

Editorial by Karl Randau

BEN is about to celebrate its one-year birthday and we're now anticipating the BEN general assembly to be held at Esna Manor, Estonia, 17-18th of April. These get-togethers of the network are utterly important since they work both as the glue unifying the network socially and emotionally and also in terms of visioning; these meetings are forums where we collectively decide BEN's path into the future. And that is exactly the attitude I want from myself and others stepping into the meeting – the realisation that we can achieve big things and that our possibilities are near endless if we are open to them.

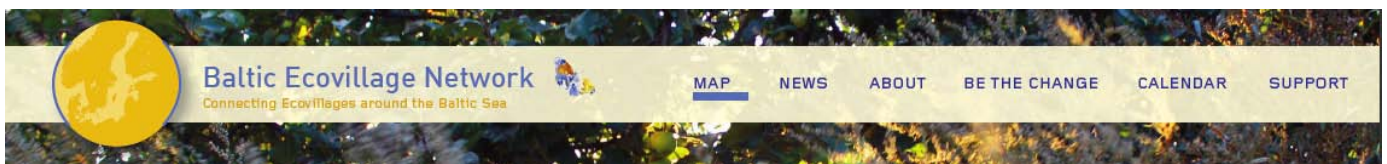
Being part of the TESTS projects –

funding nearly all BEN activities till date – I would like to share what's on the table for the TESTS project over 2014. First we have started the development of the new BEN webpage that we hope to have finished before the general assembly in Esna. The webpage is being developed in cooperation with the GEN-Europe office, further strengthening BEN's ties to the global ecovillage movement. The newsletters will be integrated with the webpage and sent out to subscribers as digests, allowing more organic growth of the network.

2014 also anticipates several transitional activities set to reach out to thousands of people in Baltic Sea Region,

introducing the relatively unknown concepts of ecovillages and transition. First up is a conference on ecovillages and transitional towns in St Petersburg held by our Russian partner, 3rd-4th of April. Over the year we also expect activities in Finland, Estonia and Poland and we will be hearing more about these in the upcoming newsletters, and for those who have the privilege to attend, at the international meetings. These projects embody BEN's ambition to strengthen both the ecovillage movement internally as well as to reach out to the broader civic society with its ideas. The year has just started and with the momentum we have I anticipate great achievements to come.

New webpage coming soon! by Clara Cortadelles, eco-minded designer



BEN is putting down roots and as a growing organization, needs a high quality webpage. The development of a webpage is funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers through the project TESTS II. The conditions and criteria of the webpage was set by the BEN board and a call went out through the network in search for competent web-designers who submitted proposals, which was sent to the board.

The assignment included only the technical solution and hosting on the site for 3 years, while the structure of the web content and the graphic design were already provided.

This was last December 2013. During January, the call had a good echo effect and we received nine quality bids. Just

starting in February, supported by a technical evaluation committee of 3 external experts, the BEN board chose one proposal: It was that of GEN Europe and manned by their IT-responsible General Secretary Ulrike Schimmel and GEN Web Designer Ralf Krause. The main focus was on the quality of the selection criteria fulfilled, the language issue, the launch timetable, back-up routines and ability to conform to graphic design. The winning option also seemed especially favorable due to the connection to GEN Europe. By using GEN Europe's web services other national networks and ecovillage association might follow BEN's example of being hosted by GEN Europe.

I had the pleasure to think out and create the layout and the visual appear-

ance for the web site. My main ambition was to give the webpage a clear and intuitive impression. I wanted it to feel like it was possible to breathe the fresh air from the Baltic when entering the webpage.

We have already started working on making the first web draft, and the programmer and I are having a close dialogue trying to find synergies to build the site as functional and user-friendly as possible.

As an 1-year birthday present for BEN, we will present the web at the annual meeting in Estonia in April.

Our hope is that the BEN web will help unite the ecovillages around the Baltic to better cooperate and work for our shared vision.

