the future before them. For a family with children it doesn't get any better.*” [Mjölntorpet]

The ecovillages are a “*good [place] for kids with many adults who care.*” [Tuggelite] “*It is very positive for children to grow up in this type of environment.*” [Mjölntorpet] “*Because we all know each other, more or less, the children have access to many adults and many playmates, like an old fashioned village feeling of ‘we belong together (vi hör ihop).’*” [Solbyn]

Twenty-three (20%) residents looked forward to moving into an ecovillage for their children’s well-being, because it is a “*child friendly environment*” [Åkesta]. A Smeden resident “*wanted [her] daughter to be able to grow up in a place which is fairly good from an environmental perspective.*” [Smeden]

Residents were enthusiastic about the opportunities for children. Feeling the children’s safety, social needs and opportunities for play and creativity were good or very good (85%, 87%, and 78% respectively).

[ Table: VI k - kids needs ]



Parents are able to feel more secure about their children's safety because "*the children have someplace to go even when we aren't home.*" [Tuggelite] It is logical to assume that children can have greater freedom to test out their independence because parents can feel safer letting them play throughout the area under the informal supervision of many adults. In Solbyn a diversity of ages and occupations of adults means "*always someone home.*" [Solbyn]

Children of different ages have different needs. Concern was expressed by several residents about play grounds and other opportunities for entertainment for children of all ages. This is discussed in the site design section of the Design chapter.

Children often do not have the opportunity to form relationships with adults other than parents and teachers. In the ecovillages frequent informal interaction provides "*more adult role models,*" [Bålarna] and helps foster "*natural adult, child relations.*" [Mjölntorpet] The diversity of ages helps children create a wider range of friendships with other children than they might in school or day care. "*The children play with each other regardless of age or gender,*" "*and see all ages and types of people.*" [Solbyn]

The emotional security developed through the social network extends to a "a social security (trygghet) for children" [Tuggelite] An on-site, or neighboring, day care<sup>9</sup> can contribute to the security and social welfare of the community. Parents staying at home with young children are not as isolated because there are other children and adults nearby. The day care increases the comings and goings of people throughout the day so that there are "always adults and children around, especially children." [Understenshöjden]<sup>10</sup> Young children are not so far from home. Some children even run home during the day. Parents can feel close to their children but still be able to attend to other tasks confident that their children are being well looked after. At first day care employees were concerned because they were not always aware of the whereabouts of the children, Over time confidence has grown between the parents, daycare employees and children.

Solbyn and Åkesta have a parental cooperative daycare on-site. The parent cooperative daycare offers an additional opportunity for parents to become involved in the lives of young children in the community. Children from nearby neighborhoods attend the daycare as well. Parents divide responsibilities for maintaining the daycare. The parents provide a portion of the operating costs and the state provides the remaining funds. The parents do not staff the daycare which has full-time employees. Several residents commented that it is "*good with a parental cooperative daycare.*" [Åkesta] A handful of residents moved into the ecovillage specifically for the on-site daycare.

Establishing a day care in the ecovillage common house, or as in Åkesta, converting one of the homes, can cause logistical problems. Conflicts can arise between the residents' use of the common house and the daycare's use. In Tuggelite, residents' use of the common house was restricted during the day and employees had to clean up more thoroughly than they would in another situation. Employees needed an area where they could store supplies and administrative work without disturbance. Residents considering an on-site day care should consult with persons experienced in running a day care to discuss how to address some of these problems. From my interviews I believe residents feel the benefits of having an on-site day care far outweigh the disadvantages.

Nearby daycare good, convenient for parents but they are not involved to the same extent as they would be with a parent cooperative daycare. Employees are less likely to allow children freedom to run home or otherwise stray. The sense of security gained from casual surveillance would not be present because it would be “outside,” rather than “ours.”

## **Social Organization**

*“A good place to grow old. An excellent place for children to grow up. A place to set down one’s roots.”* [Understenshöjden]

The social network in a community can be augmented by design choices and shared decisions about maintenance, administration, and recreational activities. A great deal of social interaction between people is orchestrated individually. Certain design choices can increase the likelihood of causal social encounters. Whereas, formal social interaction is often designated by choices about maintenance, administration and recreational activities.

Design is discussed as it relates to public space, the significance of a common house to a community, and the social value of having shared tools and facilities. The maintenance and administration of an ecovillage will be addressed through a discussion of meetings and maintenance. The section on maintenance is divided into a discussion of work groups, work days and individual maintenance responsibilities.

## **Public space**

Residents are most likely to meet one another outside, around the ecovillage.<sup>11</sup> *“Pleasant casual meetings,”* [Mjölntorpet] reinforce a positive sense of community. People interact in response to their environment. You may be more likely to stop and chat by the mailboxes if they are shielded from the wind and rain. You may be more likely to take an evening stroll if the area is beautifully landscaped. How people interact, where they may meet, casually and formally, is effected by design. The Design chapter discusses specific design considerations for public space.

Public space provides a neutral space for people to meet. It is important for people to meet their friends and acquaintances as they go about their daily lives. A chance meeting in the parking lot can brighten your whole day. People can freely exchange: stories, news, advice, ideas, and recipes. An informal meeting by your flower bed can be short and satisfying. The expectation to spend an “polite” amount of talking is not there, you are busy tending your flowers. You are free from the expectation to invite him in for coffee and free from worry over whether you picked up your livingroom or not. It is a brief exchange. Perhaps he tells you about a sale on tulip bulbs or you tell him about your son’s first solo bicycle ride. Spontaneous meetings with neighbors reinforces a positive sense of security and community, quality of life, and personal well-being.

Garden space has a high social value.....

Lots of people meet at their neighbors - see statistics

**Other meeting places:**

UN - no main entry -3

TG - stores, kids activities (daycare), common house, cooking group every two weeks, school, bus stop

SOL - gardening -11; day care - 3; sauna - 2; meetings, school, bus stop, woods, workdays, playing field, common house

ÅK - work groups; workdays; gardening; daycare

MY - garden -2; common house

BÅ - furnace room -2; stable, woods, lake

MJ - daycare; sauna; compost; furnace; pump house; workshop; bus

four people wrote that a shared kitchen doesn't exist but not true, why?

discuss here the use of common facilities - how the frequency of use of laundry increases use of common and increases social interaction - see records for numbers on laundry

SM - gardening - 5; meetings

UN - subway -3; trash -2; pub; garden -2 ; stores nearby - 4; recreational activities -3; bus stop; way to school; workgroups -2; meetings - 2; bike storage (exists and doesn't depending on person, 3 said doesn't exist but 20 meet there often or sometimes); play area -2; common house - 4

no main entry -3 (design too)

MY - "Good with village street so you can walk through and meet your neighbors." I did not like village street. Too close, too much cut through, not enough landscaping, bad two parking areas.

