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Abstract

Ecovillages are burgeoning communitarian phenomena in postindustrialized countries whose members push for ecologically sustainable change. The author situated a case study of an urban ecovillage in the social movement literatures on political opportunity structures and collective identity construction in an endeavor to bridge macro-structural movement and micro-identity construction theories. Using participant observation and interview data from ecovillagers, she answers three research questions to investigate how ecovillagers' collective goals for sustainability are negotiated in the context of regulations and dominant consumer ideologies. Informed by literatures on collective identity, the author asked, "What are ecovillagers' goals? What work do they do in their everyday lives to achieve these goals?" Additionally, to understand villagers' interactions with political opportunity structures, she asked, "How do members negotiate actions within a larger political environment that both facilitates and constrains them?" From her data, she determined how ecovillagers conceptualize their collective identity and actions within the context of constraining institutions.

Keywords

collective identity, environmental movements, intentional communities, ecovillages, political opportunity structure

Introduction

In the midst of global warming, diminishing biodiversity, and dwindling resources (Foster & York, 2004; Watson & Zakri, 2001), some people strive for more sustainable ways of living. The ecovillage movement is one example of small communities that are intended to build community and ecological sustainability. The members within the movement have a complex vision of sustainability, a word with many broad definitions. A commonly used definition of sustainability is meeting the needs of the current society "without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, 1987). Ecovillagers attempt to live their version of sustainability and share their model with the world, but they find themselves constrained by their surrounding community.

In this article, I analyze one case of a growing environmental movement, the urban ecovillage, to understand how people within it construct their collective identities through dynamic

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interaction with preexisting structural opportunities and constraints in the dominant culture. Presently, sociological theory on social movements has prioritized either a macro, political opportunity structure approach or a micro, collective identity construction approach with little attempt to bridge these different levels of analysis (Hunt, Benford, & Snow, 1994; Johnston and Klandermans, 1995; Melucci, 1995; Meyer & Minkoff, 2004). Structural theorists refer to political opportunity structure as the pervasive political climate in which a movement is situated, whereas micro-constructionists seek to understand culture—or meaning, symbols, and collective identity (Melucci, 1995; Meyer & Minkoff, 2004; Wood, 2002). Despite polar views, there are theorists who argue that a closer look at institutional effects on movement culture is necessary (Burawoy, 1998; Swidler, 1995). Swidler (1995) argues “the cultures of social movements are shaped by the institutions the movements confront” (p. 37). She contends that “institutions structure culture by systematically patterning channels for social action” (p. 39). However, ecovillagers are more than mere products of their environment; they are also actively engaged with their surroundings. In light of this, I venture to bring these analytic levels together as a contribution toward a more holistic theory on social movements.

In my research, I examine how political opportunity structures, or the context where action takes place, affect collective identity, goals, and means of action within a social movement. I focus my investigation on how individuals within one ecovillage actively create a collective identity through a process that includes generating a collective vision by agreeing on common values, establishing goals, and converting them into action. The process toward collective identity does not occur in a vacuum. Although ecovillagers seek to create an alternative society, the ecovillage is embedded within a city and the larger culture. Ecovillagers simultaneously live in the ecovillage and the larger society, thus, local laws, economy, and prevailing ideologies within the dominant society affect ecovillagers, and vice versa. The larger society shapes the physical and symbolic environment of the villagers engaging in the collective identity construction process. These actors then set out to reshape the already existing laws and prevailing ideologies in the dominant culture by spreading awareness and leading by example.

To explore the dynamic interactions between the larger society and ecovillagers, I conducted in-depth interviews with 24 ecovillagers¹ from one ecovillage in the Pacific Northwest, and I used participant observation to understand daily life at the village. From my interviews and field work, I interpret how ecovillagers perceive their goals of moving toward sustainability translating into actions in their everyday lives, and I analyze how they then negotiate these goals within institutional constraints.

The particular ecovillage in which I conducted interviews and participant observation is ideal to view the relationship between structure and collective identity construction. Ecovillages are a relatively new and burgeoning phenomenon internationally. The particular site I chose for research was established during the conception period of ecovillages, the early 1990s, and still retains some original residents who experienced the emergence of this movement (Gilman, 1991; W. L. Smith, 2002). The ecovillage is strategically located within an urban area where residents attempt to change local city housing regulations, raise environmental awareness, and be “a model” of sustainable living for local citizens. However, villagers often find themselves constrained by the larger community because of slow-moving bureaucracies and some citizens’ resistance to change. Regardless of these constraints, the village has persevered. Although there are limitations to case study research, for example, it is not generalizable to all ecovillages or social movement groups, my data reveal everyday challenges that activists face and how their group identity evolves despite and in response to these challenges.

To address the relationship between structure and collective identity, I contextualize ecovillages within the literature on intentional communities and explain how ecovillages as a social movement

relate to the dominant culture. I then define political opportunity structures and collective identity. In my analysis, I show how actors in this community participate in and understand their collective identity negotiated within larger structural opportunities and constraints. I do this by answering the following questions about the particular ecovillage I study: What are ecovillagers' goals? What work do they do in their everyday lives to achieve these goals? How do members negotiate day-to-day actions within a larger political environment that both facilitates and constrains the realization of their goals?

Contextualizing Ecovillages

The United States has more recorded intentional communities² than all other countries in the world combined (W. L. Smith, 2002). An intentional community is defined as "a group of people," usually at least five individuals, including some not related by blood, marriage, or adoption, "who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values" (Kozeny, 1995, p. 18; W. L. Smith, 2002). Communitarians, or individuals who live in intentional communities, may inhabit a suburban home, an urban neighborhood, or rural land in a single residence or in a "cluster of dwellings" (Kozeny, 1995, p. 18). Within communities, individuals share ideologies, skills, knowledge, and resources. Intentional communities encompass collectives spanning from religious communes to urban housing cooperatives, and an ecovillage is one type of intentional community (Herring, 2002; W. L. Smith, 2002).

Intentional communities have an extended and diverse history that dates back about 2,000 years to the Roman Empire (Schehr, 1997). Kanter (1972) identifies three communal waves from the 1600s to the 1970s. What these three waves have in common is that communitarians withdrew from society and joined communities as a result of rapidly changing cultures (Schehr, 1997). Schehr identifies a fourth wave that diverges from the previous three waves of communities. Communitarians in the fourth wave attempt to integrate with the larger society in the form of urban ecovillages and student co-ops. These communities coalesce with dominant societies rather than escaping and are identified as less "alienated from mainstream culture as were their predecessors" (W. L. Smith, 2002, p. 111).

Ecovillages,³ a specific form of intentional community, are relatively new phenomena. Robert Gilman formally coined the term in the early 1990s in reference to combining ecological design with a community-building design. As the prefix "eco" implies, ecovillages are created with an intent toward sustainable, environmental living. They may use green building techniques, for example, constructing buildings that are made from earthen materials, and situate housing units around green space for subsistence gardening. Villages are purposefully laid out to maximize utility from the environment and to diminish excessive use of resources as well as to foster community interaction (Gilman, 1991; Kirby, 2004).

Ecovillages are particularly interesting because of their rapid growth within the last couple of decades. W. L. Smith (2002) compiled a list of communities from 1990 to 2000, referencing prominent community directories. The directories are not complete as many communities refuse inclusion, thus a definitive number of communities is difficult to calculate. However, W. L. Smith found that, of the intentional communities that share information, ecovillages⁴ are among the fastest growing types. Consistent with Schehr's (1997) identification of "fourth wave" intentional communities, contemporary intentional communitarians, including ecovillagers, are engaging more with the dominant culture. Rather than seeking isolation and escapism, urban ecovillagers undertake community outreach venturing to change current dominant structures (Schehr, 1997; W. L. Smith, 2002). Not only are these communities rapidly growing, but they are also civically engaging to create social change.

