

## Chapter 8

# Where Next? Applying the lessons

*“I hope others can learn from our experiment, that is what it is all about.”* [Tuggelite]

It was the wish of many residents to expand ecological building and principle throughout society.

This book has focused on the planning, design and social features of existing ecovillages in Sweden in an effort to demonstrate how they are able to improve an individual's quality of life by meeting three basic human needs beyond sustenance: identity, belonging and purpose. This exploration leads to consideration of how the wisdom garnered from existing ecovillages might be applied on a broader level; to other ecological projects and resident-initiated planning projects.

Make the ecovillage a real ecovillage according to definition - the essence of what makes an ecovillage can be applied in many circumstances - in other words, the ecovillages profiled in this book are merely a phase in the evolution of the ecovillage principles. It would be a mistake if the reader were to attempt to reproduce a carbon copy of any of the case studies outlined here because the ecovillage is greater than that and it is the desire of those residents who have worked so hard to see their efforts used as a starting point/stepping stone to a new level. For if future projects do not reflect the lessons learned from those who have before then their advances will be lost. These lessons can be applied to wide variety of situations which can incorporate: new and existing housing, businesses, educational venues, and other institutions. The ultimate vision of an ecovillage,

as described in the Definition chapter, incorporates all aspects of life, not just housing. The vision is of an ecological **village**, not simply ecological housing.

The lessons from the profiled ecovillages highlight a handful of concepts which can be applied to a broad spectrum of projects. These lessons are:

- increase individual self-worth and quality of life
- increase individual sense of belonging
- maintain a commitment to growth
- involve all individuals in the creation and growth of the community
- planning and administration focusing on
- learning
- communication
- patience
- confidence
- having fun
- emphasis on the common goals of the environmental protection and community in all decisions
- creation and maintenance of a physical design which promotes a strong social system and environmental protection whether through renovation or new building
- keep designs:
- visible
- simple
- user-friendly
- attractive to see and pleasant to use

### Success stories

Following the above criteria some existing communities have implemented some of the basic ecovillage principles without defining themselves as an ecovillage. These existing communities were revitalized with the intent of increasing the sense of community and the level of environmental protection. The success



Fig. 1 - New greenhouse in front of Solhuset

of each project seems to be directly related to the number of the above elements incorporated into the planning and operation of a project.

### **Solhuset**

Solhuset is an 18 unit apartment building built in the 1950's. It was renovated using ecological principles and resident participation. Prior to renovation, the residents hardly knew one another. The architect proposed transforming the building in a manner that not only reduced its environmental impact, but also increase communication between the tenants. A green house was added to the building that allowed each household to have their own garden plot. The residents were also asked to participate in the renovation process. In addition, they were offered gardening courses. Residents who just a few years before didn't even know each other's names, now meet daily in the jungle atmosphere of a greenhouse café run by one of the residents. These same tenants, who had previously had only a minimal interest in environmental projects, have now requested that an area of land in front of the building also be developed to increase the total garden space available. In summary, this project all residents an increased sense of belonging and raised their level of environmental awareness. [REFERENCE]

### **Tusenskönan**

Tusenskönan is a five story apartment building with seventy units and an inner court yard located in the center of Vasteras. The renovation of this building was done with a focus on environmental awareness and social cohesion. Improvements in included a landscaped center courtyard with tables and benches; a recycling room; a gardening area and a common indoor room. All of these additions helped facilitate more contact between residents in a more casual and comfortable atmosphere. A new program was initiated where the residents were responsible for general building admistration and maintenance. This had the benefits of both reducing costs and allowing the residents feel more connected to the health of their building. The recycling room is particularly noteworthy because it is well lit:



Fig. 2 - Interior courtyard of Tusenskönan



Fig. 3 - Constructed stream

has plenty of natural lighting: has a large sink for cleaning individual containers: it includes potted plants: it's well organized and user friendly. On resident interviewed noted a noticeable improvement in the residents morale....[QUOTE AND REFERENCE]

### **Botkyrka**

Botkyrka is a large apartment complex built in the 1960's. It includes 5 (??) identical ten story concrete buildings. Prior to the renovation project, the number of unit vacancies was high. Vandalism rates were high and the level of tension between tenants was high. The units also had very little usable space for young children to play outdoors or indoors. The management planned a massive renovation project in hopes of increasing the appeal of the units to both new and existing tenants. Residents were asked to participate in the planning process including meetings. The management team went door to door to inform all residents about the upcoming changes and gathering their opinions. This task was especially difficult since many of the residents did not speak the native language. Once all the data was collected, the management drew up a variety of solutions for the residents to vote on.

The improvements included the following.

Each building was individualized. A playground and a community house were built for every two apartment buildings. Recycling facilities were added to each building. The area in general was cleaned up and the entire area was landscaped.

The final cost of all the renovations, with the resident's participation, was millions of crowns less than what was originally budgeted. The community buildings are now booked up several weeks in advance. The levels of vandalism have decreased significantly and

occupancy levels are up substantially..[GET NUMBERS]

### **Ekoporten**

Ekoporten was a plain 1950's three-story apartment building with drab landscaping. It has since been transformed into model of ecological renovation. A small streambed carrying rainwater meanders about the lawn between gardening plots, passing a small green house and shed. A root cellar was built into a small hill for storage of home-grown vegetables and home-canning. A fourth story was added to the building with a conference room and a large meeting room equipped with a kitchen and small nooks where residents can come and read quietly.... Solar panels provide hot water for heating and washing. A large mechanical compost machine turns household organic waste into usable compost in a couple weeks. Glassed-in balconies were added for residents' enjoyment as well as passive solar heating. The size of the stairwell was doubled and each landing was filled with plants known for their aromatic and air cleaning capacities. A fountain in the front entry gurgles pleasantly. Residents entering the building are embraced by beautiful smells and sounds, providing a small retreat before entering their apartments.

[REFERENCES]



Fig. 4 - Ekoporten - south facade and garden

Conclusion - although much has been accomplished residents know the process is never finished - residents would like to see what is discussed above become a reality ....

The true gift of the ecovillage is not its demonstration of new ecological technologies. Its treasure is the proof that the future of our planet lies, not in fancy techniques, but rather the commitment to a better quality of life where individual and community goals are pursued through a shared commitment to the environment.

The individual is the principle beneficiary of the ecovillage principles. The environment and the community benefit, but without gains for the individual the community and environmental protection are compromised.



Fig. 5 - Fountain in stairwell of Ekoporten