**Common House**

"A beautiful and functional common locale is very important." [Solbyn]. The common house is a central feature in the community.<sup>12</sup> It can be a hub of activity for the ecovillage featuring: parties, workshops, a sauna, games, and much more. The common house represents a shared commitment to the well-being of the community. It is greatly valued by the residents, 76% of residents feel the value of the common house as "high" or "very high". Even residents in those ecovillages where it is not extensively used expressed their appreciation of its value.

**[ Table: VI n - value of common space ]**

actual value, not percentages

Value	ALL	TG	SOL	AK	MY	SM	MJ	UN
very high	40	7	14		2	1	4	12
high	49	7	9	5	3	6	6	13
soso	12		1	2	1	3	1	3
low		4			1		2	1

A great common house has many features useful and enticing to residents. The more services offered by the

common house the more the residents visit. Residents meet each other more often while attending to daily tasks and for recreation. Interaction with each other at the common house improves the overall social well-being of the community.

The ecovillages with the most heavily trafficked common houses (with the greatest number of features) also expressed the highest appreciation of their social network.<sup>13</sup> A full-featured, well-used, commonhouse can counterbalance my assessment that the greater the influence residents have in the planning process the healthier the social community. Solbyn contradicts my assumption. Solbyn had a disappointing planning process. The residents were able to influence the process in the beginning, but in the end their contributions were nearly nullified by last minute changes. Solbyn has also had a large turnover. Despite this, they have retained a strong social community. I attribute this to their common house and other features discussed in the meeting and work group sections.

Bålarna, Ruskola have no common house.

Location of services at the common house which residents must use regularly promotes spontaneous meetings improving the social well-being of the community. In Tuggelite residents go by the common house on daily and weekly errands: to pick up their mail, leave their trash and recyclables, do their laundry, attend to the central furnace, and (until 1997) take their children to or from daycare. Solbyn's contains laundry facilities and a daycare. The common house facilities in Solbyn entices residents through additional means: a music room, library, sauna, guest rooms, weaving loom, classes, parties, and a flag raised for special occasions. The common house is a "*good location for play, studies, parties, choir meetings, Ping Pong.*" [Mjölntorpet] Enticing common house features in other projects are: guest accommodations, a message board, sign-up for purchasing bulk foods, distribution of bulk foods, a carpentry workshop, a cooking club, games, an evening pub, classes, interests groups, crafts, and yard sale/flea market.

The common house can be an extension of the home providing: extra space for a guest to stay, a place for large messy projects, a place to run into neighbors, a place for kids to hang out and be noisy without hassle from their parents to "keep it down", and a place for big dinners, group meetings, and classes. It can also be a way to reduce the need for extra space in your home for a washer and dryer, a sauna, or a guest room. The guest rooms and saunas are popular. In those places I checked the sign up sheet for both was full.

A message board is a good way to draw residents to the common house. A message board might have sign up sheets for the laundry, sauna, or collective purchases, notices to buy or sell goods or services, the current newsletter or meeting agenda. If residents have other reasons to visit the common house the message board is a place to linger and perhaps meet a neighbor.

### **Laundry facilities**

Shared laundry facilities are a socially and environmentally positive choice. I believe it is one of the best ways to maximize the benefits of the common house to the community. Residents are more likely to have

spontaneous causal meetings while they frequenting the common house to do their laundry. While there they are more likely to use other facilities while they are there and may return to use other features because they are reminded of them while they are there. Nearly every resident surveyed who visited the common house once a week or more stated that laundry was the most common reason for them going there. Overall, 65% of residents said the most common reason for them to visit the common house is to do laundry; 17% of residents visit the common house several times a week, and 28% visit once a week. Of the 8% of residents who meet their neighbors very often in the laundry room all of them live in Tuggelite and Solbyn; of the 40% who meet often in the laundry room, 52% live in Tuggelite and Solbyn.<sup>14</sup> Excluding the statistics from Tuggelite and Solbyn from this calculation, of the remaining ecovillages,<sup>15</sup> 56% visit the common house most often for laundry; 4% visit more than once a week, and 25% visit once a week. In Tuggelite, 86% visit the common house more than once a week and 66% in Solbyn. In Tuggelite, 35% visit once a week and 66% in Solbyn.

**[ Table: VI l - how often common space ] in %**

How often	ALL	TG	SOL	AK	MY	SM	MJ	UN
several times a week	17	50	33					23
once a week	28	36	33		17	8	54	30
several times a month	48	14	33	90	83	92	23	48
rarely	7			10				22

**[ Table: VI m - most likely reasons for visiting the common house] in %, respondents gave more than one reply**

Why	laundry	coffee	social	party	meetings	sauna
ALL	65	7	25	55	9	
TG93	7		36	14		
SOL	75	46	60	17		
AK	45		9	9	55	9
SM	17		17	92	9	
MJ71	31	38	46			
UN	48	3	38	38		

laundry meetings %	ALL	TG	SOL	AK	MY	SM	MJ	UN
very often	7	14	24	0	0	0	0	0
often	37	79	44	9	17	0	38	34

Laundry facilities in Åkesta, Myrstacken and Smeden are limited to a couple machines for heavy weight items. The common house in these ecovillages are not as well designed (see Design chapter). I did not feel

comfortable in them, they were drab and felt cramped. The care put into these common houses and their functions was not equal to that of the others. This is evidenced by how infrequently residents visit these common houses; <sup>16</sup> 0% visit the common house several times a week, 7% once a week, 83% a couple times a month. I should note that because in this question I offered options of several times a month and then the far extreme of never,<sup>17</sup> therefore statistics for “several times a month,” may be inflated because residents did not want to endorse the negative implication behind checking “never.” The last option should have been rarely instead of never. The most frequent reason for visiting the common house in these sites is for meetings, 73%, held once a month or so. Laundry being the next most common reason, 36%; 7% of residents meet their neighbors often while doing laundry; 43% seldom, and 33% never. The comparison of Tuggelite and Solbyn to Åkesta, Myrstacken and Smeden indicates that common laundry facilities are a significant motivation for residents to use the common house and meet one other frequently. This daily interaction with neighbors strengthens the social system.

Environmentally, a shared laundry room requires far fewer machines than would be necessary if each home had their own. The group can afford to purchase higher quality machines since they are buying fewer machines. Higher quality machines with lower water and energy use will be necessary for the high rates of use. Special equipment which can be difficult to justify purchasing for an individual family such as a mangle, heavy weight steamer, or a large capacity washer for heavyweight items, carpets, coats, can be bought by the group. Residents are more likely to run a full load of laundry, instead of washing just a few things, if they must reserve a time in advance. Shared laundry can be an inconvenience, especially for large families. Nonetheless, I believe the benefits outweigh any inconvenience.