Ecovillages as a Social Movement

Schehr (1997) argues that intentional communities are social movements because they are attempting to change the social order in the areas of property and labor relationships into more communal and collaborative orientations. Ecovillages constitute social movements as they challenge institutional, organizational, and cultural authority (Snow, Soule, & Kriesi, 2004). Ecovillagers confront city laws, codes, and zoning that prohibit grey water recycling and buildings such as icosahedral huts. They also confront ideological differences from a dominant culture that designates status in terms of material possessions that require the perpetual extraction of precious resources (Foster & York, 2004; Watson & Zakri, 2001).

These communities emerged during a time when Schor (1998) observed a broader environmental consciousness developing during the 1990s. She identifies a “voluntary simplicity movement” with individuals who make lifestyle changes as a response to consumerism and materialism. These individuals “downshift” their lifestyles by choosing to earn less money, work less hours, buy less consumer goods, and make their own needed goods. They are rich in “cultural” and “human capital” as they are well networked and educated but are technically classified as financially poor by the government. They choose to earn less, consume less, and socialize more. Ecovillages develop amid this broader consciousness, as evidenced by villagers’ critique of consumerism, their “downshifted” lifestyles, emphasis on community, and the connection they make between these choices and environmental wellbeing.

I locate ecovillages as a part of the larger environmental movement because of their emphasis on living simply, sustainably, and symbiotically with their environment (Kirby, 2004; Sandilands, 2002; W. L. Smith, 2002). Sperber (2003) defines the environmental movement as

all formally and informally organized participation and communication intended to prevent or remediate [interference with] interactions between living organisms on and below the surface of this planet and the physical conditions obtaining on and within it; between this planet and the atmosphere; between the oceans, rivers and lakes . . . and land masses; between human populations and other species. (pp. 5-6)

This definition highlights the problematic environmental conditions that the ecovillage movement seeks to mitigate. Gilman (1991) stresses human activity that is “harmlessly integrated into the natural world” in his definition of ecovillages (p. 10). Ecovillages are specifically created with the intent to diminish interference with these natural processes and maximize efficiency during the consumption and waste cycle. They attempt to do this within the constraints of a dominant culture that glorifies material wealth.

Political Opportunity Structures

Use of political opportunity structure in this article broadly refers to the external environment in which a social movement is situated that may either facilitate or inhibit movement action. This can include a sympathetic polity or constituents, movement actors’ perceived opportunities, structural political openings or prohibitions, and so on (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004). I will use Tarrow’s (1994) broad definition of political opportunity structure as “consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure” (p. 85). The “political environment” will refer to the dominant cultural values and sanctioning institutions discussed below.

The use of the phrase “dominant culture” in this article refers to Conover’s (1975) description of the “secularized Protestant work ethic” or “drive for financial success,” consumer materialism,

and individualism as the primary values in contemporary United States. Weber (1904/2002) contended that modern-day institutions were built with this Protestant ethic in mind, and people are sanctioned in accordance with these values. Currently, citizens of the United States consume a disproportionately large amount of the world's resources (Teller-Elsberg, Folbre, & Heintz, 2006; World Bank, 2005).

Ecovillagers live a critique in opposition to a dominant consumer culture. Ecovillagers' critique prioritizes material needs rather than material accumulation and runs counter to a consumerist paradigm that emphasizes consumption with little regard for the resource extraction process and waste cycle (Conover, 1975; Inglehart, 1977; Watson & Zakri, 2001). Inglehart (1977) believed that this consumptive lifestyle lends itself to a "postmaterialist" critique that may cause some individuals to join social movements to counter the lifestyle. Many ecovillagers believe they live a critique. Their everyday actions deny consumerist ideologies and are political in a dominant culture that sets the consumerist context. Although a part of the larger environmental movement, ecovillagers carve out their own niche.

Collective Identity

In my analysis of interactions between movement actors and dominant cultural institutions, or political opportunity structure, I more specifically explore collective identity within an urban ecovillage. Melucci (1995) argues that a group's collective identity is constructed through active relationships and is constantly evolving (Wood, 2002). The process toward collective identity involves several steps, including networking and communication between actors, actors' recognition of status as a unit within a system of "opportunity and constraints," defining goals and actions, and actors' emotional investment (Melucci, 1995, p. 44; Saunders, 2008). Therefore, collective identity consists of a group's construction of meaning and actions. Actors must acknowledge their collective status and establish collective goals and actions. I use Melucci's (1995) definition of collective identity because he emphasizes actions and relational processes "within resources and limits" (p. 58), but in my assessment, this definition falls short in the discussion of meaning, which I think is important to understanding goal construction in the process toward collective identity.

Actors create and recreate meaning through actions and interactions in the process toward constructing a collective identity, and meaning is "redefined continuously in light of new experiences" (Hunt et al., 1994, p. 190; Melucci, 1995; Saunders, 2008; Wood, 2002). In my fieldwork, I looked for manifestations of meaning in "cultural tools" such as symbols, stories, images, assumptions, and ideas to get at ecovillagers' goals. I also looked at how ecovillagers communicated beliefs, what skills they valued, their emotional investments, and, ultimately, their actions. Wood (2002) contends that it is in this process that individuals begin to solidify a collective identity. More specifically, I look for ecovillagers' shared goals and what community members perceive as inhibiting or facilitating the realization of their goals.

In any discussion of identity, social factors such as race, class, gender, and sexuality are important to explore. Women make up the bulk of the grassroots environmental movement (Seager, 1996). In the literature on intentional communities, race, sexuality, and gender relations are barely acknowledged. With respect to gender, researchers disagree on whether or not intentional communities are more egalitarian than the dominant culture (Conover, 1975; Martin & Fuller, 2004). Conover (1975) finds that intentional communities tend to be more female dominated, whereas Martin and Fuller (2004) find more complex gender relations, including many cases of male domination.

Many ecovillagers come from middle-class backgrounds and choose to live without the luxuries that postindustrial life affords (Kirby, 2004). Villagers often accept a form of downward mobility when shifting to an ecovillage lifestyle. Inglehart (1977) describes "postmaterialist" values that he believes can drive social movement participation. He contends that people whose

formative years were spent in scarcity, for example, during the Depression, tend to place more emphasis on material values, values that centered on the necessity of having a stable job with a stable income. On the other hand, “postmaterialists” who live in a time of access to more resources can effectively “place less emphasis on economic growth and more on the ‘non-economic’ quality of life.” (as cited in Schehr, 1997 p. 68) *Postmaterialists*, as he terms them, tend to have a higher regard for nature and seek less hierarchical, more egalitarian relationships. Though feminist scholars problematize the notion that only affluent people are concerned with “quality of life” (Braun, in press; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayer, & Wangari, 1996), these issues are beyond the scope of my analysis.

Method

This is a case study of an urban ecovillage located in a small city in the Pacific Northwest United States. I spent slightly more than 2 months, from July 2007 to September 2007, visiting and living in the community; interviewing, observing, and participating in community activities; and engaging villagers in discussion. In exchange for my sleeping arrangements on a futon mattress in a teenager’s living room, I was involved in work trade, which included moving compost, cleaning rabbit cages, doing domestic chores, and becoming absorbed in some individuals’ environmental awareness projects. After my stay there, I continued to visit the community about once a month for the next 6 months.

I was able to gain access because I had previously spent a summer visiting the community on occasion. My first experience with this community occurred in the summer of 2004.⁵ Reentering the community years later was not difficult. Even after 3 years, the property owners and original conceivers, as well as residents of this community, still recognized my face and met with community members to reassure them that my presence would not be intrusive.