European National Networks at Torri Superiore by Monika Podsiadła

Torri Superiore is situated in the beautiful valley crossed by the river, with small waterfalls' stream down from leafy mountainsides. For many of us it is unusual to see leaves on trees and flowers in this time of the year.

First European National Networks Meeting took place in summer during last GEN Conference in Schweibenalp, where we decided to meet again on January.

At Torri we could meet in a larger group. Over 25 people from 12 European National Networks (also non formal registered networks) participated in the meeting. Thanks to Urlika Schimmel and Anna Kovasna, who organized the meeting, Lucilla Borio, our facilitator, and the whole community from Torri the meeting took place with extremely nice atmosphere full of friendliness, enjoyment, the spirit of cooperation.

More or less we knew each other, but during the meeting we created closer relations between us. It was a good place to get to know much more about other

national networks, their history, characteristics, their highlights and challenges.

The form of the meeting was unusual. Everyone was involved in the creation of the meeting, the substantive content as well as activities between working time. There was a mixture of songs, games and exercises with meaningful mind work which made us go forward on the appointed plan of topics. We discussed cooperation, education, partnership between networks, political strategies, fundraising possibilities, exchanges and mobility between national networks. Incredible how many topics were worked in so short time.

It was a very intensive meeting, but also very fruitful. We made some agreements, which are now realized in an international team. Working together in cooperation benefits us all.

Interesting people around, inspirational talks... and behind the window almost all the time was raining with the sounds which soothed the brain work

and created homely atmosphere. The time was running quite fast, with coffee/tea or food intervals. But interesting talks and discussions that you could hear everywhere till late night...

I have the impression that everyone in our international group found a niche and thanks to this diversity we could create harmonious completeness. This harmonious cooperation is an example and hope for balanced, peaceful, new civilization which I think everyone of us hold in the heart.



Gaija Organic Village Association by Hanna Pöyhönen

Gaija Organic Village is situated by the beautiful and clear Oulunvesi Lake at the town of Ähtäri in North West Finland. Established 2006 it currently has a population of about 30 people. The organic



village residents share a common goal, desire to live in the country and develop a sustainable community.

Gaija Organic Village Association runs an exploratory project from 1 Sep 2013 to 28 Feb 2014 to plan how to refurbish the buildings of the former old people's home to create an Expertise Center of Ecological Lifestyle.

The project aims to identify opportunities to enliven rural area using principles of sustainable development.

The project has been funded by the Rural Development Program for Mainland Finland and is managed locally by

the Kuudestaan organisation at nearby town of Alavus.

Pilot workshops will be set up to define the key areas of future workshops for different kinds of target groups and possible future partners. The workshops will include traditional crafts, permaculture and green care.

A register of experts who can run workshops, teach permaculture and traditional crafts, build or renovate houses, or have knowledge about traditional treatments will be started as part of the project. The register will serve both the local residents and anyone in

Finland seeking an expert in ecological skills.

Central parts of the project are visits to the other eco-villages in Finland to accumulate knowledge about variety of ways to build, organize and manage ecological centers. The visits will be used to establish and strengthen Gaija Organic Village Associations networks

both locally and Finland wide. The project will create links between different bodies of sustainable building practices in Finland and it aims to attract expert speakers and professional instructors to visit Gaija Organic Village events for giving specialist lectures. The project will be compiled to a PDF-file for www.gaija.org web pages by the end of March 2014.



A community bond: crowdfunding in Finland by Marika Lohi

As with quite many EU-projects also in Gaija's project the costs should be paid first and appear in the account of the association after the approval of the EU-grant project report. Gaijan Luomukylä is a new association and it had not yet collected enough profit to be able to finance for itself all its costs so it was decided that the association needed to have a loan.

Instead of going to ordinary bank Gaija's people decided to have a go and try a new form of crowdfunding in Finland, community bond issue. A community bond is a 100 Euro loan to a project which

is making the world a better place to live in. An investor gets detailed information about what the project is doing with his/her money, what are the risks and how the project influences the local community.