### **Daycare and other business**

A daycare is an excellent way to provide life in the ecovillage all day long. It would be easy for the ecovillage to become a bedroom community, where people are only home on evenings and weekends. Parents staying at home with children could still feel isolated. If a day care is not a reasonable option, as discussed in the previous section on children, other options for livening up the area on weekdays might be considered. Bålarna has a small computer software company on site with three, occasionally more, employees. More and more companies are allowing residents to work from home by tele-commuting. Working at home can be distracting, but it is nice not to have to travel far to your work space. It is helpful to be able to set your own hours. If residents themselves are not in a position to use on-site office space the space might be rented out. The neighborhood center in Hågaby will have office space for rent. The group might consider different rent scales for residents and outside clients. Small businesses may thrive in an ecovillage, depending on its location. Hågaby is considering an organic restaurant or café. The promotion of a vibrant community on weekdays as well as evenings and weekends will help move ecovillages towards being villages rather than housing with a few amenities.

Types of business: organic veggies/canning, etc. - masseuse - yoga or other classes - ...

business on site, day care, working at home...

hold classes and other activities in common house for extra funds, many residents have special skills this is a chance to share and offset costs.

### **Sharing tools and other items**

Shared tools and other items can promote social interaction, reduce costs, and save on environmental costs. Several of the ecovillages have some type of shared workshop or other facilities. Understenshöjden has a workshop for carpentry which was used extensively while residents were completing the self-building portion of construction. A shared lawnmower, weaving loom, photography studio, and library are examples of other shared items. Residents should discuss in advance how to deal with maintenance of the workshops and the care and replacement of tools. With so many people using the items they are liable to be broken or left untidy.

The survey: 35% said they used shared equipment frequently, 51% occasionally. There is great variation between the ecovillages because they have different degrees of equipment. [Pertains to Economics section??]

### **Meetings and administration**

“...many times when I’ve been to a meeting I feel we haven’t come so far. I don’t know what one can do about that. Making decisions about things is hard.” [Myrstacken, Lindén 38]

Administrative meetings are a necessary part of community living. They form the backbone of a well-functioning community. Together residents must decide upon how to make their ecovillage an ideal environment, attending to: environmental, economic, maintenance, and social affairs. Meetings can be pleasant and constructive rather than a time consuming chore. Running a good meeting is a skill. It does not happen automatically. The more time a group spends honing their skills the better the outcome. The resource list at the end of this chapter lists a variety of sources for further information on building a strong community.

Democracy is dependent on the participation of all members of a decision making body to be effective. It is important to “*make sure everyone participates,*” and “*to work with and follow up on shared democratic decisions.*” [Tuggelite] Attendance at monthly meetings, however, is frequently low. Residents are concerned about the welfare of the community but one’s zeal is diminished in the face of “*long discussions*” [Tuggelite] and the possibility of “*too many compromises which no one is really happy with.*” [Mjölntorpet] In addition to these frustrations there is the conception that meetings are boring. Most people can think of dozens of things they would rather be doing. Meetings can, be productive, satisfying and interesting, but it does not happen magically. Ubbeholt, an ecovillage still in the planning stage, has had success with guidelines adapted from the Handbok i civil olynad (Handbook in Civil ...)- Per Hengren, bonnier förlag, 1990 for its planning meetings. In addition to resident commentary, the following discussion is based in large part upon guidelines from this Hengren’s handbook and consultation with Jan Alan, group therapist and developer of the State of Oklahoma mediation program.

Readers interested in moving into an existing ecovillage are encouraged to also read the second half of the Planning chapter which has an additional discussion of group process and group dynamics.

**A skilled facilitator** is central to a productive meeting. His or her responsibility is to run the meeting in an efficient, courteous manner according to pre-determined protocol. Hergren recommends utilizing two facilitators, or co-facilitators.<sup>18</sup> One facilitator leads the meeting, steering the discussion, summarizing key factors in the discussion, and nips conflict in the bud. The other helps individuals make their point concise, coaxes less vocal members to participate, and ensures that members adhere to the time schedule. Alan cautions that unless the facilitators can work together as an effective team it is best for a single person to facilitate the meetings. A single facilitator would perform the duties of the two facilitators.

The facilitator may hold another office on the board but not necessarily. The chair of the board often takes responsibility for running meetings, but the best chair of the board may not be the best person to facilitate. The facilitator's role is instrumental to the dynamics of the community. It may be valuable to rotate the responsibility between persons interested in the position before electing a facilitator. After members have had a chance to experience their different mediation styles elections can be held. Elections for facilitators should be held more frequently than other elections as group dynamics may change and a different leading style may suit the group better for a while.

Effective facilitators “notice which members dominate the discussion and ensure that others have an opportunity to speak if they desire. This “gatekeeping” role is often shared among group members. A discussion leader may also ask if anyone can summarize the content of what has been said as a means of moving the group process ahead. This can serve to assure those who have expressed their views that they have been heard and thus enable the group to move on.” [Gaia 155]

**An Attendance chair** generates interest in the meetings. She finds out why residents are, or are not, attending meetings and what they do and do not like about them. The attendance chair should be a personable individual with whom people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts. This position is valuable when attendance at meetings is low.

**A time keeper** can help members adhere to time limitations established in the protocol. A pleasant sounding stop watch can remind residents, without being obtrusive, to move onto the next person or item. The facilitators or sergeant-at-arms will intervene if necessary to ensure the schedule is kept.

**Start on time and end on time.** Residents are busy. The time they invest in the community should be valued. Late comers should be aware that the meeting will begin on time and enter without disturbing the meeting in progress.

**The agenda** should be established in advance. A well thought out agenda and orderly presentations make the business at hand speed by quickly. Residents should have the agenda for the next meeting made available to them in advance so they can consider their views on a subject. A resident may want to speak to the secretary and

reserve a few minutes in the discussion period to express their views. The better prepared the participants the more productive the meeting is likely to be.

**A protocol** should be established for how meetings will be run and how decisions are to be made. A clear protocol helps maintain focus on the issues at hand rather than debating the administrative logistics.

**The Sergeant-at-arms** is responsible for ensuring protocol is followed. It is her or his duty to be direct and enforce the protocol. If a discussion on a topic has been tabled she reminds members to move onto another topic. She reminds residents of voting and discussion rules. The sergeant at arms should not hold any other position. She is able to be more firm in her requests than the facilitator because her role is enforcement only, not guidance.

**Time limits** help limit the length of discussions without singling out particular people. Hengren recommends beginning with each member contributing a few minutes (less than five) minutes to the discussion. This can generate new ideas and provides a general idea of where people stand on an issue, especially the opinions of quieter individuals. After everyone checks in, an open discussion may follow. A time limit on the open discussion prevents heated discussions from going on indefinitely. If many people want to contribute it may be best to limit each persons contribution to allow as many people to speak as possible. Once the predetermined time is over the facilitator summarizes the key arguments or solutions. The group can decide to continue, vote, or table the discussion for another meeting. The limits may seem troublesome and interrupt discussion but over time residents can tailor their comments accordingly and the whole process will run more smoothly. Knowing their time is limited, residents may learn to think longer before speaking.