My 24 interviewees included 23 of the 27 adults, older than 18 years, who lived at the ecovillage at the time I entered the community in early July.⁶ I also interviewed a woman who had moved off the property a year earlier but had lived previously at the ecovillage for a total of 3 years. The ecovillage population is constantly changing but is consistently a multigenerational community. My interviewees’ ages ranged from 19 to 77 years with a mean age of 36 years. Fifteen interviewees were female, and nine were male. Every interviewee was White, mostly Western European ethnics, a few Eastern Europeans, and a few individuals who claimed to have small parts of Native American ancestry. Of the 24 people I spoke with, 12 had lived there for at least a year or more.⁷

For triangulation purposes, I conducted semistructured, in-depth interviews and participant observation and analyzed written community materials. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed, and field observations were jotted down in a field notebook and typed up at the end of each day. Interviews lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to 3 hours, and questions, which I explain in more depth below, focused on personal values, everyday actions including work and play, and reasons for living in an ecovillage (see the appendix). These questions, informed by the movement culture literature, gave me insight into personal and movement goals that ecovillagers strive to accomplish and how they work toward achieving these goals in day-to-day life (Burawoy, 1998; Melucci, 1995; D. E. Smith, 1987; Wood, 2002).

Combining Melucci’s (1995) definition of collective identity with Wood’s (2002) orientation to meaning, I investigated interview data, field notes, and some written materials to decipher respondents’ understanding of meaning and action and how meaning and actions are constructed within a dominant society that arranges their opportunities and constraints. I also asked questions about how individuals viewed the city and dominant culture to understand their critique better. Specifically, to interpret ecovillagers’ perceived opportunities and constraints in their city, I asked,⁸ “What does a typical day look like? Is the larger community conducive to maintaining

the ecovillage? And, what resources do you utilize from the city?” Often, personal goals are interconnected with movement goals such as choosing the ecological brand of soap to use or specifically buying local produce. Respondents’ answers allowed me to see what they perceived as favorable conditions, such as access to bike lanes, or structural impediments, such as having to pay for land and therefore work in the formal economy, to their goals. Their answers also elucidate instances of agency where they found ways to go around or confront impediments to their goals, such as in an instance with one resident, Ears, who went door to door in his neighborhood in an effort to build more support and community.

I analyzed interview data, a welcome pamphlet,⁹ and villagers’ everyday actions to distinguish ecovillagers’ goals. First, I determined recurring themes from interview subjects’ responses to questions regarding ecovillage community values, personal values, their understanding of dominant cultural values, and problems they see both in the ecovillage and in dominant culture. Then, I evaluated how this understanding of values translates into everyday action by examining responses individuals gave to questions regarding what a typical day looks like, what a typical day might look like if they did not live at the ecovillage, and how individuals’ feel the ecovillage is affected by its location in a city. Finally, I used my observations in my field journal to confirm, disconfirm, and contextualize interviewees’ responses to my questions. Through these responses and notes, I disentangled the ecovillagers’ most prominent goals and how they understand these goals translating into everyday action within the confines of the dominant culture.

A Portrait

The ecovillage is embedded within a unique neighborhood that is characterized by overgrown lawns, lavish fruit trees, herb garden-lined sidewalks, houses with colorfully painted, wooden frames, which are situated within conventional, square, grid blocks. The ecovillage sits on five parcels of land, approximately an acre, and takes up about half a neighborhood block. The layout of the village is elliptical, with the major axis, or longest distance, stretching east to west. It is difficult to discern from the street that the village is much of anything. It is surrounded from the east by a wooden fence that wraps around the corner within the confines of the sidewalk. As the fence moves west, it soon turns to cob (an earthen building material), embedded with expressive, ceramic mosaics, beyond the south-facing, cinderblock driveway. Within the walls, the dwellings follow a similar path, situated around the perimeter of the five parcels. The assorted lodging varies from small, wooden cottages to naturally built,¹⁰ earthen apartments, to individual-sized geodesic domes built from weather-protected cardboard. Many materials that make these homes are scavenged from city waste, including abandoned building sites and dumpsters.

In the center of the village is the concrete tile driveway decorated with leaf imprints and small mosaics. This driveway is the home to a small, purple car and a small truck typically adorned with long wooden planks, tools, and several 5-gallon buckets. At the end of the driveway, the woodshop garage supports a home just above it where two of the three property owners live. The driveway is often the site of work parties, which consist of community members working collaboratively to beautify the property¹¹ or build useful and decorative additions. It is the main work site where artistic creativity and ecological design are combined with utility to create a variety of domestic ecotools. There are expansive vegetable and herb gardens on either side of the driveway and fruit trees sprinkled throughout the village. On a summer walk through the ecovillage, one will likely confront earthy aromas including ripening tomatoes, a variety of herbs, alpaca manure, and the nearby compost heap.

On a “typical” summer day during my fieldwork in the ecovillage, villagers begin to wake up about an hour after sunrise. There was often chatter in the morning as individuals watered their gardens or got together to make breakfast out of fresh veggies from the garden, “dumpstered” (named from the dumpster retrieval process) bread, goat’s milk from a friend’s farm, and/or eggs

from their own chicken coop. People discussed their plans for the day, and most of them would leave to either work or play in the city while a few folks stayed on site to maintain the property.

The specific jobs individuals had were interesting to me because all but three of my interviewees had jobs in line with movement goals. One woman was a nanny who worked 15 hours a week and was able to bring her daughter along with her to work. She found this important because she wanted to raise her daughter with her environmental consciousness. Another woman, an acupuncturist, worked 1 to 2 hours a week. There were a couple of integrative intimacy coaches trained in nonviolent communication who helped people understand their personal feelings and needs. There were a couple of permaculture¹² teachers, some natural builders and carpenters, and gardeners. The rest of the individuals worked on the property, trading their work for a place to sleep.

The village usually began to buzz again around five in the afternoon when people would return to the property from their jobs or from their bicycle journeys around the city. At the time I was there, residents were getting ready for an ecofair, off the property, where people from all around the state would take on projects aimed at sustainable practices. During the afternoon and into the early evenings, the woodshop was open while villagers worked on their projects. Ralph was busy making nonelectric, wooden fruit driers that used solar heat and air. Huck had a crew of young women working with him to build icosahedral huts made from cardboards, plastics, and other random city waste materials. Ears was also working with a young woman and her tent partner to build a sustainability sunflower wheel, backed by plywood, that provided information on how to achieve more sustainable living in day-to-day life. Emily had about half of the ecovillagers rehearsing in a play she wrote and directed about sustainability to take to the fair. All the banter usually continued until around 10 at night when people began to retire to their respective beds.

When discussing identity, it is important to examine social factors such as race, gender, class, and sexuality. In my observations, I noticed some interestingly gendered aspects of the community. In general, men thought women held more power in the community, and I observed some gendered work. Gendered work seemed exemplary of the embeddedness of ecovillagers in the dominant culture. However, gender is outside the scope of my analysis. I also want to acknowledge that I only caught a snapshot of this village's history. I am not aware of the typical makeup of the ecovillage. It is a transient space and may have looked very different a few months before I visited. For example, all my respondents were White. I do not know if this is typical of ecovillages in general, indicative of the homogeneity of the city, or a matter of the time I was there. Thus, I do not analyze race and ethnicity in this article. Additionally, sexuality was rarely brought up in my interviews. With regard to class, some of my interviewees came from poor or working-class backgrounds, although most were middle class. The fact that most identified themselves as middle class is consistent with Inglehart's (1977) description of postmaterialists who value quality of life over material signs of wealth.

