

Editorial by Karl Randau

RECAP OF THE YEAR AND ANTICIPATING BEN IN 2014

Many things have happened over the course of 2013. We're reaching the end of the year, which makes me inclined both to reflect and to look forward on what 2014 could bring. The TESTS project funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers is behind the majority of BEN activities over the year. BEN was formally created as a member NGO in April, in a back-to-back meeting with annual meeting of the Swedish Ecovillage Association in Ängsbacka, Sweden. A board was elected and the

first 4 full member ecovillage network NGOs (Finland, Russia, Sweden and Estonia) joined the organization and BEN became a full member of GEN in July. Over the year the first transition projects have also been successfully carried out by the Russian and Latvian partners, where the last one, a conference on sustainable lifestyle held in Riga the 16th-18th of December will put the TESTS project to a closure. Outside TESTS BEN has also joined as associate partner the final period of EU BSR programme's Ecovillages for Sustainable Rural Development project and the

three year long REALS project, funded by The Swedish Institute, as well as the TESTS II project that will naturally follow TESTS I and begin in January 2014. In retrospect we should all be pleased to see that everything has went so well. Personally I find it beautiful to see an idea turning into something real and tangible and I would like to thank everyone on the board, the activists carrying out the activities and everyone else involved for making this happen. And more is to come. Over 2014 we both have great obligations and great opportunities.

Under the TESTS II project there is funding for creating a BEN website with the requirements to sufficiently cover our needs, four more BEN newsletters, for organizing two international meetings excitingly intertwined with national grassroots events and three more transition outreach projects building on our experience from the TESTS I pilots. Best of all most partners have got their part of the cake, which we hope will help boosting the national networks further. Outside TESTS II, there are endless

possibilities to further engage and expand BEN's activities and influence. To capitalize on the outputs of the now ending Ecovillages project has especially been discussed as groundwork for new project ideas.

We are also pleased to see that positive things are happening around us. In November a meeting was held in Templehof Ecovillage in Germany where Germany, Austria and Switzerland discussed creating an ecovillage network NGO, GEN-DACH, for cooperation in the

German speaking countries in 2014. This also means a potential new member for BEN. Finally I would also like to inform you of the GEN Europe's National Network meeting 17th-19th January to be held in Torri Superiore Ecovillage, Italy, where I hope representatives from both BEN and the Baltic Sea national networks are invited. A travel compensation of 70 EUR will be given by GEN to the attendees, while 100 EUR is expected to contribute to food and accommodations.



BEN's "Ecovillages" follow-on project takes form by Robert Hall

To "capitalise" on the unfinished work of the EU BSR Interreg project "Ecovillages for Sustainable Rural Development" it is currently being discussed to create a new 1 year project to better utilise the outputs of the 1.6 MEUR project now closing down. Basically there are two strands that need attention and these two would together be the BEN project.

The first strand is training courses for ecovillage creation. The "Ecovillages" project has produced a number of publications tailored for the Region which can form the basis of a BSR Introduction to Ecovillage Design. These 1 week courses would be a pre-EDE, preparing for people to to the Gaia Educa-

tion's 4-week Ecovillage Design Education course. We would like to see trainers that have completed the EDE themselves (so-called GEESE) in the training teams of the BEN courses. The idea is to first organise a one-week professional Training of Trainers course for 12-16 persons who wish to be BEN trainers. We would sponsor 4 transnational pilot courses in ecovillages in Russia, Poland, Baltic States and Sweden. Each pilot course would get a budget to help pay 3-4 trainers plus participant travel and food costs but participants would be expected to pay a course fee as well.

The second strand is utilising the "Ecovillages" Policy Recommendations to approach BSR and European decision

makers. This would be done through two events. One would be participating as speaker/panelists at a sustainable development/climate workshop at the 5th EUSBSR Annual Forum that takes place in Turku, Finland on the 3rd June 2014. The second event would be to hold a hearing in Brussels at the European Parliament for various stakeholders based in the European capital. This could perhaps happen on Earth Day, 22nd April and be connected with other events there.

Both strands will involve ecovillage activists. So if you want to be part of the design the strands of this 50 000 EUR project, please contact the BEN secretariat at Suderbyn.

Estonian Ecovillage Winter-Gathering by Kadri Allikmäe

Estonian ecovillage winter-gathering will take place from 10th to 12th January in Himmaste schoolhouse in South Estonia. All foreign guests are warmly welcome! This time we go back to the

basics of community building. There have been many initiatives in Estonia and they all have already some experience, so now is a good time to look back and analyze.

More info coming soon at www.kogukonnad.ee, we will write a longer email for everyone via BEN and BELL email lists. Contact (main organiser): kristina@kogukonnad.ee.

Handicraft Project by Jesús Pacheco

Sustainable development is not only recycling or an awareness of climate change. It is a change in our way of thinking and action in relation with nature, the world and humankind based in the belief that the physical, social and intellectual worlds are interconnected.

Based in this conviction, it was developed the project "Traditional knowledge

for a modern and sustainable lifestyle". The project, was developed by three different Gotlandic organisations:

- Relearn Suderbyn, suderbyn.se: A non-profit organisation based in Suderbyn Permaculture Ecovillage. Relearns aim is to promote a sustainable way of life through different outreach activities such as courses, trainings or internships.

- Miljöverkstaden Merkurius, miljoverkstadenmerkurius.blogspot.se: A collaborative project between the People's University in Visby and the Employment Service. The aim is to give people that have been unemployed for a significant time, motivation, energy and experience to re-enter the labour market.

- Gotland läns hemslöjdsförening, hemslojdenpagotland.se: The handicraft association of Gotland who are working

for both professional and for those seeking knowledge and inspiration for his hobby. With their expertise they kindly ran the course.