**Silence is golden.** Hengren recommends pausing between speakers to allow reflection on the previous comments before being swept into the next.

**Tough decisions** are best not made hastily. The group may want to consider postponing voting on difficult decisions until the meeting following its discussion. Residents can take time to talk informally and reflect. Someone may come up with a better solution in the intervening time. Voting might take place at the beginning of the following meeting. A brief discussion may be necessary. If the solution for the issue is still contentious the group may consider requesting written commentary on the subject before continuing discussions. See the discussion of the newsletter below.

Some issues are not easily resolved. Myrstacken has been discussing whether or not to start a daycare for some time. The debate has been tabled and brought up again. Complex topics like the daycare will require volunteers to research costs, legal matters, employment of staff, and more. Research tasks should be assigned during meetings with time on later agendas for people to present their findings. Results of research might also be published in the newsletter to ensure that all residents have the opportunity to read and consider the options.

**Study circles** enable a small group of people (6-10) to investigate a subject in depth. A smaller group can work more efficiently than a large group at devising a set of solutions to a problem. Members of the study circle become the “experts” whom the large group can consult with.

**Chronic talkers and dictators**, there is one in every crowd. A person may feel they have sacrificed more time or energy in the community and is therefore entitled to be overbearing. Of course their contributions are important, but they are not a one man show, it is a group effort. You, and others, may wish their contributions were more contained. To address this I recommend tightening control within the meetings. Limit the time people are allowed to speak in open discussions. Request that members with substantial suggestions write down their ideas and obtain a time to speak on the meeting agenda. Strictly enforce, one at a time, speaking rules. This can seem harsh to other, non-offending members, but in the long run the group will be more productive and tensions can be reduced.

**Gripping and accusatory statements** should not be allowed. Discussion should focus on being constructive. Personal attacks or finger pointing are not appropriate. Those who engage in this type of speech should be asked to rephrase their concern or remain silent. Personal conflicts between neighbors should be addressed privately between concerned parties, not aired publicly. Residents who need assistance in resolving a dispute should seek mediation by the chair or another third party.

**Quiet people**, nor any member should feel railroaded by anyone. Even if you are a quiet person by nature, it is important to make yourself heard. Others may feel the same way and just haven’t spoken up. If you are a quiet person speak privately with the facilitator about the opportunity for every member to take a few minutes to address their concerns without interruption. All too often we come up with the best responses after the fact. Write these down and bring them up at the next meeting. Contact the facilitator or secretary in advance and let her or him know you have something important to share. Animosity breeds quickly. Address issues before they mutate into something ugly.

**A newsletter** can be an excellent means of increasing the productivity of meetings and the decision-making process. A newsletter should include: a synopsis of discussions and decisions in the prior meeting; an agenda for the issues and votes in the next meeting; editorials written by residents about a current topic in debate. An editorial can be an effective means for a resident with strong views on a subject to express herself in a concise manner that others can reflect upon rather than get caught up in a heated discussion in a meeting. The mere act of trying to get your ideas down on paper, whether or not they are printed, helps clarify where

you stand. A word limit on an editorial requires you to pinpoint the most vital points in an argument. It is easy to get sidetracked while speaking.

The Solbyn newsletter, Solby-bladet, began as a weekly newsletter in 1988. Ten years later Solby-bladet still informs residents, now on a monthly basis of: meetings, items for sale, skills for trade or sale, recycling do's and don'ts, births and birthdays, holiday celebrations and parties, work groups, work days, work to be done, recipes, a notice for a yoga class, and much more. A brief look at the ten years of newsletters revealed a chronicle of the joys and trials of life in the sun village, Solbyn.

## **Improving the meetings**

**A protocol** is only useful when you follow it. A facilitator should do her very best to lead residents to abide by predetermined rules for running the meetings.

**Sitting in a circle** rather than in rows helps people to see one another and better respond.

**Parents** may find it difficult to attend meetings if they have small children. Consider making consistent arrangements for watching the children so as many people as possible are able to attend the meetings.

**Theme meetings**, a presentation or activity might interest residents who may not otherwise attend meetings. A resident might have a slide show to share from their trip to ecological projects in Germany. Gardening suggestions in the spring may interest many residents. Active presentations might be appealing in smaller ecovillages. Residents can go look at an individual's work, a better wood shed, the best flower bed, or a table they built in the common house workshop. The presentations should not prevent attending to administrative details, but they can liven up a meeting. Theme meetings should be held when there are few pressing items on the agenda. The business meeting should be shortened and held before the theme portion of the meeting. The responsibility for exploring and implementing programs can be delegated to a work group - a program committee.

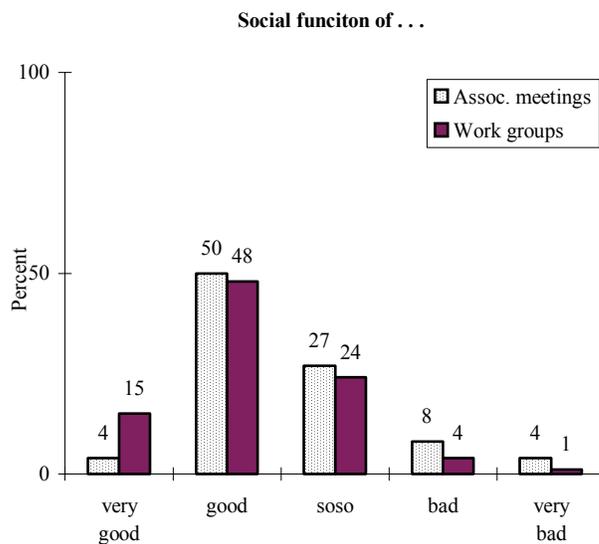
**Communication is a skill.** The group may want to consider holding workshops in effective communication and group dynamics. An accusation such as, "if Jane cannot keep her yard clean I think she should be fined," can be rephrased as, "I would like to ensure that the standards for our yard's appearance is kept high." The underlying meaning is the same, but one makes an individual feel bad while the other instills pride in the community. Workshops focusing on etiquette, active listening, and group dynamics have helped many businesses and neighborhood associations. See the Resource list for further reading on group dynamics.

Socializing is a positive part of attending meetings but it should not detract from getting work done. A social hour can be held after the meeting has started and ended on time. Food, refreshments, and good company are good

incentives for many people to stick around for the meeting.