Analysis

As the title "intentional community" implies, ecovillagers, made up of activists and friends of activists,¹³ intentionally form a collective where they communicate among each other to create and achieve meaningful goals for social change. To be clear, when I refer to ecovillagers in my analysis and conclusion, I refer only to ecovillagers at the particular site I study. The primary intention or goal for this community is achieving ecological sustainability. However, members do not have a monolithic vision of how to achieve this goal. Some only care to live their everyday lives in ways they view as sustainable, whereas others push for action outside the confines of the village. Whatever their individual avenues toward sustainability, villagers communicate, think of collective actions, and define and redefine sustainability in the collective identity process. Additionally, how actors act on their goals is dependent on how they negotiate the political opportunity structure, sanctioning institutions, infrastructure, dominant ideologies, bureaucrats,

and neighbors in the greater community. From my data, I conceptualize everything ecovillagers acknowledge surrounding the ecovillage as parts of opportunity structures. I argue that ecovillagers strive to do everyday actions deliberately and meaningfully in line with movement goals. In the following sections, I draw key research questions from my interviews including, What are ecovillagers' goals? What work do they do in their everyday lives to achieve these goals? How do members negotiate actions within a larger political environment that both facilitates and constrains them?

Ecovillagers' Collective Goals

Garnering evidence from my data, I was able to catch a glimpse of the evolving collective identity process. At the time of my research, ecovillagers' main goal was sustainability, and they experienced an urgent need to achieve this goal given pressing environmental crises. They spoke of achieving this goal by *being* the change they seek, and, vital to their collective identity, modeling sustainability for the larger community.

According to ecovillage residents, sustainability is the ultimate goal that drives their actions. Sustainable has many definitions among and between policy makers, scholars, and the lay public (Tisdell, 1988; United Nations, 1987). Similarly, ecovillagers have various understandings of this word that they define and redefine depending on the circumstances. Everything, from protecting the environment, to internal mental processing, to dealing with conflict in personal relationships, is covered under ecovillagers' definitions of sustainability. Discussion about sustainability came up in 17 of the 24 interviews. Although each member appears to have a distinct personal idea of what sustainability means, one ecovillager, Kat, a 27-year-old, single mother, defines sustainability in a way that encompasses common themes and multiple understandings:

Sustainability is living in a way that enhances the quality of life for not just humans but for other species as well. So a given area or land base can maintain health or increase in health over time. Biodiversity would increase for instance, or at least stay stable and not decrease. Sustainability in interpersonal relationships means that a relationship can continue, that when there's conflict there's a way to resolve the conflict. That goes for whole communities that [when] there's conflict in the community, there's a way for the community to resolve that and continue on with each other, and people don't have to leave.

Kat notes that sustainability means maintaining or improving environmental or communal health over time. This sustainability message is articulated throughout my interview data in conjunction with a pronounced need for immediate attention. Ralph, a property owner in his mid-fifties, identifies the repercussions if sustainable practices are not aggressively pursued and says,

We will achieve sustainability. There is no question about it. The real question is will it be with technology or with dust blowing in the wind?

To my initial surprise, the sustainability message was frequently framed in an urgent apocalyptic context. Inevitable "civilization collapse" as a result of extravagant consumerism is discussed as taken-for-granted in close to 40% of my interviews. However, one member, the eldest woman on the property, does not believe in an inevitable collapse. She states,

Ralph has the feeling that so much is going to happen [civilization collapse] in the next few years that we won't even have food, and that's why he's so interested in having the fruit trees and everything like that so that we'll always have food. I'm not that pessimistic; I think that we'll always have something around. Maybe not everything.

Ecovillagers portray a need for society to deal with global warming, resource extraction, and the waste cycle as soon as possible. They attempt to achieve these goals collectively by being “a model of sustainable living.” This Gandhian “being the change” message from their welcome pamphlet, given to each new resident, suggests that movement goals are enacted in everyday actions, that the everyday is political.

Villagers have multifarious understandings of sustainability; correspondingly, they go about modeling sustainability in a multifaceted fashion. Their model consists of widely held beliefs about relating to each other and their environment interdependently while maintaining self-reliance, or minimal dependence on dominant institutions and infrastructure. Beyond immediate relationships among each other and their local community, ecovillagers express the necessity to reach others and teach them by example how to live sustainably. I explain various strategies for modeling more in depth below.

Part of “being the change” includes interdependent relationships with the environment and others. Ann and I sat in the kitchen of her two-bedroom cottage that she shared with her partner and 16-year-old roommate. I asked what community means to her, and she responded, “A group of people working for the greater good of everyone, helping each other and being supportive.”

This quote illustrates how Ann sees the well-being of others as just as important as her personal well-being. Many ecovillagers take this further by extending their interpersonal well-being to their connection with nature:

There’s a way to live in harmony, and then there’s a way to live out of balance, you know. For some reason, I’ve always really had admiration for plants and just nature, just raw nature.

Relating to community members as well as nature interdependently is an important component of the ecovillagers’ philosophy. This ideal is evident in how they talk about each other and the earth by emphasizing the importance of respecting all forms of relationships whether they are with plants, animals, or other humans. It is indicative of the symbiotic, circular relationship ecovillagers perceive as necessary for the survival of the planet.

I witnessed ecovillagers relate to each other nonhierarchically and caught a glimpse of their interdependence during meetings. I was told by the property owners that these meetings occurred biweekly or once a month depending on the time of year. Attendance was not mandatory but encouraged. The three meetings I sat in on had high rates of participation. This may have been in part because of the fact that all meetings were potlucks and had inviting, social atmospheres. At the last meeting I attended, there were 22 people sitting together on sofas and chairs oriented in a large circle just outside the community center, in an area referred to by some as the “outdoor living room.” The only adults missing were the four individuals I could not find to interview.

Throughout the summer I conducted my research, business meetings were held monthly because it was difficult to schedule meeting times that most members could attend. Many members would leave for a week at a time to attend ecofairs and other ecogatherings. During business meetings, ecovillagers attempted to come to consensus regarding community issues. If consensus could not be achieved, they agreed to a majority vote. If issues affected specific parties, these issues were discussed with the relevant parties, and all potentially affected individuals hashed out concerns together. Ultimately, the property owners had a final say regarding financial matters, but the owners attempted to bring financial concerns to the whole community. An example of this was when Ralph thought that he had to sell the community center to stay current on his mortgage bills. He confronted the community at the final meeting I attended. One member suggested and almost everyone agreed to pay \$5 extra a month to keep the community center in the community. This instance was illustrative of the ways in which ecovillagers tried to work

together, interdependently, to achieve their goals despite the dominant cultural messages of authoritative, rugged individualism they critique.

Attenuating the yoke of hierarchical dominant institutions also means lessening one's reliance on them. Everyday, self-reliant actions I witnessed during my stay included gardening in the community garden where about half of the ecovillagers grew a portion of their own food. I met members who made their own clothes, shelter, and rope; raised chickens, geese, and rabbits for personal consumption; and gleaned and canned their own fruit. I met others who were critical of electricity use, stores, clinics, formal education, cars, or money. Some members taught workshops on topics like permaculture, nonviolent communication, child rearing, and personal growth to integrate holistic, "back-to-the-earth" approaches.

Amanda, a slender, 29-year-old woman, and I talked in the outdoor living room within the cob fence. She sat on a reclining chair, and I sat on a torn-up, blue velour couch. She explained to me how she made the top she was wearing and then went on to say,

My friend made the shorts, and I made this necklace. That's a big part of things, learning how to do [rely on personal skills]. Oh, yeah, this kind of goes along with it, specialization. A lot of people . . . are all about specializing, and that's what this world is about, that's how you make more money. Specialize in something. I don't really think that way. I think, actually, I would like to have a broader skill set. That includes making my own clothes, my own shoes, everything.