Financing ecological, social and cultural initiatives and transparency are two of the main issues in ethical financing. Community bonds work on the third very important thing, building communities around the initiatives. In community bonds the relationship between the investors and the initiative is made of friendly money. The investor gets interest to his/

her investment but the initiative decides how much. Instead of maximum profit one can end in maximizing the economy of common good.

Gaijan Luomukylä's community bond issue of 16,000 Euros was sold out in approx. 1.5 months to 63 investors of which 6 were companies and associations and the rest 57 individuals. Investments ranged from 100 Euros to 2,000 Euros. An investor could choose an interest rate of 0%, 1% or 2%. The issue was done in co-operation with Pankki 2.0-initiative, which develops ethical financing in Finland.

Good events in Estonia coming up by Liina Järviste

BEN Annual Meeting 17-19th April

BEN has its first birthday and will be 1 year old in April! The first annual meeting of BEN will take place from 17 to 19th of April, in Estonia, Esna (100 km from Tallinn). Everybody is most welcome!

These days will be filled with serious work, exploration of local eco initiatives, happy celebrations and lots more. On Thursday we'll have BEN annual meeting with the discussion of financial report, election of new board and auditors for 2014. We'll have also introduction of activities of different partners in BEN. The afternoon will be reserved for open space and discussions of new co-operation opportunities. In the evening there will be some good celebration with dance, etc.. On Friday we'll continue with planning and vision work in the morning. Then we'll go to Equilibre centre, where natural building, hipotherapy and community development are combined. We'll have a real "hands on work party" there.

We can continue our discussions and celebrations on Friday night. On Saturday, we'll leave Esna for Lilleoru (25 km from Tallinn), the most famous Estonian eco-village. There will be a tour and transfer back to Tallinn in the evening.

We welcome all participants to arrive on the evening of 16th. If you plan to come from Tallinn, please let us know! We'll have planned common transportation, though there are also busses to Paide (the nearest town). The TESTS project should be able to pay for 2-3 representatives per country to come.

For more info and registration please contact Liina Järviste, liina.jarviste@gmail.com.

Learn practical permaculture this summer

PDC from Saturday 16 to 30th August in Altmõisa, Tuuru, Läänemaa, Estonia with Klaudia van Gool (UK) and guests.

It will be a practical, intensive course

offering the possibility of significant and positive life changes. Although permaculture is most commonly thought about in connection with gardening & farming, its principles, ethics and design methods can be adapted and used in each individual's own work, interests and home to bring a more harmonious & sustainable lifestyle.

Permaculture offers a perspective on all aspects of building a sustainable future. Permaculture encourages us to use our individual skills, knowledge and interests, whilst drawing on traditional wisdom, science and our innate ability to observe and learn from the world around us.

The course fosters foundational habits to establish strong nature connection, observation, and ecological design skills. Participants will gain a clear understanding of how to use the tools of Permaculture Design to develop a mutually enhancing interaction with land and

community. During the second half of the course the participants will be guided in groups through the design process, applying what they have learned, to produce an original design on the site. They will be able to take this experience away and then apply it in creating further designs for their own home or garden. The course will be held in English and Estonian. Translation to and from English/Estonian available. The cost of the course will be approx 350 Euros (includ. food and tent).

Altmõisa is an old farmhouse with many permaculture elements already in place (greenhouse, cob chicken coop, orchard). It operates in close cooperation with Altmõisa guesthouse.

For more info, please contact Ines Margato: mar_gata@hotmail.com, (+372) 58862352.

Rising Together: An inner path of collective leadership to build thriving communities

From 18 to 24th July in Esna, Järvamaa with Magalie Bonneau-Marcil and Ronski, A. Kosky.

Let's develop together social sustain-

ability of our communities. Rising together is an intimate and intensive 7-day leadership gathering bringing together kindred spirits who share passion for personal and community transformation.