Residents generally felt that meetings are a good opportunity for socializing with neighbors. However, one resident took offense at suggestion of meetings as a social occasion. “Meetings should not be a social affair, it deals foremost with work, same for work groups.” [Understenshøjden] I agree that administrative matters should be attended to swiftly so those with busy schedules can return to their homes and families. Low attendance at meetings implies to me that more should be done to make them interesting. A Solbyn resident told me that sometimes attendance is so poor that less than five people, in addition to the board, attend. Solbyn has 60 adult residents.

[ Table: VI g - meeting as social ]



**The board**

The board is comprised of individuals who are elected to fulfill administrative roles in the community: a chair of the board, vice chair, facilitator (or co-facilitators) secretary and treasurer.

“In Myrstacken the residents that the meetings are not for decision making, rather, merely advisory<sup>19</sup> for the board.” [Lindén 38] Myrstacken is not alone in the development of an “us vs. them” mentality towards the

board. The board is comprised of residents, all of them being like everyone else living there. They have volunteered their time to work for the well-being of the community. Make a special effort to commend their contribution.

Residents are not absolved of responsibility towards the community just because they elected a board. Board members need support. They need to know what residents are thinking; what they want. They cannot act according to the wishes of the community if community members are not at the meetings to express themselves. If residents are dissatisfied with the attitudes of those on the board they should elect different people the next time. However, if the contributions of board members are taken for granted why should anyone want to volunteer for the positions? Board members deserve praise.

Elections for officers should be staggered throughout the year so there is not an entirely new board at once, recommends Alan. Annual elections are probably sufficient for most positions. Elections for the facilitator may best be held every six or nine months because the role of the facilitator is so vital to the success of the meetings.

Other positions might include a community historian, photographer and editor for the newsletter.

A scrapbook is a great way for the community to preserve its collective memories. A community historian would be in charge of collecting articles, recording events, and entering them into a community scrapbook. The scrapbook can be a great resource: for residents showing off their ecovillage to friends, for new and prospective residents, and researchers interested looking for information on the ecovillage.<sup>20</sup> A community photographer can record memories or residents can contribute their own photos to the scrapbook.

An editor for the newsletter may or may not be an elected position, it depends on the level of interest in the task. A team of people may instead chose to prepare the newsletter as one of the work groups.

### **Follow through**

*“It is a problem to get something done. We make decisions but they are not carried out, there is no follow through.”* [Myrstacken, Lindén 39]

The decisions made in meetings are for naught if they are not implemented. Responsibility for tasks should be assigned to individuals or a team of individuals. Try to distribute tasks equitably. Some people will volunteer for more tasks than others. They may have more time or interest than others, but if they take on too much responsibility there is a danger that they might resent others who are not participating. Establish a time table for completing the tasks. If appropriate, reserve time on the meeting agenda for a presentation of progress.

Devise ways of encouraging positive social control. People’s efforts should be rewarded. Some neighborhood associations place a “yard of the month” plaque in the most beautiful yard in the neighborhood to encourage residents to maintain their yards. Simple recognition for a job well done goes a long way.

**The value of trust** and informal communication should not be underestimated. A positive environment where residents feel valued and value one another will contribute significantly to the well being of the community. Individuals are more likely to follow through on tasks if they feel trusted and know their contributions will be appreciated. Gossip and back-biting behavior should be smothered with kindness as it will undermine the moral of the entire group.

### **An ecovillage handbook**

“If something is not working someone follows up on it.”[Solbyn] If your heater breaks, you are locked out of your house, or your bathroom gets water damaged, the Solbyn handbook, *Vi bor i Solbyn*,<sup>1</sup> tells you what to do and who to talk to. In fact, the Solbyn handbook has a section about every imaginable question you might have about daily life in an ecovillage: from how to maintain your compost toilet to what to do with your old Christmas tree. The handbook provides all the information you need to follow through on most any task. If only it would do the work for you too.

## **Maintenance**

*“Many who do not live in an ecovillage have the impression that it is tiresome and time consuming to live in an ecovillage, but really it isn’t.”* [Myrstacken]

Chapter 14 Management, maintenance and Refuse Disposal.

p. 286 “ Good management is essential to the success of any multifamily housing development.” [Cooper ]

“Significantly, the quality of the environment on the estates surveyed (ranging from large to small, prewar to contemporary) depends more on the way it is maintained and cared for than on the design standards”

Management responsibility and care-taking should be established before tenants move in.

Someone should be available on-site to address questions, complaints.

Plan ahead for easy repairs.

Provide a resident manual.

Allow space for residents to personalize.

Pets, good but can cause problems.

A pleasant ecovillage life requires certain tasks to be fulfilled. Fortunately, “many hands make light work.” Many of the tasks are completed on workdays and on teams in work groups. Individual tasks are generally not too burdensome. Maintenance issues related to design are discussed further in relevant sections of the Design chapter.

Myrstacken has hired a groundskeeper. It is the only ecovillage to do so. It is also the ecovillage with the least positive sense of community. Although, “it would be nice to sometimes get out of maintenance which takes both time and energy out of us.” [Åkesta] I strongly recommend that residents perform the maintenance themselves. It keeps down costs and promotes pride in the community and its property.

## Work Groups

Responsibilities are divided between work groups. The types of workgroups and their responsibilities are determined by the group but the team of residents in work group decide amongst themselves how best to accomplish their goals. Examples of different workgroups are:

garden

root cellar

laundry room

energy

sewage

newsletter

recycling

common house

shared purchasing

information: scrapbook, media relations, fulfill information requests

field trips:

guide visitors to the ecovillage

service: maintain equipment, change light bulbs, call plumber, etc.

green space: maintain public green area with assistance from work days

first aid: provide advice, support and referrals on health matters

activities: arrange parties, recreational activities, outings

program: arrange theme for large group meetings

Work groups can be devised for a limitless variety of tasks. Some tasks are more vital than others. The number of people in a group are determined by its purpose. Group responsibilities should be clear. The needs of the group change and consequently the work groups. Reevaluate them regularly. Care should be taken to make the amount of effort necessary to complete the tasks in each group similar to avoid feelings of inequitable responsibilities. Residents must honestly evaluate their interests, skills and the time they have available choosing which group to volunteer for. Different work groups will suit some people better than others. Some people will have to be brave and volunteer for the less glamorous groups like the trash group.

The work groups “work well. Of course, we get to know one another.” [Mjölntorpet] Work groups are a good way for residents to get to know one another better while accomplishing important tasks.

[See Table: VI g above]

Members participation in the workgroups tends to be frequent with 74% participating often or very often. Residents experience participation in the work groups as easy or acceptable (91%), although the assessment of the time required to do the work varies. There was a small tendency for those who answered their experience

was easy to also say it took little time. Those who said the groups took a lot of time were slightly more inclined to write their experience was acceptable. I had asked residents to write what work group they were in so I could compare their assessment of the time and effort required and the type of work group. The answers were not sufficient to draw any conclusions.