Amanda's quest to be self-reliant, not dependent on societal infrastructure for clothes or shoes, is exemplary of just one of the many ways ecovillagers go about rejecting dominant consumer culture in an attempt to become more sustainable. This woman articulates her skepticism in the specialization process that she sees as a part of the dominant culture's way of living. She enjoys being versatile, acquiring new skills, and taking ownership of knowledge that will allow her to meet her basic needs rather than relying on store-bought items.

In addition to personal and interpersonal everyday work toward achieving sustainability, villagers believe they must relay the environmental message of their model to others all over the world. One way ecovillagers go about both living and sharing their ideas for social change is by giving tours to visitors in the community. The welcome materials communicate, "Our home serves not only as a place for us to live, but also as a model of sustainable living for hundreds of guests and tours we host each year." By giving tours to guests, ecovillagers must "practice what they preach" and show others how they may go about living in a more sustainable way.

In line with the welcome pamphlet, 18 of my 24 respondents mentioned a desire to reach out to the community in order to share their version of sustainability. Ears, a 26-year-old resident who had lived at the community for 4 months at the time of the interview, expressed the collective desire to be "a model":

I think that the ecovillage right now is the closest thing that this city has to a template of an alternative life style for an urban area. Someday there might be ecovillages on every city block . . . it could be a . . . , probably already is, an eco-role model for the rest of the community.

Ears articulates the ecovillagers' sustainable model goal. Beyond expressing this goal, they feel a sense of duty to share it with others. Helene's words illustrate a similar point, but she takes it a step further, suggesting that the ecovillagers desire recognition. Helene is a woman in her early thirties who has been living on the property for 1 year:

It's interesting that people do often just kind of come through here because they're curious about it. We want people to know [about the ecovillage]. That's part of our intention too. A lot of us want people to feel good about what we're doing too or to feel excited about the possibilities [for change] at least.

These two individuals speak directly to the ideas of being "a model" as well as relaying the message to others. Helene wants newcomers to feel excited when they see this alternative living model and hopes that what they see may plant the seed for social change. Ecovillagers want outsiders to incorporate ideals about nonhierarchical relationships, environmental interdependence, self-reliance, or diminishing dependence on infrastructure into their own lives.

Ecovillagers' collective vision is to model sustainability for the larger community. As individuals, they have many ideas on how to go about modeling this that they negotiate among each other and within the larger community. Given their collective objectives to be more self-reliant on the one hand and to reach the broader community on the other, how do ecovillagers navigate institutional constraints to achieve the goals expressed above? What work do they do in their everyday lives to achieve movement ends? What inhibits them? What facilitates their goals? How do ecovillagers reconcile the use of societal infrastructure that is often counter to the goals they express? In the next two sections, I explore ecovillagers' articulated opportunities and constraints—how they perceive themselves translating their ideal of sustainability into actions while facing opposition and resources in their surrounding local community.

Ecovillagers' Perceived Opportunities

In accordance with Schehr's (1997) assessment of fourth-wave community characteristics, rather than escaping to rural land, ecovillagers try to attain sustainability with a village in a city. They are embedded in the dominant culture—a culture they critique for its lack of sustainable practices. Their relationship with the dominant cultural structure is interactive; villagers negotiate their goals within and through the surrounding banks, schools, media, car culture, and dominant ideologies. Consistent with their philosophy of interdependence, they rely on the surrounding community in many ways. Ecovillagers manage to seize opportunities they perceive emerging from their local community in order to achieve their goals. During my fieldwork at the village, the opportunities ecovillagers voice about the city they reside within included the following: the city polity's emphasis on environmentally conscious living, thus its inclusion of bike lanes and local, organic farmers' markets; access to networks and people in town who are available for teaching as well as proselytizing; and access to city resources in the forms of libraries, city waste, and dumpsters.

In the city the village is located within, the citizens' environmental consciousness or tolerance creates a safe space for ecovillagers to experiment with ecotechnologies, such as grey water recycling, that do not meet local city housing codes. When speaking with one of the original two owners, Ralph had this to say about the city he lives in:

This town is progressive and the building department helps as much as they can. They are sympathetic old hippies within the system. Bureaucratic laws are slow to change and hinder the progress of the community, but most bureaucrats turn a blind eye to illegal activities. They don't want to make more work for themselves. The only time [the ecovillage] would get busted is if neighbors report you or if you do something brazen . . . I tell people to be sure you get along with your neighbors if you want to do something illegal.

Ralph conveys a belief expressed by others within the ecovillage that the local citizens tolerate ecovillagers' lifestyle. Consistent with political opportunity structure research, a sympathetic polity—citizens, neighbors, and law enforcement—allows a movement to flourish in a city where

the polity is in agreement with the movement's cause (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004). Ecovillagers are often able to get away with many things that violate laws, such as building icosahedral huts made of scavenged city materials such as plastics, cinderblocks, and cardboard that they weatherproof. By city code, these structures are considered substandard housing and are illegal because they lack running water and electricity, but ecovillagers perceive that the huts are overlooked because some bureaucrats are ideologically in alignment with ecovillagers' cause. Villagers also coexist peacefully with most of their neighbors, so there is minimal concern that they will be reported. Not having to worry about violating the law makes it possible for them to create housing that is in accordance with the model they seek to be.

As discussed in the previous section, one of the ways ecovillagers also accomplish their goal to be a model is by educating others through workshops and tours at their facilities. Given their critique of dominant cultural institutions, they try to recruit people participating in these institutions, such as university students, in order to expose their model to more people. In accordance with being a sustainable model, Huck, an elder resident who has lived at the ecovillage for 6 years, discusses opportunities to proliferate movement ideologies through an educational venue at the ecovillage:

There is kind of an idea of [the ecovillage] being an educational . . . the original part of what [Ralph and Emily, coowners] wanted [was] a vision that [the ecovillage] would be educational. We have tours come through here, sometimes 30 [to] 40 people. There's any number [of groups, a research institute], a couple of charter schools, a couple of departments of the University [that] during a course of their events they say, "let's go tour the ecovillage," and so they'll come on in here, and sometimes [Ralph or Emily] or even I will just waltz them through what's going on. Taking that even deeper, is when you come here you are in some state in an educational halfway house, situation . . . So, there's kind of a social, a strong social suggestion here that you can implement alternatives, and get pretty uppity and strong about it if you feel like it.

Intentional communities are also well networked among each other. Individuals go back and forth between communities to find communal support and new ecotechnologies. During my stay at the ecovillage, I met several community "hoppers". These individuals traveled from intentional community to intentional community, taking away and bringing with them new ideas to and from each community. Hoppers would set up camp in communities for months at a time and move on with the passing seasons. However, hoppers were not the only ones who traversed to various communities. In fact, attending workshops at different communities was a regular occurrence. Several ecovillagers taught workshops about personal growth and permaculture at nearby intentional communities, four of which I visited. These strong community networks provided ecovillagers with extra support and affirmation by way of giving members a place to escape to from time to time and having political and ideological support when bureaucrats targeted a specific community.

Emergent structural opportunities including sympathetic bureaucrats, networks of students and supporters, and other city resources make it possible for ecovillagers to move closer to obtaining their goals. An environmentally conscious polity, access to abandoned, building site waste, and access to networks of students and other tour groups allow ecovillagers the figurative and literal space to move everyday actions toward sustainability. However, ecovillagers cannot always navigate the space to live consistently with their visions. In the next section, I will scrutinize constraints articulated by ecovillagers.