It is dedicated to support individuals to awaken more fully to their power to co-creating thriving and sustainable communities from the inside out. Partici-



pants will develop their inner leadership capacities through a range of holistic tools and approaches such as:

- Conscious Communication and Conflict Resolution: The Way of Council, an indigenous practice that builds trust, opens loving connections and allow authentic intimacy to deepen

- Transformation of Consciousness: Meditation, Interactive Exercises, Shadow Work, Joanna Macy's Work That Reconnects;

- Conscious Embodiment and Creative Self-Expression: Authentic movement and transformative dance practices that unleashes the unconscious, supporting greater inner freedom, increased self awareness and capacity to relate with one another authentically. No dance background required;

- Ritual work supporting communities to unify, build trust and heal our humanity together.

The cost of the course will be approx 350-500 Euros (depends on income and includes food and basic accommodation).

More information from liina.jarviste@gmail.com or [here](#).

About REALS by Emilia Rekestad

BEN is associated partner in the newly started project REALS (Resilient and Ecological Approaches for Living Sustainably), which will run during September 2013 – August 2016. Project goals are to increase learning, awareness and access to information in relation to sustainable lifestyles, waste reduction and sustainable resource management in the extended Baltic Sea Region. To underpin this, the project aims to generate cross-sector and international networks within the theme of sustainable living. Here it involves different movements as the ecovillage-, the permaculture (www.permakultur.se)-and the Transition (transitionnetwork.org) movement as well as private and public sectors. Project owner is Permaculture Sweden. Partners are at present from Russia, Sweden and Belarus with an aim to extend the partnership to involve more BSR countries. Partners: CEMUS at Uppsala University & Swedish University of Agriculture, Greenelizer (Sweden), the Russian "Ecovillage and

Eco-initiative Network REEN, Department of Sustainable Development at the St.Petersburg State University, as well as EcoHome and Ecoproject, voluntary organizations with established networks in the Belarusian Green Movement. REALS is also supported of many Associated Partners. The project will promote the sharing of information between participating countries, especially around the practices and perspectives that highlight

local resilience and emphasize the regeneration of the local ecosystem. Expected results are practical thematic workshops, expanded networking and open-source data gained from workshops, research, and other stakeholders. REALS is held as a potential flagship project under the EU's Baltic Sea strategy (EUSBSR).

You find more information about the project [here](#) or contact info@realsproject.org.



Conference on education, Russia by Antonina Kulyasova and Emilia Rekestad

The village Siniki is following the same pattern as so many other rural villages around the world.

The young generation sees little possibilities or interests to stay in the village, and the population decreases rapidly. The role that the village school plays is crucial for the village and its future generations, as the distance and travel to next nearby school is very far.

This conference looked into how new educational models could be usable for this and other schools in the district of Yst'yansky. The aim is to create motivation and possibilities for young people to stay and find sustainable means of living on the countryside. This was REALS second project workshop so far.

The three-day long conference hosted all in all around 100 people, including school students and teachers from 6 schools of Yst'yansky district; representatives from local municipalities administration, from district administration and from district department of education;



experts, representatives from ecovillage movement (Ecovillage 'Blagodat' [God's grace] Kovcheg and Grishino among others), environmental NGOs; St. Petersburg state University, Bryansk University, and ordinary citizens from Siniki village.

The conference became the platform for sharing new methods of education which are more interactive, interdisciplinary and practically oriented and more adaptive to rural areas. 8 open lessons and 5 master classes (practical, in handicrafts, etc.) were conducted by representatives from NGO's, Ecovillages, schools, urban communities. Both children and adults took part in these "lessons" in the classrooms. Methods which were based in play, theatre, handicraft, pictures, storytelling and more were shown. The aim was to explore ways of learning and education which can be used in finding models for education which generates a change in consumer patterns and choice of lifestyle – models which motivate students to support local socio-ecological development through awareness about the global situation.

Teachers and representatives from the district department of education (Yst'yansky) discussed how they can implement the methods which was shared, in their local schools.

The group of experts suggested to create a model platform in Yst'yansky district where new methods of education, interdisciplinary courses, practical tools and more can be tested and then disseminated. This idea was approved.