[Tables: VII b, c, d - work groups]

How often do you participate in work groups? - All %

very often	18%
often	52%
seldom	24%
never	5%

How do you experience participation in the work groups? - All - (not all answered these questions)

easy	36%
acceptable	50%
hard	6%

little time	41%
time consuming	32%

### **House groups**

Solbyn and Understenshöjden have assigned tasks some maintenance to house groups. In Solbyn the house groups, ten groups of 4-6 households, maintain the public space around their homes. One month at a time each house group in Solbyn takes responsibility for tasks for the whole area: assuring lights in public areas are turned off or on, securing locks, cleaning the laundry room, sauna and common house toilet, and light maintenance on public green areas and compost. House groups in Understenshöjden, 5 groups of 4-9 households, have been working together since the planning stages. They maintain their surrounding landscape and have a shared compost.

### **Work days**

“Workdays give a good ‘we’ feeling.” [Smeden]

“It is fun. I would do it a thousand times over before doing it myself. It is a good feeling to do it to keep down living costs.” [Solbyn, Lindén 41]

Several ecovillages hold workdays. Tuggelite every fifth Sunday, Solbyn twice a year. Myrstacken is discussing four days a year with mandatory participation in two days or else the resident pays fee in lieu of participation.[Lindén

40] The workdays are an excellent opportunity to undertake large tasks: to paint the common house, plant trees, clean out the root cellar, mow the grass, till the soil in the gardens, improve the playground and much more. Workdays promote pride in the ecovillage property and each other.

“Workdays make it possible for everyone to meet and socialize.” [Åkesta] “It [a workday] is nice because many people show up and we eat dinner together, it is pleasant and doesn’t feel burdensome. All the children are out and can play with one another. One talks a lot with everyone one meets. Everyone has so much going in their lives so that we do not meet. Yes, in the stairwell one talks with most of their immediate neighbors, but not those who live further away, so it is natural opportunity to talk while one is working.” [Solbyn, Lindén 41]

The Solbyn newsletter provides the list of jobs for the next workday and residents sign-up at the message board in the common house. Two tasks not to be forgotten on a workday are watching the children and preparing food for a meal and/or party afterwards.

### **Individual maintenance**

After all the work is done in public areas a few tasks still remain in the home: taking out the trash, recyclables and compost, attending to your compost toilet, stoking the fire, cleaning the filter in the ventilation system, gardening and other unglamorous tasks. All homes require regular maintenance. Special toilets are really the only extra feature that you are unlikely to find in other homes. Gardening, compost, recycling, and wood heating are not standard in all homes, but these features are not uncommon. Fortunately, the chores are generally easy and require little time. In fact, more people said they were not responsible for various chores than said they were hard and time consuming.

[ Table: VII a - maintaining stuff ]

Gardening was deemed by many to be “hard<sup>24</sup> and time consuming, but fun.” [Smeden] Gardening, unlike taking out the trash provides a sense of accomplishment. No store bought vegetable can bring the same emotional satisfaction as eating your own, home-grown carrot.

The toilets and sewage were the next most difficult and time consuming tasks. I anticipated that those sites with composting toilets would be more likely to describe toilet maintenance as difficult. Nearly half of the Åkesta residents, who have compost toilets, said the job was hard and time consuming, but most of the residents in Tuggelite and nearly half in Solbyn it was easy and took little time. However, 30-32% of Tuggelite and Solbyn residents cited the sewage to be hard and time consuming. I imagine these residents were referring to emptying the toilets compost. I do not understand why 10 of 29 residents in Understenshöjden found maintaining the toilets hard and time consuming.

Snow removal from public walkways is contracted by all the ecovillages. Walkways and streets must be cleared as soon as possible. The paths quickly become icy and dangerous. It can not wait for residents to fit it into their schedule.

The key to smooth maintenance is to provide residents with the information and resources they need. Residents need to know what to do with their compost, dead Christmas trees, old light bulbs, and stained toilets. Without direction people are likely to do whatever is most convenient for them at the time. A handbook, such as Solbyn's is helpful as well as updates in the newsletter. If morale is kept high, residents will take pride in their community, follow through, and encourage one another to do the same. The design of various features can also help or hinder certain behavior. Design elements are discussed in the Design chapter.

## **Ecological feeling, behavior**

“Eco is not just building the houses, it is a daily exercise.”

An ecovillage is more than ecological building design and materials. The design and materials create a beneficial infrastructure as a starting point for residents, but ultimately the individual and collective resolve of residents to protect the environment and their social system is what makes an ecovillage. An ecovillage is not a static entity. It is dynamic and to retain its essence as an ecovillage the combination of its elements - the individual, community, and the environment - must work in consort to perpetuate its evolution. A strong social system is not enough, a group of individuals can have a strong commitment to the community but not the environment. The commitment to the environment helps the social and the social helps the environment, the two alone are as strong as them working together.

A continual improvement in environmental protection is dependent on four facets of an ecovillage. First, it is dependent on the individual to be responsible and critical of their behavior. Second, it is dependent on members of the community providing positive reinforcement of the individuals behavior. Third, the physical structure must facilitate the desired behavior and values. Fourth, the larger community - the city and state - must provide infrastructure facilitate the desired behavior.<sup>1</sup>

However a strong social system can help fill some of the needs in peoples lives which money can not buy, but we try to buy anyway.

Most people say money can't buy what is truly important in life, but then their lives are consumed with earning money and the accumulation of things. It is difficult to live according to this philosophy because people in society and advertising are sending constant messages about how this or that thing will improve your life. You can see that thing, you can own that thing. This hunger for consumption of extraneous goods is very harmful to the environment. It is far simpler to work for money to buy something than to face oneself and find the things money can't buy. The ecovillage community provides infrastructure to help people find those things money can't buy. These things: [list of stuff,] are available in the community more immediately than without a community. Part of ecological responsibility is a responsibility to oneself. To be personally honest, and to do the work for what money can't buy. When this work is done the need to work so hard for money for material items is reduced. How people find these things varies according to the individual. Some find it through their families, some through

religion, creative pursuits, or .... An ecovillage with a strong social network provides these things. Nonetheless, the current ecovillages have a long way to go in this direction. On one hand, people are far more satisfied living in the ecovillages than they were when living elsewhere, but there is no evidence to show they have gone to the next level of tuning out the “buy, buy, need, need” societal messages. It is easier to change what we buy, ie eco-friendly shoes, than to reduce how much we buy. The latter ecovillages gave in to the selfishness of wanting individual washers and dryers, more square meters per family and so forth. Now it is time to acknowledge this and move forward.