Ecovillagers' Perceived Constraints

Regardless of emergent opportunities, people in the larger city can inhibit ecovillagers' actions and lives. Ecovillagers make many sacrifices to remain in a location that is more conducive to

spreading movement ideologies. Rather than moving out to cheaper, rural land with different housing codes where they may become truly self-sufficient, they choose to remain in an urban area near more people. However, this choice also limits what the ecovillagers can do. Constraints that shape ecovillagers' activities include local laws in the form of housing codes and neighborhood zoning, a need to pay a mortgage, jobs, neighbors' attitudes, and geographical space. In this section, I investigate ecovillagers' understanding of constraints from the surrounding city.

To demonstrate the frustration ecovillage advocates face with zoning restrictions, consider Cedar's case. Cedar is an environmental activist who works with the ecovillagers I studied and the city the ecovillage is located in to create an "ecovillage zone." This ecovillage zone would allow nonrelated, adult individuals to live together on a plot of land, build small earthen huts situated in a nontraditional circular pattern, recycle grey water, and move toward realizing their version of sustainability. Cedar is given the runaround when meeting with city officials:

It is simply flat out *WRONG* for people in [the Northwest] to have to fight an uphill bureaucratic battle every time they express a desire to simply live in communities designed to be in harmony with nature. There needs to be a concentrated effort to make the institutional change once and for all, and then all those who follow us will be able to walk through that door. The consciousness is there in [the Northwest] for ecovillages to *flourish*—it is being blocked by bureaucratic inertia.

Faced with slow-moving bureaucratic processes that impede ecovillage advocates' vision of progress, Cedar pushes for change by writing guest columns in a city weekly paper on "legalizing" ecovillages and working with local land use public interest groups to advocate for ecovillages and zoning changes. Regardless of the constraints he perceives, his actions are indicative of different tactics ecovillagers use to interact with preexisting, in this case legal, institutions that both shape actors' path options and are shaped by actors.

Individuals are embedded within and shaped by the dominant culture they in turn reproduce and reshape through interactions. To illustrate this point, I use the example of the two property owners, Jamie and her son Ralph. They bought into the five parcels where the ecovillage sits as a business venture 16 years ago. Although once aspiring entrepreneurs, they no longer desire their positions as landlords and encourage others to buy into the property as well, but only one other resident had the funds available to do this. The owners pay a mortgage on the property and must ask residents for rent, thus reproducing economic relations by exchanging money and paying the bank. Although most decisions regarding community matters are made by the community as a whole, this landowner–renter situation interferes with their vision of relating to each other in a nonhierarchical manner. When times become hard, the landowners, as participants in economic institutions, face decisions about whether or not to sell parts of the property. Ralph expressed his dislike of being a landlord:

I don't know who should own this place. I don't like being a landlord. I would like to sell off a portion of the property to get rid of my debt so I can just write. Ideally, I would love to sell it to the people in the triplex, but they don't have any money. I'm trying to find cool people who will buy into it. The rent from tenants almost pays the mortgage, taxes, and insurance, but I cover the rest in the form of credit cards.

Like many ecovillagers, Ralph expresses disdain for bureaucratic institutions, yet he is still dependent on them as well as a part of them. Financial insecurity and the inability to sufficiently pay off debts hinder villagers' capacity to attain the goal of sustainability. It may be a matter of time before the property debt is no longer manageable, and the property must be sold to

anyone willing to buy it. In the meantime, ecovillagers try to find ways to minimize economic relationships.

Because many ecovillagers refuse to purchase goods unless they cannot make the goods themselves, housing is their primary expense. The necessity to pay rent at the ecovillage drives needed working energy away from the space. Time is spent at a job earning money rather than at the village finding ways to improve their model of sustainability. Eight of the 24 respondents worked at least 30 hours a week or more at a job, 9 worked part-time anywhere from 1 to 15 hours a week away from the property, while the remaining 7 worked solely on the property, trading work for a sleeping space. Working in the city detracts from desires villagers have for intimate relationships within the village and collaborative working arrangements. Emily has lived there for 5 years, and she explains,

It's definitely a different feel because it's in the city so people have very functional lives outside of here; they have jobs or are attached. I think that kind of takes away from the intimacy here because people are doing different things.

Emily describes a frustration that is shared by many ecovillagers who would like to spend more energy on making the ecovillage their ideal living space. The necessity to trade labor for wages in the formal economy in order to pay for living arrangements is constraining, given villagers' desires to work together toward building a more sustainable city. There is also an underlying ideology that people should not have to work for money but, rather, for sustenance and pride. Having to pay rent perpetuates the ecovillagers' reliance on outside work and money and decreases their availability for intimacy.

In addition to constraints from financial institutions, lack of geographical space was often referred to as a problem by ecovillagers to whom I spoke. Some villagers admitted that their versions of sustainability were not viable at the contemporaneous location. Carey, a 27-year-old resident who has lived in a dome for close to 2 years offers her insight:

[Lack of space] makes the ecovillage less sustainable in the long run because there's less experimentation in true self-sufficiency. There's not enough room to have enough rabbits to feed the whole community, there's not enough room to have a big enough garden to feed everybody, there's no creeks running through the property. There's not enough room to grow a big enough nettle patch so we could make ropes out of it. You know, whatever it is, because it's small, and because it's inside civilization there's not, there's not a possibility of creating self-sufficiency here . . . Long-term sustainability is not possible here.

Carey describes the space limitations in the village as physically restricting their food production possibilities. They literally do not have the space to become self-sufficient. The neighborhood the village is located in is not structured to allow them the acres it would take to produce enough food for everyone in the village. Also, to buy out the neighboring lots, ecovillagers would need more money. Because they already have monetary problems, their ability to buy more space is limited.

Neighbors' perceptions may also constrain possibilities for expansion. J. T., a 41-year-old male who has lived on the property for 11 years, had this to say about the ecovillagers' relationship with immediately surrounding neighbors:

I think some of them are curious. Some of them really don't think about [the ecovillage] very often. There was a neighbor, as far as I know his concerns have been taken care of, but he thought that the place looked really messy and he didn't like the place at all so

[property owner] built walls up on the front of the property to accommodate in large part that person's concerns. Well, I hope they're satisfied. It probably still looks like a mess so they probably don't like us but they can't say anything because [property owner] bent over backwards to try to accommodate them.

Ecovillagers try not to disturb neighbors to prevent bureaucratic intervention. They do this at the expense of getting more neighbors involved to further goals of interdependence and the propagation of movement ideas.

Ecovillagers must sacrifice ideals of achieving full sustainability in order to remain in a location conducive to spreading movement ideologies. Even though rural land is cheaper and roomier for sustenance with fewer regulations, they choose to remain near more people. Because of this strategic choice, they face bureaucrats and infrastructure that constrain sustainability prospects. The city confines villagers who must negotiate the formal economy, laws, neighbors' attitudes, and the physical geography of the city to achieve their goal of sustainability. Ecovillagers must prioritize ideals, pay the mortgage and exhibit this model or quit paying a bank and live off the land in the woods, and strategize movement choices. Weathering constraints, members find avenues to live the change their movement seeks. The last section unravels tensions between ostensibly contradictory appropriations of dominant culture and ecovillagers' goals.

Tensions Between Ecovillagers' Goals and Actions

At times, ecovillagers' choices appear counterintuitive. Despite having a goal of self-sufficiency from local institutions and infrastructure, individuals often exploit social services, food stamps in particular; cars; and popular media, including newspapers and television. They do so to further specific visionary ends at the expense of obtaining self-reliance. Even though ecovillagers express disdain for bureaucratic institutions and dominant consumerist culture, their goals of interdependence and proliferation of the movement model are at times perceived as more important. At other times, sheer convenience is justification enough. Here, I explore tensions between their ideologies and actions.