During the conference a group of participants worked together to elaborate this idea further.

It was an important experience for the participants to take part in Siniki's traditional village life, community project on local history, language, folklore, traditional cooking learning. It stimulated their own ideas about sustainability and resilience.

What could the next steps be?

- The creation of a "Model platform" – Center of resilient education for rural territories: a center summer camp for school students of the district, Educational project for sustainable forest use including tree nurseries (planned together with WWF Arkhangelsk, Arkhangelsk Youth Environmental NGO Aetas, local forest department and 2 local schools). Expertise from REEN, St. Petersburg State University and Yst'yansky Department of Education will be used;
- Department of education and district administration is very interested in exchange project with Swedish schools who work for open door education and Folk High Schools;
- Participants from different regions became acquainted to each other's work, many of them deciding to collaborate between their organizations. For example teachers from ecovillage Kovcheg (Kalujskay oblast) decided to work together with Briansk environmental NGO Viola and become part of the SHPIRE (energy efficiency) programme.

Ecovillages project releases manuals by Ansa Palojarvi

Project "Ecovillages for sustainable rural development" is happy to announce that the core project results - three manuals on: eco-settlement practices and environmentally friendly technologies applied in ecovillages; socio-cultural aspects of ecovillage establishment and governance; and green business and entrepreneurship – are available in a

project's website for a free download in English, Swedish, Finnish, Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish. Manuals have also been printed and spread in the libraries of the Baltic Sea Region countries as well as other distribution channels. By identifying and documenting many inspirational examples and case studies, the manuals aim at contributing to the further devel-

opment, application and spreading of the sustainable solutions and innovations tailored in ecovillages and regaining the balance between the ecological, socio-cultural and economic dimensions of sustainable living on a broader society level

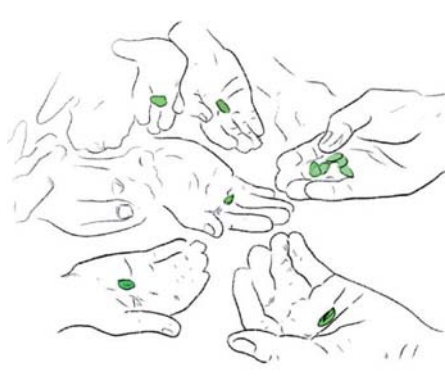
More information on the project results can be found in the last project newsletter: <http://ge.tt/1U0hik71>.

Links to the manuals:

[LIVING IN HARMONY: INSPIRING STORIES FROM ECOVILLAGES](#)



[THE ENTERPRISING ECOVILLAGER: ACHIEVING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH INNOVATIVE GREEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP](#)



[INSPIRING STORIES FROM ECOVILLAGES: EXPERIENCES WITH ECOLOGICAL TECHNOLOGIES AND PRACTICES](#)



Membership Fee for 2014 by Ansa Palojärvi

Dear members of BEN, please remember to pay your annual membership fee before the Annual General Assembly. BEN membership fee is 20 EUR for full members (national networks) and 10 EUR for supportive members (ecovillages and others).

Bank connection:
Nordea Bank Sweden
SE 10571
STOCKHOLM
BIC: NDEASESS
IBAN NR: SE4195000099603404062857

Account Holder: JAK Medlemsbank

Please note you must include the following obligatory message: Your organization's name, then paste in the following without altering: "For BEN membership fee, to BEN (36471), via 1036471025".

How to become a BEN member?

New members are warmly welcome! Just send your freely formulated letter of interest to the BEN Board (chairperson: robert.hall@suderbyn.se). According to our statutes: "Full members are

the geographical and thematic networks or representatives of ecovillages in the Baltic Sea Region promoting the association's goals and undertaking to comply with its statutes. Only legal bodies which are groups of or represent more than two ecovillages can be full members. Supportive members are all other NGOs that support the association's goals and undertake to comply with its statutes. The Baltic Sea Region consists of the following countries: Belarus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, and Sweden."



Esna, Estonia