Ecological behavior, according to A.L. Linden is effected by individual, neighborhood and public factors the messages conveyed at these levels. The ecovillage promotes positive messages at the individual and neighborhood level. Swedish society generally supports ecological measures. Although overall Swedish society still sends some double messages the strength of the message at the individual and neighborhood level is sufficiently strong in an ecovillage to encourage better behavior. The physical structure of the ecovillages creates a climate conducive to ecological behavior. Elements of organization contribute. How has this effected attitude/awareness, the first level of change? How have residents behavior and consumption patterns changed? What contribution do the ecovillages make to the larger society in their sheer existence and also in the communication of residents with those not living in ecovillages?

Being an environmentalist shouldn't mean doing without. Those who oppose the environmental movement want you to believe this. In a way it is true. The environmental movement has told people to do without which may be part of the reason the masses haven't embraced the movement and its goals in a legitimate way. It has become a social disgrace to say you don't care about the environment, but saying and doing are not the same thing. The environmental movement has offered little in return for a persons commitment to the environment. In some ways, as an individual it can seem hopeless. This is where the ecovillage becomes a valuable tool. Caring about the environment becomes rewarding. An individual can make a difference through their community. Gardening may be hard work, you do have to give something, but “it's worth it.” The fact that it is good for the environment is somewhat incidental to the feeling of satisfaction you get from coaxing life out of a seed.

### **Physical prerequisites to ecological living**

It is important to have a physical environment that helps the residents be more energy effecient. Knowing that they have a stable foundation enables the residence to feelmore empowered to be resource efficient.

Residents were asked to evaluate the physical features of the ecovillages which were ecological. Results showed that the foundation was quite strong. Sixty-eight percent cited the ecological measures were “good” or “very good.” The positive evaluation of the ecological measures shows that residents think they are starting out with a good base from which they can continue to improve. Despite their positive evaluation of the features, the residents are the first to be critical. Their critical commentary demonstrates their desire to improve their relationship to the environment.

The idealists were the most likely to say the ecological measures were “mediocre” or “poor.” The idealists identified themselves elsewhere in the survey by professing idealistic proclamations. The optimists were more inclined to say the measures were “good” make excuses for ecological features such as, “*bearing in mind that it is one of the first ecovillages built, then it is very good.*” [Solbyn]

### **Other physical prerequisites**

In addition to physical qualities such as cellulose fiber insulation or solar panels, the ecovillages were designed with features intended to facilitate optimal ecological behavior.

This is especially important with projects that would ordinarily be overwhelming for one individual to manage single handedly. As one resident stated: “*A big advantage is the possibility to realize ideas which would otherwise be ‘too big’ for an individual, for example our bee hives which four people share the responsibility for.*” [Solbyn]

It should be noted here, that the easier it is to use shared facilities, the more often they will be accessed. As stated in the design chapter, these areas should always be as clean, friendly and accessible as possible. This is especially true for areas that could be potentially disgusting in mismanaged; the recycling, compost and the sewage treatment facilities.

Collective purchasing also helps reduce wasted resources. Buying in bulk reduces the total amount of packaging used and saves energy by avoiding multiple small supply runs. ...If the decision of what to buy has already been made, residents don’t have to worry if what their using is environmentally friendly or not...takes the guess work out and keeps them from using the wrong thing.

Shared facilities help to reduce waste by consolidating resources. These shared facilities are one of the cornerstones used to reduce overall consumption in the ecovillages. The early ecovillages actually had more shared facilities than the more modern versions. The following resident describes how this can be counterproductive to the process of environmental protection.

“*The houses are built with good ecological measures in of themselves. They are however, traditional closed entities which are not conducive to exchanges, loans, and shared use of household appliances. I strongly question the ecological sense that 44 families have 44 irons, 44 sewing machines, 44 TVs, 44 ironing boards, 44 mixers, 44 stereos, and so on.*” [Understenshøjden]

As discussed in earlier chapters, this move away from shared facilities was intended to reduce conflict between members. Avoiding the problem, however, does not help the environment. Perhaps the solution lies in creating a different design and dealing with the issue of conflict directly.

One of the things that facilitates sharing is a strong social system. Residents must feel they can trust each other to properly use and protect shared items. This is especially true when it comes to the use of tools. As the following chart states, TG has the highest rate of shared tools and maintains the strongest social network.

Use of shared tools? - talked about extensively in eco-social								
%%	ALL	TG	SOL	AK	MY	SM	MJ	UN
very often	7	0	4	0	0	0	23	7
often	35	79	13	0	50	17	23	21
seldom	50	21	33	73	50	83	46	62
never	6	0	4	18	0	0	8	7

## Social Behavior

Part of the beauty of living in a community, vs. individually, is that you have other people around you living by example. If majority is doing the ‘right thing’, others feel a sense of obligation to do so also. For example, if everyone else cleans the tools when they are done, one would feel uncomfortable to not follow suit. This is viewed as a positive social control. The opposite would be a dictatorship where people were simply told what to do and felt they had little control over the situation.

The community’s shared commitment to environmental protection inspires a “*A constant ambition towards new measures for a better environment.*” [Solbyn] This commitment fosters a social infrastructure that provides individuals a means of pursuing their area of interest with the support of others by “... *working on improving our internal environmental work in various interest groups.*” [Solbyn]

The four aspects which influence environmental behavior are intertwined - individual, community, physical and societal infrastructure. The first three elements work most closely together.

Resident’s were asked if moving to and living in an eco village had raised their environmental behavior and consciousness. In this particular study, eco village residents were asked the following questions.

1. Has participation in the eco village influenced your environmental awareness?
2. Has living an eco village changed your patterns of consumption in respect to the environment. For example; buying eco friendly products with reduced packaging or more environmentally friendly packaging.
3. Has living in the eco village changed your behavior in regards to the environment.

For example; taking shorter showers or turning off lights.

The graphs below represent the types of responses received from these questions.

ADD GRAPHS

These results can be interpreted in a variety of different manners.

First, it is possible that it is easier to change people’s levels of environmental consciousness than it is to change their actual behaviors. In the united States, I have often heard the comment, “yes, I know I should recycle, but...”