In an initial seminar preconceptions and initial opinions were discussed, the participants also considered the role of handicraft in the contemporary society and its ecological advantages and drawbacks. Two different materials were then chosen to study further in the following courses. The decision was made in consideration of what was the most locally accessible and abundant source material and our conclusion was to look closer at wood and wool.

Working with wood has a long working tradition - both in craft and traditional building - in Sweden, so the agreement to choose this material was unanimous. The second material wool



and specifically Gotlandic wool is popular for its high quality and heritage. Despite this only 30 % of wool production on the island is used and the 70 % remaining is burned. It was decided to focus on finding a way to help prevent such a waste of useful material.

The second part of this project was the practical courses in wool and wood, where the participants studied material properties and working techniques. Several factors of comparison between handicraft and industrial production were also discussed briefly during the course as for example the process, transport or quality of objects.

The course enabled the participants to adopt a different perspective on a craft object. They could see "defects" as a result of a manual work process and even appreciate the object more because of them. These defects can show the techniques and tools used during the work process and make visible the relationship between the craftsman and the object. This connection is even greater when viewing their products.

We could conclude that the modern world should find the balance between

development and sustainability. A system where humanity can enjoy a good quality of life and live in harmony with the ecosystem where it is integrated.

"When natural resources are over,



we only can reinvent ourselves. The materials have changed, but the knowledge will not die."

Francisco J. Cornejo Rodríguez.



GEN-DACH by Michel van Amsterdam

Early November 50 people from about 25 communities gathered in Schloss Tempelhof in Southern Germany. Goal: to meet and exchange and to create a Network of German intentional communities and ecovillages.

As GEN-Networks are spreading rapidly over Europe and abroad (also creating Networks like BEN) it was felt necessary to wake up the German network from its sleeping beauty existence as the existing network of the past did not work anymore since 2003 (in our times 10 years of inactivity can easily be felt as a hundred).

To say it on forehand: there is no official German organisation that could become member of BEN yet. As the invitation for the meeting was made to German speaking communities it was decided to work towards the creation of an official platform for the German speaking countries Germany (D), Austria (A) and Switzerland (CH), thus creating GEN-DACH (Dach means roof in German). It is

planned to establish this organization by July or November 2014 although no concrete agreements for a legal structure are made yet. How and when we will get a German Network is still open.

Yet, as Ina from ZEGG and Michel from Grundstein were participating and Robert Hall was enabled to address encouraging words from Gotland over Skype, the BEN Network was very present.

The meeting itself was productive, intimate, playful and connecting. Besides playful exercises to better learn to know each other, workgroups were made that discussed items like decision making, caretaking for elderly people, inner and outer transitions, education items, how to handle new members in communities and more. A special place took the item: how can we create ways of mutual support and make it easier to visit each other. There were lots of laughter and many moving songs.

(Some "old" communities that start-

ed very sceptical were surprised by the strength of this new impulse and were willing "to give the new network a chance".)

As there are some good IT-People in this network and it was decided to also use the GEN-Europe Internet framework, ways of good digital connection are created as well.

All in all: an inspiring meeting.

The next meeting of this network is scheduled for the end of February 2014.



Trip to Lithuania by Nicole Grosperre-Slominska

In the last stage of my journey to Lithuania as a representative of our association for the Earth I visited cheese makers on Darguziai village, 80 km from Vilnius. After many years working in the corporate field, these cheese makers decided to leave the city and go to France for 1 year to learn the art of making cheese in the countryside where high quality products from goat and cow milk are produced. They are sold in Vilnius once a week, often having to be ordered and also in a small cheese shop which opened in the place itself. This couple lives half the year in the pastures in yurts and the rest of the time

in the house where cheese is produced. They also hired a girl from the village to work with them. From neighbours, they buy vegetables and animal food. Their ambition is to prevent the disintegration of the charming village of Darguziai and even giving it a second life.

There was also a conference with some ecovillages who made a few presentations. It took place at the Hotel Europa Royale Druskininkai and one of the main themes was the conclusion of the three year project "Ecovillages for Sustainable Rural Development in the countries near the Baltic Sea".

Although the conditions were surprisingly luxurious, I looked at the list of guests and saw a lot of VIPs – directors and professors that would be difficult to put on bunk beds.

I was talking about our society LAS, its relations with traditional Polish villages and the people around it.

We were with Dariusz Szwed, a very interesting and compelling contributor to green policies. Everyone appreciated his presentation about green cities.

Another interesting presentation was made by Karen Litfin, american professor who has travelled around the ecovillages' world for years and wrote a book that will be released soon. She focused on the challenge of the integration of ecology, economy, community and knowledge. One of the examples given during this time, was the legendary ecovillage Findhorn in Scotland, which is totally dependent on the air transport that annually brings thousands of participants from around the world for workshops conducted there .

Stuart Pledger from Sweden, showed some fantastic examples about companies creating products based on recycled materials (Cradlenet) .

Ulrike Schimmel, many years secretary of GEN (Global Ecovillage Network) made a nice presentation as well. The constant change of the definition of ecovillages was focused, and the possibility to create an ecovillage on the basis of a traditional village was mentioned.

Two books are forthcoming with good examples and practices of ecovillages in the countries of the Baltic region. You can get them for free if you contact Adam Cwikiem, project coordinator in Poland (acwik@zpsb.szczecin.pl).

There is also an interactive map of eco-projects around the baltic region (www.ecovillageroad.eu), where polish projects, among others, can be included. In the event of a problem with the registration, Adam should be contacted.

The last word of the conference was made by Robert Hall from Sweden, the current chairman of the recently formed BEN (Baltic Ecovillage Network). Apparently BEN annual meeting for next year will be held in Poland, so we await good news soon.