One dominant cultural symbol of excessive consumption is the automobile. Car use is looked down on in the ecovillage. When Ralph originally conceived of the village layout, he had to negotiate with city officials and make some compromises. Ralph did not want to provide parking even though city codes require parking lots at apartments. He successfully convinced city officials that he would instead provide villagers with bus passes and bike sheds. The welcoming packet encourages "the use of ecologically sustainable transportation to decrease the number of motorized vehicles we own and use." Villagers are supported and encouraged to use public transportation and bikes when possible.

Because car use is frowned upon, individuals within the village circulate a myth that is best summed up by Ann, "Most people here don't drive or own cars. It's really cool." However, from my observations, more than half of the ecovillagers do own cars and drive them somewhat regularly. Based on further exploration, I suspect that Ann actually believes what she said. Cars are not allowed on the property, with the exception of Ralph's work truck and his elderly mother's small car. All other vehicles are parked on the street around the perimeter of the property. It is quite possible that car use goes undetected because it is not visible within property gates. Comparatively, bikes are conspicuously parked in bike sheds and along gates inside the village. Bike use is also frequent and is easy to observe.

Sanctioning and shame surround car use, a norm violation in the ecovillage. Some members disclose their distaste about others' car use, when I would later discover that they themselves occasionally use cars. However, the more common response to car use is embarrassment (except

in two instances where both individuals showed no shame whatsoever). Hannah, a resident who had lived on the property for about a year, claims,

I like to bike when I can. My job often requires that I transport a lot of stuff to and fro and go shopping a lot so I have to take my car sometimes. But I'm enjoying my combination of bike and bus pass whenever I can.

Hannah says she uses her car for work. Her immediate smirk that accompanied my question about her transportation habits suggested some guilt associated with her car use. Hannah of course, is not the only one who uses her car. During my stay at the ecovillage I saw villagers use cars to transport tools for work, scavenged and reuseable city waste, and ecotechnologies for show at ecogatherings and networking events. They may make an effort to minimize car use; nonetheless, they drive cars more often than they would like others to believe.

Another symbol of the dominant culture's excessive consumption is the television.¹⁴ Although many ecovillagers are critical of television because they believe it is employed to propagate consumer ideology, two owners used an episode of a television show to their perceived advantage in order to disseminate their ecological visions to the nation. In accordance with resource mobilization literature, movement actors seize opportunities to use mass resources to further movement ends (Johnston & Klandermans, 1995; Larana, Johnston, & Gusfield, 1994). Emily wrote to a reality television show about the ecovillage. The show producers invited her, her partner, and any villagers willing to be on the television show and allowed Emily and Ralph to exhibit their ecologically friendly lifestyle to the nation.

News about the show spread throughout the village and local city. Emily told a local newspaper, "It was an opportunity to sing to a different choir." Emily referred to the opportunity that she and coowner Ralph had on television to spread their ideals to people who may not have access to information regarding ecovillages and sustainable living. They were able to display the village, their model, to the nation. Although ecovillagers were split on this decision, with feelings ranging from apathy to excitement, no one to my knowledge expressed outright disapproval. In fact, most residents participated in one scene, displaying a potluck in their own community center. Villagers used a television show, a primary tool for advertisers, to their advantage. Even though television shows are interspersed with commercials that perpetuate the consumer ideology rampant in the dominant culture—an ideology that ecovillagers believe is destroying the environment—ecovillagers took advantage of the television shows' ubiquity to raise awareness of their movement.

An additional tension is many villagers' reliance on food stamps and city food boxes. As discussed in the previous section, the lack of space to maintain necessary provisions such as food and water is constraining to the self-reliance vision. However, consistent with their interdependence ideology, ecovillagers make use of social services such as food stamps and food boxes to supplement their nutritional needs. On the one hand, they are maintaining dependence on institutions for dietary resources. On the other hand, the use of such social services is congruous with a philosophy of planetary interdependence, and social services minimize monetary needs, thus slightly freeing them from work responsibilities. One young woman who trades 3 hours of work a day in the village in exchange for a space to keep her tent and also works as an acupuncturist 1 to 2 hours a week for a wage, states,

Food is obtained through a couple of different sources. One would be the garden. We get food from the garden, another would be the dumpster. We get a lot of free food. Sometimes I might even go to a food bank . . . Also, I have food stamps. Like today I went to the farmer's market and bought a bunch of delicious food on food stamps. There's also a lot of

other varied sources of free food, like [a county food box service] has drop sites I might go and check out, or peoples' free boxes often have food in them.

She talks about all the local food resources available to her through the city. Food stamps, food boxes, and food banks provide additional food support that can be used to supplement income and reduce external work time. With extra time, ecovillagers are more available to the community and can contribute to ecovillage work. In this example, the young woman mentions her garden first. Additional food support frees her from monetary obligations and allows her the time to work on her garden. Garden work, albeit not fully sustaining, is a step toward self-sufficiency from markets and the formal economy. However, the lack of adequate garden space still constrains ecovillagers from complete food independence.

According to their philosophy, ecovillagers would seek independence from institutions and infrastructure. Villagers would work interdependently with their environment and self-sufficiently from consumer institutions with regard to necessities like homes, food, clothes, rope, companionship, and so on. Constrained by mortgage payments and the lack of space for food production, they often find ways to mobilize certain institutional resources to their advantage. The uses of institutional resources appear contrary to some of the villagers' goals, but they use these resources when considering the opportunities they are able to seize to further different movement goals. Ecovillagers' use of cars, food supplements provided by the city, and the mass media are all considered appropriate means by these activists to achieve movement ends. Considering opportunity structures strategically, some resources typified in the dominant culture provide conveniences in the face of other institutional constraints.

Conclusions

In my research, I explore the presence of structure in movement actors' everyday lives. The urban ecovillage sits amidst a dominant consumer culture that differs from the villagers "live simply" worldview. I lived with and interviewed these movement participants¹⁵ to understand how they interact with dominant culture advocates and what they perceive as structural frustrations or conveniences to their goal of achieving sustainability. Villagers confront constraints in their everyday lives when they must choose between a convenient drive to work or riding their bikes through urban sprawl and car exhaust. As committed "stewards of the land," ecovillagers attempt to consume only what they need by gardening, gleaning fruit from local trees, dumpster-diving old bread, reusing city waste materials to make backpacks and shelters, resisting retail consumption, and spreading the word to others. Their way of life is threatened by insecure financial situations, lack of geographical space, and the potential for bureaucrats to shut down their operations. Although facing these problems, they also find opportunities to thrive within mainstream institutions. Using local newspapers, a national television show, community networks and support, ecovillagers manage to keep the village afloat while they incrementally move toward sustainability.

In my analysis, I answered three key research questions to illuminate the social movement process toward change. Informed by the literature on collective identity, I asked, "What are ecovillagers' goals? What work do they do in their everyday lives to achieve these goals?" In attempting to be "a model of sustainable living," ecovillagers project a collective identity, beyond each individual, to the broader community. Although subject to renegotiation and change, ecovillagers' primary collective goal is sustainability. The ways in which ecovillagers attempt to achieve this goal are varied. However, their integrated efforts, despite the variation in their individual work, combine to create a more holistic approach to achieving sustainability. The work they do in their everyday lives to achieve this goal ranges in scope. Some villagers work jobs in

the formal economy in line with their movement ideologies, some remain nonviolent in their interactions with people, whereas some make their own clothes and food to remain free from the formal economy. Many of them do their everyday work with the intention of relaying a collective image to the public that they are, in fact, living the change they seek and can be an eco-role model for the broader community. Regardless of their best intentions, at times, ecovillagers experience constraints from the larger society in which they live.