Second, seventy five percent of the respondents moved to the ecovillages because they were already concerned with environmental issues. Hence they were already recycling and conserving resources before they moved in. As one resident stated, “*My parents were always careful about turning off the lights, not driving short distances, so I’ve had these habits since childhood, biking or taking the train.*” [Tuggelite] Another resident commented that “*I already bought organic, etc. but living here made it even easier.*”[MJ]

Third, the respondents may have interpreted the examples as the exact topic, and commented only on that topic. For example, they may have only considered their behavioral changes in regards to packaging, purchasing, showers and lights. Hence narrowing their responses. If the examples were taken literally, then some of the respondents may have answered “no” in regards to changing their purchasing habits. The reason for this is cost. It is not unusual for environmentally friendly goods to be significantly more expensive than the competition. Since “*Costs must be considered in daily purchasing,*” [Smeden], consumers sometimes compromise since they are often “*Willing to pay more, but not too much more.*” [UN]

One question that could have been pursued further is the “advertising factor.” Residents who speak with friends, relatives and co-workers outside of the eco village, help raise the general public’s environmental awareness. One resident explained that he felt it was his responsibility to “*Convince more people to buy as many ecological products as possible.*” [UN]

## Ecovillages, Society and Environmental Protection

As we have seen so far, eco villages have a lot to offer. Nothing, however, works in a vacuum. Part of the eco village’s appeal is the impact it has on society in general. Public perception of the eco villages, and how the residents in the eco villages see themselves, both affect society at large. Just as members of an eco village need to support each other, they also need outside support as well. For example, if statewide regulations and the government do not support recycling or obstruct the progress of the ecovillages, they will have a much harder time being successful. In an ideal situation, the government should support the local eco villages via a variety of measures including recycling pick up, emissions laws, zoning ordinances, water treatment requirements and garbage pick up.

Residents of ecovillages feel a strong need to feel supported by society at large. Residents were asked to evaluate the society’s impressions of them based on three criteria. First, they were asked about the level of visibility of ecovillages w/in the general society. Second, they were asked to rate the public’s level of acceptance of ecovillages. Third, they were asked if the public’s perceptions were primarily positive or negative. Most of the interpretations were based on people the residents had directly interacted with. The results were surprising.

### INSERT CHART

As the above chart indicates, the residents were split on whether or not the ecovillages were well known. Two different viewpoints were expressed. Most residents felt they were well known locally, but not nationally. The majority of residents reported positive responses from those who were familiar with the ecovillages. “*In the last 4-5 years the environmental movement has swung from pioneer projects to daily environmental awareness among many. It is no longer strange.*” [MJ] However, some of the written comments describe a less favorable viewpoint. “*It seems that the perception in general, for people who don’t personally know someone who lives in an ecovillage, that it is just extreme, fanatical, environmental activists living in*

*ecovillages and the houses are completely without modern conveniences.*” [Myrstacken] *“Many believe it is not normal to live there.”*[MJ]. *“Most have heard of them at some time but are still a little skeptical.”* [SOL] Another resident felt that *“Eco villages are accepted, as long as they don’t have to move there themselves.”* [SM]

It seems clear that the ecovillages could benefit from a better and higher level of visibility. Residents were asked if they thought the idea of ecovillages should be exported to the society at large. The answer was a resounding *“yes!”*. Seventy five percent of all residents felt that more public resources should be invested into the ecovillages. Thirty percent of all residents felt that *“More important than building ecovillages is to ecologically adapt all housing.”* [TG]

#### INSERT CHART

*“The ecovillages are needed as an example to motivate people to reflect. There is much that can be done in existing buildings. But it isn’t enough for your house to be adapted for the environment, you must change your ways of living as well.”* [Smeden]

Ecovillages have much to offer

Must do PR and real improvements before spreading

Own vision of ecovillage question - abbreviated

Public perception

Investment in more ecovillages

SOL - *“A constant ambition towards new measure for a better environment.”* [Solbyn]

<sup>1</sup> Based on an adaptation of theories in *Människa och Milö* by Anna-Lisa Lindén.

[Table: IV b - public perception ]

TG - *“I imagine some think we are fanatics or hippies (flummare) who live in ecovillages.”* [Tuggelite]

*“I think people in general are a little hesitant and uncertain in regards to ecovillages and their inhabitants.”* [Tuggelite]

*“Many positively curious when I talk about living in an ecovillage.”* [Tuggelite]

*“Most have heard of them sometime but some are still a little skeptical.”* [Solbyn]

1 I did not collect data on nationalities. I did, however, review address lists for the households and most surnames were Swedish.

2 “Tuggelite: En miljövänlig vrå av Värmland,” Göteborgs-Posten. April 3, 1993, Home section, page 2.

3 “Att ‘leva som man lär’, dvs bidra till en ekologiskt hållbare vardag.” [Understenshöjden]

4 “Längtan efter alternativ livstil till köp slit släng.” [Solbyn]

5 This was an essay question. Many residents listed multiple motivations. Answers were sorted by category and

- counted as the number of comments on a topic divided by the number of participants in the survey.
- 6 “*Vi känner till alla. Umgås med visa.*” [Understenshöjden]
  - 7 Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of American Cities*. Chapter 2, “The uses of sidewalks: safety.”
  - 8 Maintenance = förvaltning
  - 9 Daycare - *dagis*
  - 10 Understenshöjden and Mjölntorpet have a neighboring day care, not an on-site day care. Solbyn and Åkesta have on-site daycare. Tuggelite and Smeden had on-site daycare until 1997.
  - 11 89% of residents stated they meet their neighbors outside around the area often or very often, see site design section in Design chapter for table.
  - 12 Ruskola and Bålarna do not a common house. Bålarna is in the process of building more shared space.
  - 13 I am referring to Tuggelite and Solbyn. My social conclusion is based questions VI a and b and KP Lindén’s research. The amount of traffic is base upon the value of the common house (VI n) and the number of visits per week (VI l)
  - 14 Understenshöjden accounts for 24% of the residents who meet often in the laundry room. At least seven residents in Understenshöjden appear to do their laundry at the common house rather than at home. I did not include Understenshöjden in my discussion of the social benefits of a shared laundry because I do not know how many residents do and do not have their own machines. In Tuggelite all residents use the common machines. In Solbyn at the time of moving in five households chose to have their own washing machine, no one a dryer.
  - 15 Excluding Bålarna and Ruskola which don’t have a common house.
  - 16 Parents with young children in Smeden went to the common house regularly when a day care was there. I have no data to compare how frequently residents used the common house while the daycare was running, however, the Smeden common house has little else to draw residents there, except a sauna. If the daycare in Åkesta were in the common house rather than a house converted to a daycare the statistics for use of the common house might be different.
  - 17 Several people crossed out never and wrote in rarely.
  - 18 My descriptions of the roles are slightly different than what Hergren subscribes.
  - 19 Advisory = rådgivande.
  - 20 The community may want to prepare a brochure and bibliography to send out when people request information about the ecovillage. This is discussed further in the next section about the perception of ecovillages.
  - 21 See appendix for a list of the table of contents of Vi bor i Solbyn.
  - 22 In the survey I used the word *jobbit* which I translated as hard or difficult. *Jobbit* is more complex than the direct translation of hard, which is *svårt*. *Jobbit* has a negative connotation - inconvenient, or unpleasant, whereas *svårt* may just mean physically difficult. Most written comments used *jobbit*, not *svårt*.
  - 23 See appendix for a list of the table of contents of Vi bor i Solbyn.
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