To understand ecovillagers' interactions with the political opportunity structure, I asked a third question: "How do members negotiate actions within a larger political environment that both facilitates and constrains them?" Specifically, I asked ecovillagers about what in the city where the ecovillage is located is conducive to maintaining the ecovillage and what hinders its progress. Ecovillagers compliment the city polity's environmental consciousness but criticize the lack of real changes made in the larger city to improve environmental conditions. While navigating structural constraints, ecovillagers face tensions. Although they may express disdain for cars and televisions, they manage to use undesirable resources when the resources serve their movement goals. This is indicative of how actors interact with surrounding structures to serve their interests. Actors seize opportunities and act correspondingly with prevailing institutions, whether or not effectively, in a dialectical process between agency and structure.

The literature on collective identity within commune, lifestyle, and social movements is considerable. What the literature neglects and what I contribute is how political opportunity structures affect the actions of movement actors, the ecovillagers, and how they push back. I begin to bridge the gap between structural and micro-interactional processes that contribute to collective identity construction by addressing how agents negotiate with dominant structure in their everyday actions. Johnston and Klandermans (1995) suggest that among the questions we should be asking is, "how movements are stimulated or frustrated by cultural characteristics of host societies" (p. 22). They are not alone in this assertion. Melucci (1995) proposes we ask "what kind of relation with the environment [institutional and cultural] shapes the movement and how do the different parts interpret it?" (p. 55). I avoid positioning the ecovillagers as mere products of their environment because this dynamic is far more complex (Hunt et al., 1994). These actors slowly make strides toward change. Most research focuses on one of two analytic categories, the micro or the macro; thus, the interaction between structure and collective identity construction is often ignored (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004).

Examining both micro-identity construction and macro-political opportunity structure movement theories provides a closer look at how change actually happens. In this case, the ecovillage collective is an instance of how actors negotiate institutional constraints to accomplish goals for change. Ecovillagers, as active agents, manage to challenge institutional structure in their everyday actions. By "being a model", they work slowly with bureaucratic institutions to change laws and codes, car and consumer culture, and traditional neighborhood layouts. They literally change the appearance of a traditional urban neighborhood block, thereby restructuring conventions imposed on them. Continuing to live their environmental model in everyday actions necessitates persistent negotiation with structural constraints. They seize perceived opportunities that allow them to "be the change" they seek.

Ecovillagers face daunting institutions that may, at times, feel insurmountable. However, these seemingly rigid edifices are more malleable than we may believe, as institutions are made and changed by *people*. Despite hardship, these actors have found ways to maintain their vision and share it with others. They continue to try to reshape constraining structure to legitimate their lifestyle in the dominant culture of which they remain a part.

Extensions to this research could include looking into the bureaucratic representatives' interpretations of the structure and agency relational process. Ecovillagers' perceptions of the process are only one part of this interaction. Different perspectives may illuminate the back and forth at

play. Other possible avenues to explore are patterns of opportunities and constraints in a range of social movements. Establishing patterns may bring to surface holes in oppressive structures that impede movement activity.

Appendix

Semistructured Interview Questions

Demographic Questions

1. What is your birth date?
2. What gender do you self-identify with (and birth sex)?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What is your occupation?
5. What level of schooling did you complete?
6. What level of schooling did your parents complete?
7. Do your parents/siblings own property?
8. What occupations do your parents/siblings inhabit?
9. Do you own property?

Life Questions

1. What events brought you where you are now?
2. What does your typical day look like?
3. What would your typical day look like if you were not living here?
4. How do you get around?
5. Where and/or how do you obtain food?
6. What does living in intentional community mean to you?
7. What is most important to you about living in intentional community?
8. What do you think are the most important issues in your intentional community?
9. What do you think are the most important issues in the larger community?
10. How are decisions made in the intentional community?
11. How does the community deal with a lack of resources, or resources running low?
12. How does the community deal with people who are not contributing?
13. How does the wider community perceive your community?
14. Is the larger community conducive to maintaining this community?
15. How do you sustain your living conditions?
16. How do you obtain money (do you even need money)?
17. What resources do you use from the city?

Attitude Questions

1. What do you think are some mainstream cultural values?
 2. How do you feel about these values?
 3. Do you have any judgments, positive or negative, toward these values?
 4. What are things that your community values?
 5. How do you feel about these values?
 6. Do you have any judgments, positive or negative, toward these values?
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Notes

1. I promised interview subjects confidentiality. To honor this end, I will use pseudonyms for people and places.
2. Because there is not a complete listing of intentional communities, there is not a definitive number of existing ecovillages, but one source references 900 such communities in the United States alone (Communities Directories, 2007).
3. Although there is extensive informal information about ecovillages over the Internet, ecovillages have not received much scholarly attention. There is minimal previous work on ecovillages to expand on.
4. In 1990, there were only 8 ecovillages recorded in the listing. By 2000, that number had increased to 108.
5. I traveled to the Northwest to do volunteer work and stayed a block away from the ecovillage. As I grew familiar with my neighbors, I began to enjoy the mild summer weather sitting at a picnic table beneath the clapping leaves of fruit trees in the ecovillage. Originally, the ecovillage inspired me. The values and actions of the individuals who lived there seemed to suggest that anyone could take any worthy matter into their own hands, including changing the physical landscape of one's city. The message was simple and clear, "be the change you seek." I had not previously witnessed a direct approach at social change. My fascination with the place grew as I met more motivated and creative people.
6. Between July and September, two new adults moved in. I chose not to conduct interviews with them because they had experienced less of the space than I had. I was not able to interview four other individuals during my fieldwork for various reasons: They were away all day, or out of town for part of my stay, or hidden in his space in one case, and/or did not participate in community gatherings.
7. About half moved there within a few months before my arrival.
8. D. E. Smith (1987) contended that in order to understand constraining institutions and power relations, it is important to ask respondents about their everyday actions and see how institutions organize these actions.
9. The four-page, typed welcome pamphlet, written and edited by coowner Emily after meetings where villagers agreed to new rules, was given to newcomers during their initial entry and interview process.
10. The most common, natural, building material used on the property was cob. Cob is made from straw, sand, dirt, clay, and water. Ralph built several of the buildings on the property out of cob and often gives tours to people specifically interested in that particular building technique.
11. Work parties usually consisted of people getting together to clean the property by removing weeds, debris, and used materials. One creative project going on while I was there was the creation of a grey-water, fish pond.
12. Permaculture is "consciously designed landscapes which mimic the patterns and relationships found in nature, while yielding an abundance of food, fiber and energy for provision of local needs . . . people, their buildings and the ways in which they organize themselves are central" (Holmgren 2004 p. xix).
13. It is important to note that not all ecovillagers consider themselves activists, although most do. For this reason, I term the minority, self-proclaimed nonactivists as *friends of activists* because they all explicitly stated that they support the collective community vision of sharing this model of sustainability.
14. Forms of mass media I saw being used, aside from the one episode of the reality TV show, were newspapers. I heard some people talk about a book interview, but I never got the whole story.

15. There are limitations to conducting interviews especially over a brief time span during the ecovillage's history. Although I use participant observation and textual analysis for triangulation purposes, I rely more heavily on my interview data. Individuals may have fabricated answers unintentionally or intentionally for varied reasons, and I have only a couple of months of participant observation with which to verify answers. Because I obtained a snapshot of ecovillage life, it may be the case that life at the ecovillage is different even now, only 3 months later. Another limitation is that this is a case study; therefore, analysis is not generalizable to other social movements or ecovillages. My conclusions are applied only to this particular village.

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Bio

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